



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

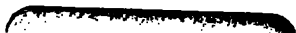
About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>

A
Woman At Bay

Sibilla Aleramo

MILES BROOKES,
SO. WINDHAM II













SIBILLA ALERAMO

From an amateur photograph taken recently in Rome





Faccio, Rina

A WOMAN AT BAY

(UNA DONNA)

BY

SIBILLA ALERAMO

AUTHORISED TRANSLATION FROM THE ITALIAN BY

MARIA H. LANSDALE



G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS

NEW YORK AND LONDON

The Knickerbocker Press

1908

PQ 4812
A 3 D 6 12

COPYRIGHT, 1908

BY

G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS

Published, October, 1908

Reprinted, October, 1908

The Knickerbocker Press, New York

PUBLISHER'S NOTE

A Woman at Bay is an English translation of Sibilla Aleramo's *Una Donna*, a novel which has been put into French, German, Russian, Spanish, and Swedish, and which made, when it appeared in the leading Italian magazine, *Nuova Antologia*, a profound impression upon the public, and was a storm-centre for vehement discussion. The novel with a purpose, if one except Cena's *The Forewarners* (*Gli Ammonitori*) and Fogazzaro's *The Saint* (*Il Santo*), now scarcely exists in Italy, where the popular novelists are content to make faithful transcripts of aristocratic, bourgeois, or peasant life; but this moving story belongs to that class of fiction. It is in the form of an autobiography of a young woman who seeks to escape from the brutalising yoke of a man to whom the severity of the Italian law regarding divorce binds her.

Of the author of *A Woman at Bay*, who screens her identity under the pen-name of Sibilla Aleramo, Maria Pastore Mucchi (writing in *Putnam's and The Reader*, July, 1908) says:

"A magnetic and genial woman herself, Sibilla Aleramo infuses humanity and energy into the hearts of those who approach her. She is an apostle of ideas, which she not only spreads in writing, but also puts into actual practice, with an enlightened and practical propaganda. Besides this, without speaking of it to any one (and I record this for the first time), at Rome, where she lives, she gives her services freely to a hospital for infirm children, and, like the protagonist of her novel, has become a social mother. With other Roman ladies she has instituted secular Sunday-schools in the Roman Campagna—a fever-stricken desert

where the nomadic peasants, absolutely ignorant and deprived of almost all the necessaries of life, live in prehistoric huts. . . .

"This woman, then, has before her something fixed, precise, which is the distinguishing mark of her character, and is seen in her acts and slightest motions. She puts the imprint of her personality on all that she touches, and even in her least important writings does not fail to show the fertile seriousness of her life. A manner at once candid, thoughtful, and grave, harmonises perfectly with a face that strikes one immediately by its compelling and gentle serenity. . . . An avowed Bohemian, she astonishes settled women, above all those who try to appear sedate, come what will; but here is a woman capable of heroic efforts and great deeds, while of the others one must ask nothing that transcends their regular course of life. . . .

"We may hope, then, that if successive generations give us the measure of their civilisation by their attitude toward womanhood, the work of this new Diotima will not only be prolific of good, but will remain a psychologic document of the first rank concerning the Italian life of our day."

CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I.—CHILDHOOD	I
II.—WE MOVE TO THE SOUTH	17
III.—THE SHADOW ON THE HOUSE	37
IV.—AN ENGAGEMENT	63
V.—MARRIED LIFE	79
VI.—TRAGEDY AND HOPE	96
VII.—MOTHERHOOD	111
VIII.—AN INTRUDER	123
IX.—FLIGHT	145
X.—A CRISIS	162
XI.—THE BOOK	176
XII.—AN INTERLUDE	192
XIII.—RENAISSANCE	205
XIV.—A TURN IN THE ROAD	220
XV.—AVE ROMA!	234
XVI.—LIFE'S KALEIDOSCOPE	247
XVII.—THE IRONY OF FORTUNE	266

CHAPTER	PAGE
XVIII.—SURRENDER	289
XIX.—PROBLEMS	310
XX.—A NEW PHASE	328
XXI.—THE DECISION.	354
XXII.—RESURGENCE	384

A Woman at Bay

A Woman at Bay

I

CHILDHOOD

MY childhood was free and healthy. It would be useless to attempt to live it over again, to try to make it sparkle as of old before my imagination. I can see the child that was I at six years of age, at ten, but as though I had dreamed her. A lovely dream which the faintest recall to the present instantly dispels. It is like music, too, perhaps, a delicate, vibrant harmony; and like a great enfolding light; and there is the joy, still vivid, of remembering it.

For how long, in the black period of my life, did I look back upon its dawn as upon something perfect, as representing real happiness! Now, with eyes that see more clearly, I can distinguish even in my very earliest years the presence of vague shadows, and I realise that even as a child

A Woman at Bay

I could never have felt myself to be absolutely happy. Not unhappy, either; free and healthy, yes, this much I must have been conscious of.

I was the eldest child and I freely made use of the fact to exert my authority over my two little sisters and my brother. My father showed his preference for me openly, and I could see that it was his intention to bestow every care upon my training. I was strong, graceful, intelligent—so I was told—and I had toys and sweets and books and a little garden of my own. My mother never opposed me in anything. Finally, my playmates voluntarily submitted themselves to my leadership.

My love for my father completely dominated me. I liked mamma, but papa was the object of an adoration which had no limits. This distinction I was conscious of, though I never had the courage to inquire into the cause. He was the glorious pattern upon which all my small personality modelled itself, and he represented to me the embodiment of the beauty of life. The spell which he cast upon every one about him I instinctively regarded as a divine right. There was no one like him; he knew everything, was

always right. Side by side, my hand in his, we two walked alone hour after hour up and down the streets of the city or outside in the country. I feeling all the while as though I were treading upon air. He told me of my grandparents who had died shortly after I was born, of his childhood, of marvellous boyish adventures, of how when he was eight years old he had seen the French soldiers arrive in his native town of Turin, "when there was no Italy yet." There was something unreal about a past like that, yet there he was by my side, with his tall, active figure, his rapid movements, his head held proudly erect and that triumphant smile of youth. At such moments the future seemed to me to teem with possibilities of adventure.

My father directed my reading and my studies without making me work very hard. When my school-mistresses sometimes visited the house they listened to him admiringly and, as it seemed to me, with a touch of surprise and deference. At school I stood near the head of my classes, and occasionally there arose a faint suspicion that I might, perhaps, be a privileged scholar. From the time that I was in the very lowest grades,

noticing the contrast in the way in which we were dressed and in the contents of our lunch-baskets, I was able to form a pretty shrewd idea of what the families of most of my companions must be like; families of operatives ground down with toil, and of small shopkeepers. Then, when I went home, I would notice the shining door-plate whereon was my father's name preceded by a title.

I was only five years old when my father, who was a professor of science in the ugly little town where I was born, threw up his appointment in a fit of annoyance and went into business with one of his brothers-in-law, the proprietor of a large commercial house at Milan. Even I could see that he was not altogether happy in his new occupation. When he would come home on some half-holiday and settle down in the rather disorderly little room where he kept his apparatus for making experiments in chemistry and physics, I understood that it was there and there only that he felt thoroughly at home. And what a multitude of things my father must have taught me!

Without being importunate my curiosity was lively enough to lend a keen flavour to existence.

I was never bored. Often, declining an invitation from mamma to go with her to pay visits, I would spend the time instead in the house, buried in a great arm-chair, reading books of every description, some of them quite beyond my comprehension, while others plunged me into a species of intoxication, carrying me completely out of myself. When I paused it was only to try to give expression to certain vague ideas of my own. These I would repeat aloud in measured tones as though I were scanning verses suggested to me by some inner voice. I blushed over this just as I blushed over certain languid poses which I sometimes assumed in this same arm-chair when for a brief instant I would deck myself out in imagination in the garments of some beautiful and seductive lady. Could I tell the difference between affectation and originality?

My father regarded everything in the domain of pure poetry with an indifference that was half contemptuous. He said he did not understand it. Mamma, on the other hand, would now and again repeat to us a few languorous, homesick verses or passionately declaim snatches out of old romances, but this only happened when papa

was away. To me it seemed as though papa were always in the right rather than she.

I thought this even when he gave way, as he sometimes did, to tremendous explosions of anger, explosions which made all of us tremble and plunged me into a condition of utter and unspeakable misery. Mamma, with difficulty suppressing her tears, would take refuge in her room. Often in my father's presence she wore an anxious, almost frightened, expression, while not with me only, but with the other children as well, all idea of parental authority was centred in papa.

No serious disputes ever occurred between our parents in the presence of us children; occasionally we would overhear a few hasty words, a caustic reproof or a sharp order or, at the worst, my father's naturally hot temper would get the better of him over some piece of carelessness on the servants' part or some naughtiness of ours. No matter what it was, however, mamma always seemed to be to blame; then her head would droop as though she were suddenly overpowered by fatigue, or she would give a certain smile which I could not bear because it distorted the usually resigned expression of her pretty mouth.

Was she at such times recalling memories of the past?

She hardly ever spoke to me of her childhood—her youth, but from the little I did gather I reconstructed a picture considerably less interesting than that evoked by my father's reminiscences. She was born, it appeared, in the extremely modest household of an employee and, like my paternal grandmother, her mother had a great many children, most of whom were still living, scattered about in different parts of the world. She must have grown up amidst many privations and with very little affection, the Cinderella of the establishment. When she was twenty years old she met my father at a dance. She once showed me a picture of the beardless youth that my father was at that time, his features still wearing the smooth, regular curves of boyhood, the eyes alone as yet betraying the existence of an iron will. It was the next to the last year of his university course. Hardly had he taken his degree when he was given a chair and they were married.

I was born before the first year after their marriage had elapsed. Mamma's pure pale features used to light up on the rare occasions when she

alluded to this time, to the couple of furnished rooms of those first months of her married life. Why could she not always be animated like that? Why was she so prone to tears when papa hated the sight of them? And why did she generally express opinions contrary to his when, indeed, she dared to express any at all? Why, too, was she so little feared by us children and so seldom obeyed? Like papa she, too, sometimes gave way to fits of anger, but it was more as though she were possessed by something she had tried too long to suppress. I used to have the impression that my father's outbursts, even the most violent of them, were natural, inherent to his temperament, whereas mamma's ill-temper, always directed against us or the chamber-maid, were in doleful contrast to her usually sweet disposition; they were like spasmodic attacks of some sort which she was conscious of at the time and felt sorry for.

How often have I seen my mother's beautiful, deep, black eyes glisten with unshed tears! A feeling of intense discomfort used to rise up in me at the sight. It was not pity exactly, nor grief, nor yet embarrassment; rather it was a gnawing

sense of anger at my own impotence, at the impossibility of making things not happen that were going to happen. What things? I hardly knew. I was about eight years old when I began to have a strange apprehension that mine was not a "real" mamma, that is not like the mammas I read about in my story-books, whose love for their little girls enfolded these latter in an atmosphere of ineffable tenderness and joy, giving them the sense of never-failing care and watchfulness. Two or three years after the dawning of this dread there succeeded a consciousness that I was not able to love my mother as, in my heart, I would have liked to. This it was, undoubtedly, that prevented me from guessing the real cause of the vague shadow that always hung over our house and so often chilled our laughter before it had time to pass our lips. Oh, if only once I could throw my arms around her neck with absolute abandonment, feel myself understood, promise to take care of her when I should grow big, enter into an agreement of mutual affection with her as I had tacitly done with papa from time immemorial!

She admired me in silence, regarding me with something of the same pride which she felt for her

A Woman at Bay

husband's daring and energy, but she disapproved of the kind of education to which I was devoting myself with so much ardour. She was afraid for me, imagining, doubtless, that I would grow up devoid of sentiment, that my brain alone was being developed; yet she lacked the courage openly to put herself in opposition to my father's system.

Even my father did not try really to know me, and there were moments when I felt utterly alone, moments when my only resource was to bury myself in the day-dreams which constituted the secret joy of my existence.

The chastity of the soul was beginning to dawn within me. Side by side with my outward existence another, secret, life, hidden from every one, was carving out its course. And I was conscious of this dualism. From the time of my first year at school I had been wont to observe two entirely diverse aspects of my nature. At school every one thought me angelic and, in fact, I was an exemplary child, over whose demure little face a smile, at once timid, and vivid, was continually playing; but, no sooner was I in the street than I would seem to inhale the entire oxygen of the atmosphere; I would begin to leap up and down

and to chatter without stopping to draw breath, and when I got home it was as though an earthquake had arrived; instantly quitting their quiet games my brother and sisters would rush to place themselves unreservedly under my autocratic rule. When the study-hour came and it was time to prepare my tasks and lessons I would withdraw to my own little room or to a corner of the garden and become once more utterly oblivious of all about me, completely taken up with the zest of intellectual application. At the same time, however, I had no particular desire to excel my school-fellows nor to win prizes. Then, at night, after mamma had made me repeat a tiny little prayer in our beloved dialect, "Lord, make me grow big and strong and to be the comfort of my parents," and had left me in the dark, in bed, where my sister already lay fast asleep, there would come a feeling of restfulness, of comfort that was not altogether physical, as though at that moment, all wrapped about by the shadows, the stillness, the silence, I were actually freer than at any other time throughout the entire day.

I loved to lie staring into the darkness; I was not afraid of it because papa had assured me

A Woman at Bay

from the time that I was a tiny child that the hobgoblins and witches of the fairy-tales had never existed any more than had the "devil." I would go over in my mind all the little events of the day, see again my father's charming smile, or mamma's hands making a gesture of annoyance, and recall my own sensation of anger at some piece of stupidity of one of the children. Then I would begin to think about what was going to happen the next day, the probable results of examinations; of excursions, new books, and games, friends and teachers to be won over. . . .

Mamma made me say my prayer every night. I must pray to God. . . .

One day at school, when I was still in the second elementary class, I heard the word "Hebrew" scornfully applied to a pale, silent little classmate who sat beside me on the bench. She burst into tears and the mistress, on finding what the trouble was, had uttered a few sharp reproofs. The incident had filled me with amazement, as, up to that time, I had known nothing of differences of race and religion. One of the teacher's sentences had particularly struck me; she had said that every form of religion carried man into the presence of God

and that all were, therefore, worthy of respect; one class only of human beings should, she said, be regarded with horror and at the same time with pity, and these were the *atheists*. Instantly the picture of my father rose up before my mind; my father was an atheist, of that I felt very sure; he had used the word himself and he never went inside a church. In the eyes, then, of my teacher, of my companions, of every one, my father was a creature to be regarded with horror.

Three or four years later, in the darkness of my little chamber, I was still revolving this problem. My father talked to me more frequently now of what he termed a time-honoured falsehood. He told me that before mankind there were animals on the earth almost exactly like us, that before the animals and the plants, the earth was a desert, and that this earth of ours was nothing more than a little speck in space like one of the stars we saw in the sky, while the stars were so many other worlds, possibly inhabited . . . ; and he told me all these extraordinary things in such a natural way that it never occurred to me to doubt any of them.

At the same time it was never explained to me—

nor did I ever dare to ask—why *we* are in this world. Here the catechism of the schools was much more satisfying: “God created us. God sees us from on high. God, if we are good, will take us up to paradise. This life is merely a passage.”

But what extraordinary importance every one attached to the passage! It seemed to me as though no one ever really thought seriously about hell, yet how afraid every one was of getting hurt, of falling ill, of dying! For my own part I was inclined to believe with papa that there was no hell. I never heard either angel or tempter at my ear; when I was good it was because I wanted to be; when I felt remorse it was because I knew of myself that I had done wrong. And then . . . From morning to night mamma, papa, my teachers, the workmen on the street, everybody, in fact, even the rich, important people, those who earned and those who spent, were all preoccupied with the selfsame question, the question of food to eat. And why did they want food to eat? So as not to die. The weeks and months and years go by and then . . . you die. It would be just the same with my brother, with my sisters, with me. . . .

The subject wearied me. I would feel sleep creeping over me, yet the morrow would bring the same fruitless ponderings. To know, to know! In my semiconsciousness words charged with mysterious meaning would surge through my brain—"Eternity," "Progress," "Universe," "Conscience." These rang in my ears till at last the sound of them grew confused. Then, again, I would remember the compassionate look on the faces of some of my teachers, I would wonder whether mamma went to mass on Sunday because she really wanted to or because of some strange dread of what people might say. I recalled the first and only occasion on which I had attended a sermon, one evening in the month of May, when the altar of the great church had glittered with candles and lilies. The preacher, standing above in the pulpit, waved one arm about energetically while his sonorous voice descended upon the kneeling crowd. He told them of the miracles performed by one of the saints and every one appeared to believe him. At the close, the organ began to sound and from on high, invisible, the choir, a flood of silver notes, began chanting the lauds. In recalling this something within

me always began to vibrate just as it had at the time; I would suddenly feel an overpowering sadness at not knowing how to pray, how to sing, and, more poignant still, there would come the realisation of my loneliness.

It would fade away again. Why should I be unhappy? I was little, but I had not wanted to be deceived. I would grow up and some day I would know.

Beside me I could hear my little sister's tranquil breathing. Perhaps she was dreaming of the glass house for her doll which I had promised to give her if she would leave me more room in the bed. I was not very clear as to how I was going to carry out my side of the bargain! But . . . when I should be grown . . . then I would care even more for my little brother and sisters, I would never make them cry, and I would see that mamma was joyous at last. . . . Now, however, I wanted to go to sleep. My head felt a little tired. How delicious it would be if a breath of wind were to waft me to one of those grassy slopes which in summer-time, in the country, were my delight. Far away in the distance I could hear the sound of bells, hundreds of bells, calling me. . . .

II

WE MOVE TO THE SOUTH

ONE morning, while I was wondering what would be decided about the prosecution of my studies,—I had completed the fifth class—I saw my father enter the house an hour before his usual time, followed by the office porter carrying a box on his shoulders. Dismissing the man he lifted me in his arms, held me close to his face for a moment, put me down again, and turning to my mother, who was interrogating him with anxious eyes, said: "It's ended. . . . I have broken with him entirely. At last I can draw a free breath."

For some time past the two brothers-in-law had found it ever harder and harder to agree; their entirely opposite temperaments were always at odds, the one full of eager initiative, the other constantly wishing to put on the brakes. Papa found the tedium and confinement of the office irksome in the extreme and, moreover, it brought

him very little material benefit. A trifling difference which had occurred that morning had provoked a lively scene and the question of his remaining was settled for ever.

At the age of thirty-six my father found himself for the second time obliged to begin life over again, and again it was because of his longing for new sensations and for independence.

That same day he took me with him for a long walk. I have a confused memory of the huge Piazza d'Armi, which we crossed in a light autumnal fog. Papa was talking, half to himself; I could feel my small being lifted up in speechless ecstasy. America, Australia. . . . Oh, if papa really would take us out into the world! He spoke of less exciting possibilities as well, of going back to teaching, or undertaking the management of some private estate, but whatever it was, it was always to be something away from Milan. The city which until that day I had loved, though without ever saying so to myself, now seemed to me quite insupportable; who knew what fresh enchantments might be awaiting me elsewhere? I seemed suddenly to have advanced in years and in importance. Perhaps my father would

make me his confidante. All thought of my studies disappeared. Perhaps I would have to work too, help to support the family. . . . I fixed upon my father eyes which must have danced with enthusiasm.

At home mamma, on the contrary, appeared to be utterly cast down. What was she afraid of? She was young too, younger, even, than papa. We children were all strong and well. Even papa must certainly have hoped to find her a little more courageous.

She did not seem to take comfort even when a few weeks later a gentleman who wanted to establish a chemical industry in a small town in the south of Italy offered the direction of it to my father. The latter was, undoubtedly, somewhat daring to accept a kind of work to which, as a fact, he was absolutely new. It was his charming smile which had captivated the capitalist. The terms offered were very good and down there the country would be full of sunshine. For two or three years or so. . . . My father never cared to look very far ahead into the future. For the time being he was quite happy in the thought of the risk he was taking, and so, without

paying any attention to my mother's trepidations, he announced that he would start in the spring.

Sun, sun! What floods of dazzling sunshine! Everything seemed to sparkle in this land to which I had come. The sea was a broad expanse of silver, the sky an infinite smile resting upon my head, an infinite blue caress to one to whom the full beauty of the world was now revealed for the first time. What were the green fields of Brianza or of Piedmont? The northern valleys, or even the Alps, of which I had had glimpses in my early childhood, or lovely lakes, or beautiful gardens compared with a country so suffused in light, with those limitless spaces which stretched away above and before me, with that deep and ample inhalation of the air and of the sea? My lungs drank in with avidity all that free air, that salty breath. I would race up and down in the sun on the shore and face the waves as they curled on the sand. It seemed to me at each instant as though I were about to be transformed into one of those great white birds which I could see skimming along the surface of the water and vanishing on the horizon. Was I not like them?

Oh, the perfect happiness of that summer! Oh, my beautiful, wild youth!

I was now twelve years old. In the little town which had conferred upon itself the title of city, there were no schools above the elementary grades. A tutor, engaged to give me lessons, was promptly dismissed because he was found to be incapable of teaching me anything more than what I already knew. During the hottest hours of the day, alone in the little room of the big house which I had elected to call my study, I would run my eyes rather languidly over some huge manuals of physics and botany and two or three foreign grammars which my father had got for me. Going out later on the high balcony which overlooked the piazza, I would watch the group of idlers lounging in front of the pharmacy or the café, an occasional peasant woman bending beneath an incredible load, or a dirty ragamuffin berating one of his comrades in sonorous and incomprehensible language. Down at the end of the piazza shone the sea. Two hours before sunset you could see far, far away, the sails of the boats coming back from the fishing; as they drew nearer they took on reflections of yellow and pink. One

A Woman at Bay

after another they sailed in and the babel of the fishermen's voices would often reach even to where I stood. I could distinguish the rhythmic cry of the men as they dragged their boats up on the shore.

Going down-stairs I would betake myself to the enormous enclosure, near the railroad station, where the factory was going up with astonishing rapidity and where papa passed almost all his time. Occasionally he would give me some small order, which I would execute anxiously and with the most scrupulous exactitude. "You shall help me, too, later on, when everything has become systematised. You shall be my secretary if you like." Whereupon a struggle would take place within me between my old-time timidity and a new-born spirit of audacity and independence. Perhaps my father was thinking that he would make up to me for cutting short my education. A feeling of pride took hold of me, a dim idea that I was coming into contact with life, that there was being spread before me a spectacle far more varied and interesting than any book.

I used to smile at the operatives, at the handsome, bronzed peasants who came in from the

surrounding country to offer themselves as labourers, at the young girls who climbed nimbly up the scaffolding carrying bags of lime on their heads. I had a sympathetic interest and curiosity about all of them and would repeat their picturesque-sounding surnames to my brother and sisters, wondering all the time if I should ever have the courage to treat them as a mistress in the way that I treated our maid-servant.

Papa, yes. He showed himself a born commander—unyielding, omnipresent, a marvel of activity and energy. When mamma and we children would sometimes go out with him for a little while in the evening, after dinner, and walk along the main street of the town, the people used to watch us from their door-steps with a mixture of admiration and awe. They said mamma had a Madonna face and feminine voices would often murmur blessings upon her and upon her children as she passed. She would thank them with her gentle smile; a small, slight creature almost humbly clad. At such times it seemed to me that even she was content, and a look almost of reverence would come into her eyes for this companion

of hers, endowed, as it appeared, with yet another charm.

I remember a photograph of me taken a year later. I was already regularly employed at the factory and had adopted a hybrid costume consisting of a straight-cut jacket with a multitude of pockets for my watch, my pencil, my note-books, and a short skirt. My hair, cut short, fell over my forehead in curls, lending a boyish look to my physiognomy. My pretty tresses, with their streaks of gold, had been sacrificed at my father's suggestion.

My fantastic appearance perfectly expressed the state of my mind at that time. No longer considering myself a child, I fancied I must be a young woman. I was an extremely busy person, and was filled with the importance of my mission; believing myself to be really useful, the knowledge filled me with satisfaction. In truth I threw myself into the work which my father assigned to me with real passion and an absolute loyalty. I was as much interested as he was in every detail, big or little, connected with the management, and, while it did not weary me to cast up accounts hour after hour in the registers, I enjoyed myself as

much as though playing a game when I was allowed to take my stand among the labourers, watching them at their heavy toil or chatting gaily with them during their intervals of rest. There were a great many of them, more than two hundred; a part, those who came from Piedmont, took turns day and night at the furnaces, while the others, who belonged to the neighbourhood, worked continuously in the great courtyards and under the sheds. All these people did not actually love me, perhaps, but at least they liked to have me appear suddenly among them in my somewhat brusque way, and their pleasure showed itself in an added alertness of bearing more in conformity with the ideal of work cheerfully performed. They thought me more just than papa, and tried to gain my good-will by ingenuous flattery so that I might use my influence in their favour with the master who made them all tremble. I knew very well, however, how utterly useless it would be for me to attempt to modify my father's iron rule, and I was persuaded, moreover, that this was very necessary. So I only tried to make their master more acceptable to them, and one way to do this was to set them an example of obedience. It may be that

my father noticed this. During the short walk from the factory to our house he used to talk to me in a tone of voice with which I only was familiar, not sweet or tender, but with a sort of restfulness, a note of relief and abandonment. He would say confidentially, "Suppose we try this or that measure . . .": or, "If we did so, or so . . . we might be able to raise the salaries a little." It was almost, at times, as though he were asking my advice. I thought what happiness it would be to hit upon some really useful suggestion. The factory came to be for me as well as for him a huge living thing which drew us away from every other interest and occupation, kept our imaginations constantly aflame, our nerves on the stretch, and which compelled our love; a whirling corner in the stream of life in whose current we two had been caught and were being whirled around while all the time we fancied that we were controlling it.

Arrived at the house I would experience the same sense of discomfort that had always assailed me on my return home from school, only now it was multiplied a hundred-fold. I felt myself to be out of place there, and had a contemptuous sense of moral isolation. I was like a boy who,

barely out of the leading-strings, complains arrogantly of the servants' behaviour. That was precisely the way I talked of the children's carelessness, of their neglect of their studies, of mamma's lack of that calmness and firmness which would have given them the training they needed. The servant-maids must have carried dreadful accounts of me back into the country with them: how I was never to be seen with a needle in my hand, how I took no interest in the housekeeping, and so on. Then my sudden gusts of passion without any apparent cause, to be compared with nothing but those similar outbursts of my father. Perhaps these were really the relaxing of nerves too tightly strained, or they may have been the indication of some approaching crisis in my physical development. I knew nothing about it, but I did know that I must quickly get out of doors and run like some mad thing along the shore and feel the delicious air of the open caressing me on every hand. Then I would come back perfectly calm and ready to erase from my memory all trace, even, of my ill-humour. I would even forget the look of profound grief which such scenes invariably brought to my mother's brow.

My mother! How could I ever have been so indifferent to her? She had now almost entirely faded out of my life. I cannot fix in my memory the precise stages of the slow decadence in my mother's health and spirits which took place after we moved to the South. From the very first days she was never able to shake off a certain timidity which kept her from going out alone or even with the children to walk along the shore or in the fields. The town afforded no distractions, while the women of the neighbourhood rarely ever quitted their houses, and were ignorant, lazy, and superstitious. The women of the peasant class worked harder than the men, and a large part of the population lived on and from the sea, repairing at night-time to their wretched hovels, which stood huddled together some hundred yards or so from the shore.

Nor did mamma take any interest in the factory or find anything there to amuse or distract her. It is true that I was half pleased at this, feeling that she was not likely to look favourably upon some of my performances. I was now conscious, even more strongly than at Milan, of the divergence in temperament and tastes between her and papa

and, consequently, me; and I felt also, confusedly, that this divergence was ever more and more at the bottom of the disputes which our parents were not always successful in hiding. But I did not think much about all this or, to speak more correctly, I rid myself as rapidly as possible of the disagreeable sensations which the thought aroused without stopping to probe it. May this have been from an instinctive dread of making discoveries too serious for my years? I cannot say; but a little incident occurred at the time which gave me the impression that my father's feeling for my mother was not the same as his feeling for me.

It was towards the close of our first winter in the South. We had been invited, mamma, papa, and I, to the principal town of the vicinity to dine and go to the theatre with the proprietor of the factory and his wife, who had condescended to call at our house during the previous summer. Dusk was falling and it was nearing the time for the train to leave. I was all ready and waiting when papa came home to dress; in the twinkling of an eye he changed his clothes and was ready to start, but mamma, on the contrary, still lingered before the glass, dissatisfied with her costume, which she had

not worn for a long time. She was passing the powder-puff across her face when papa, impatient at the delay, reappeared in the doorway. I can still see before me the room, the looking-glass, the high window through which, beside the sunset light, there seemed to enter the reflection of the water, grey, turbid; while in my ear re-echoes the sound of a single phrase, caught as it were in flight: "Well, my opinion is that you are a coquette."

Half an hour later, in the train, I still found myself trembling inwardly, unable to frame any blame for my father, any excuse for my mother, down whose cheeks, as she leaned out of the window in the shadow, I could see the tears slowly coursing. Was she also living over again that moment of mortification? Or was she thinking of numberless others as well? Was she brooding over the fact that I had been a witness of the slight? For the first time she seemed to me like an ill person, a morbid invalid, one who does not wish to be treated, who will not even say what ails her.

I had read in books about the fluctuations of love and hate, I had noted the likes and dislikes

of the people of the district, I thought I already knew much about life, yet I was unable to discern the melancholy truth about the affairs of my own household. Months went by, mamma's sadness increased; papa's attentions to her, even their walks together, gradually ceased; and I, who was no longer a child, pursued my way exactly as though no threatening danger were closing in around us. Why? I was spellbound, it is true, just as I had been from infancy, by admiration for my father, but that alone would hardly account for my blindness. Perhaps mamma, in pathetic mortification over her sorrow, warded off a confidante whom she deemed at once too young and too exclusively devoted to him who was the cause of her unhappiness; and so she allowed the time to pass by in weary, fruitless waiting for something to happen.

Among the neighbours she must certainly have aroused a good deal of sympathy by the sweetness of her manners and her gentle air, though, having given up all religious observance by papa's orders, the more bigoted were inclined to blame her.

Who knows whether from the very first the general opinion was not that she could not be

very happy with a husband and a daughter such as papa and I?—for there had soon sprung up towards papa a deep-seated feeling of hostility. There were no rich people in the neighbourhood except the proprietor of the factory, who spent most of his time at Milan, and a certain count, the owner of almost all the land thereabouts, on whose rare appearances with his wife, a big, fat idol, laden with jewels, every one, men and women alike, used to bow themselves to the ground. Then there were about a dozen lawyers who first industriously stirred up and then dragged out lawsuits among the farmers, already copiously bled by their taxes; add to these a few priests and a half-dozen carabineers and you have the entire upper class of the place. Not only had my father taken no notice of these people, but he had declined with some show of impatience a banquet which they had wished to give to him and to the president of some institution—I don't know what, but something very old and pompous and without funds. Such an action was unheard of, as unheard of and nearly as offensive as his systematic refusal of all presents which were sent him. How often have I seen old women leave our

house in a state of dumb wonder and fury because papa declined to receive the chickens with which they had hoped to soften his heart in behalf of their sons.

But in spite of all their extreme ignorance and indolence the people still formed the best element in the population. They had preserved an instinctive goodness of heart, only they blamed the "director," as my father came to be called, for his unparalleled severity towards his dependents, a severity which was, of course, exaggerated as it passed from mouth to mouth.

At first my father had merely laughed at this widespread dislike. Then, little by little, as he grew more familiar with the native character, a feeling of bitter hostility took possession of him. Above all else he was irritated by the prevailing hypocrisy. Isolation made him hard and intolerant and he exaggerated ever more and more the differences between this almost Oriental people who crowded servilely about him and his own compatriots from the North. Was he, perhaps unconsciously, guarding against the danger of becoming naturalised or of seeing his children become naturalised? Be that as it may the

result was to obscure his judgment; he grew to have an exaggerated opinion of his own superiority and his scornfulness increased until it became an incitement. He would have liked to employ only Piedmontese in the establishment, to found a colony of them, but to this the proprietor objected from measures both of prudence and of economy. The management, nevertheless, was entirely in the hands of our own people, who, with their families, formed an isolated group regarded with distrust by the natives.

Secretly I was very proud of this distance placed between us and "all those other people." When I came home from the factory with my red woolen cap set on top of my mop of short hair, and with the rapid gait of a person full of affairs, I could distinguish a murmur of voices following me. As I passed the café the usual group of idlers would regard me smilingly and I was conscious that on the one hand I aroused their curiosity, while on the other they were shocked, being accustomed to see little girls slip shyly and timidly by, flattered to be taken any notice of. I began to conceive an aversion for the place, and if I did not come to hate it outright it was solely by reason

of its natural beauty, which I was never weary of admiring. A strange homesickness—strange, that is, because when we left Milan I was not conscious of any feeling of regret—had begun to creep over me, insinuating itself into my innermost being; but I gave no expression to it in the letters I wrote to my friends. My northern home, seen through the haze of memory, now seemed to me desirable, full of charm. The city itself above all else, the huge city, the great human ant-hill with its teeming life, the city which I now remembered in some of its most typical aspects, would suddenly rise up before me curiously foreshortened; I would seem still to be a little child, holding my father's hand and walking beneath a cloudy sky, or in the dusty sunlight; the city of my childhood already wrapped in nameless regrets, whose very memory now had power to thrill me with passionate feeling. . . .

As a reward for my first year of "work" papa took me to Rome and Naples, and this longing for "living centres" first awoke in me then. Once more, after two years, I saw crowds of human beings, met faces bearing the stamp of high intelligence or of active stirring life; again I felt myself

to be small, of no account, an atom, yet panting to learn from everyone and everything about me. These sensations interested and excited me more perhaps than the buildings and the historical sites. In my letters to mamma as well as in the diary which at my father's suggestion I kept during the trip, they form the dominating note, out-balancing the ingenuous observations, the notes of admiration, and the feeble criticisms.

This journey was the crown to my eager, fearless, triumphant youth. It stays with me only as an indistinct memory, blurred by being exposed to too blinding a light. The impressions were piled one on another like the syllables of some mysterious word summarising human life; I received them in awed astonishment; a new gentleness, a sort of languor whose cause I could not define, an expansiveness, invaded my being. . . . The present then was merely a lethargy, and I was going forward to meet a new phase of existence.

III

THE SHADOW ON THE HOUSE

IT was the third September we had passed in the South. The bathing season had been just like the preceding ones and not a single incident stands out in my memory to distinguish it from the others. It seems to me on looking back that, as far as I was concerned, the delight of being able to swim farther and more fearlessly every day alternated with the equally intoxicating joy of reading, though the latter employment often left me with a headache, and a feeling of vague dissatisfaction with myself.

Of mamma, of the children, even of papa himself, I am unable to recall a single fact connected with that summer. I can't even remember how it came about that one evening there was a small reception at our house, given to some of the townspeople and a few of the neighbouring families; I know, though, that the suggestion came from papa. Three of the rooms of our apartment were

decorated for the occasion with lights and plants, and there about forty persons had assembled. There were a few Romans and Neapolitans, in whose eyes there gleamed an expression of ironical amusement at the manners of the provincials; some ponderous gentlemen who watched my father curiously in his unfamiliar aspect of geniality and good-fellowship; a few employees and the school-masters and mistresses of the district with their families.

The strains of a small orchestra invited every one, old and young alike, to join in the dance. In my quality of little hostess I could hardly refuse to take a few turns around the room as well, though I did so unwillingly, as dancing always put me out of humour and made my head ache. I was the object of much attention, and the bashful manner of the young men as they drew near caused me great amusement. Between the dances, however, I found myself involuntarily watching my father and mother. The one, an admirable dancer and passionately fond of the exercise, seemed to have renewed his youth and by force of his enthusiasm and ardour to cast a veritable spell upon every one about him. Once

more that tall form, circling around among the couples, seemed to me to be the very embodiment of vigorous, simple, joyous life.

Was my mother, too, enjoying her hour of relaxation? She likewise was whirling around the room, wearing a black lace gown sparkling all over with little beads. The sight recalled to my mind memories of the past when I had often seen her start for some entertainment, leaning on my father's arm, a little timid yet not ill at ease, in her pretty clothes. To-night her features still retained their beauty of line; she did not look a day over thirty, and yet it seemed to me as though she were trying to conceal some inward nervousness whose cause I could not make out. Did not papa or any of the guests notice what an effort it was for her to take part in the evening's conversation and amusements?

The next morning at about eight o'clock, soon after getting up, I happened to pass my mother's door. Knowing that she was probably still in bed I knocked to ask if she had any orders. Her voice faintly bade me enter. I caught a glimpse of my father's profile as he lay sound asleep, his face turned towards the door. Mamma's face,

half hidden by the pillows and bed-clothes, was indistinguishable. A moment later I closed the door and rejoined my brother and sisters, who were already at breakfast.

How many minutes was it before a loud cry followed by others, and then a hum of voices from the piazza below, made me tremble with fright? Before I could reach the window the noise had shifted to the foot of our stairs; I turned and ran to the door, followed by the servant and the children. Exclamations of surprise and pity rose from below, together with a shuffling sound as of people carrying a heavy weight. The maid-servant flung herself over the banister, looked down, uttered a loud shriek, and drew back trying to thrust us into the room and to prevent us from seeing. Then I beheld two men carrying my mother's body between them, a white, half-clad form over which some hand had thrown a piece of muslin, which hung limply down, as did the feet, the arms, the hair. A crowd of persons followed. I thought I had gone crazy.

No, it really was mamma, with closed eyes, a face as white as the face of a corpse, and some red marks on one arm and down one side. My father came

out of his room half-dressed, uncomprehending. I saw him clutch his forehead and his face suddenly contracted, and that is all I can have seen or heard for the time being, as I remember nothing more. I was recalled to myself by some women's voices talking near me. They were recounting how they had seen the figure of my mother leaning far over the balcony of our apartment; how, blinded by the sun which shone full in their eyes, they had mistaken her for one of the children and motioned to her to draw back, instead of which she had leaned over still farther, then had suddenly let go entirely and had fallen sideways to the ground.

The doctor came and I went into the room with him. Mamma was lying motionless on the bed, while at the foot stood papà looking utterly beside himself and nervously wringing his hands. On seeing me a great sob broke from him, the first I had ever heard issue from that breast. Throwing himself on a chair he drew me between his knees and buried his face on my shoulder.

Oh, the chaos of my mind! The emotion that shook my father completely unnerved me. I was stirred, moreover, by a vague presentiment of

other moments yet to come which would be as horrible as these. I wished that I might never more be freed from that embrace; for the first time in my life I longed simply to close my eyes and to cease to exist, while the sole thought I was able to put into words was the single question: "Is she alive?"

She was alive—by some miracle. Her head and body had wholly escaped injury; only the left arm was broken, but it was three days before she recovered consciousness. Then, either she remembered nothing of the tragedy, or she was unwilling to speak of it. I have a dim recollection of hearing my father, on a certain evening, questioning her on his knees and of his getting no response save, "Forgive me, forgive me." The children were in the room at the time. My father cried, and I don't know to this day whether it was more agonising to me to see his tears or to hear the disjointed words of the sick woman issuing from the shadows.

Had it been a fit of insanity? I wanted to think so and yet the idea terrified me. My father's voice, asking himself in low, shaking tones in the semi-darkness of the sick-room what it could have been that caused that access of despair, had

in it a ring of true and passionate sincerity. My mother regarding him in silence gave me a singular impression that it was she who was awaiting an explanation from him, yet I felt absolutely convinced that my father did not know wherein he had been to blame. She was in bed for two months with alternations of fever that threatened congestion of the brain. Though her presence was felt among us as it never had been before, yet she seemed like a person aloof, set apart, like one who has just made some supreme renunciation.

Something sinister had begun to creep over our house, something apart from the alternations of the sick-room, and which, in spite of an instinctive effort on the part of all of us to combat it, increased ever more and more. The children, understanding nothing, dumbly submitted to the gloom of their surroundings, but I began to note, with anxiety at first and then with downright alarm, the obstinate recurrence of certain symptoms in my mother's protracted convalescence. There were periods of torpor, lapses of memory, and manifestations of exaggerated liking and repugnance for those about her. By now, however, I had taken the management of the house into my own

hands, without giving up either my work at the factory or my reading and correspondence, so I had but little time left to analyse the crowd of new emotions which were surging up within me. I felt sorry for papa, while on mamma I lavished a tenderness so vigilant that for a time the symptoms in her sick soul I so much dreaded almost disappeared. I was sure, now, that I loved them both, but with a new feeling of uneasiness, an impression that took hold on me more and more that I now stood entirely alone with my own soul, that I was a stranger to those two other souls whom I loved, whom I pitied, and whom I dared not judge.

By the end of the winter mamma had almost entirely recovered, though her arm, which, owing to the inefficiency of the surgeon, had twice to be reset, remained weak and she lost the free use of one hand. Emaciated and aged, she looked more dejected and spiritless than ever, with that useless hand, which the youngest of my little sisters would kiss from time to time, thereby causing a tear to shine in those tired eyes. She seemed herself to be a child, a shrinking, timid child, unable to throw off the memory of some past fault.

Papa, when once the weeks of actual danger were over, recovered from his alarm and became once more master of himself. Not daring to interrupt the long periods of silence into which he now sometimes fell, I would say to myself, "He is searching through the past, examining for the first time those signs and warnings, interrogating them." The friction, of which I had been dimly aware in the lives of these two beings whom I loved, I now perceived to be something quite other from the differences which occasionally arose between papa and me. I realised that this was something which went much deeper, something direful, invincible, like my own antipathies—or at least so I thought—for certain people and things. Papa must have loved her so dearly once, the poor, dear soul, and now, in her silence and isolation, she was evoking who knew what memories of the past! Yet I felt that these could never be anything but memories; nor was I able to picture a future in which a new and stronger love should spring up between them and among us all. Papa's manner toward her now was attentive, condescending, almost caressing, and he controlled his former outbursts of temper, but he had

evidently become wholly resigned to her persistent melancholy, while she, I could see, was oppressed, borne down, by a timid, anxious longing to draw nearer to him again.

There was one day when our house was full of sunshine. My parents passed more than an hour together in the room which my father now occupied alone. When they came out mamma had a pink colour in her cheeks such as I had not seen there for a long, long time, while a faint smile flickered across her lips, the smile of a happy child. She looked at me as though she hardly recognised me, but my father's brow clouded over. What did he read in my mind?

Frequently in the course of the succeeding weeks the sight of my mother leaning wearily against my father's shoulder troubled me. That he tried to avoid being left alone with her I was persuaded of, and indeed we all of us used instinctively to keep away from the house. Slowly the spring went by. In the warm, close twilights I was sometimes seized by a torturing longing to cry, to let myself dissolve into tears. What was it? Whither had my buoyant youth flown? Why did my father hold so aloof from me? He did not

care whether I suffered or not. He did not love me, ah, surely he no longer loved me! I was suspicious of him, of myself, of life!

Youth, however, reasserted itself in time; I kept on with my work and sent long letters to my friends, written in a vein of curious stoicism. I used to smile, too, with a sort of ingenuous coquetry at some of the Piedmontese workmen, for whom I had conceived an exaggerated liking, possibly merely because of the aversion I had begun to feel for the people and things of the district. And all this time my small form was undergoing a transformation: I was losing certain angularities of outline and movement; my face, in especial, had grown more animated, more expressive. It was something my father said one evening, after looking at me in silence for a long time, that first made me regard myself with anxious interrogation in the glass. He was speaking half to himself and, with mingled joy and incredulity, I heard him murmur, "She is going to be pretty." I did not really believe him, yet the words gave me inexpressible delight.

Others noticed the change in me as well. There

was a young man at the factory who had been employed there for about a year. He was the son of a small proprietor of the neighbourhood, good-looking, and with a bright, vivacious manner. We were on friendly terms and used to exchange jokes and sometimes have lively discussions in the intervals of our work, especially when, as sometimes happened, we were left to ourselves in the big room where we both had our tables. That spring the tone of half-ironical respect which he had hitherto used in addressing me was changed for one of involuntary admiration. This did not escape me and caused me much amusement. He used to tell me all the gossip of the neighbourhood and what his friends were saying about me, while I, for my part, plied him with eager questions. One of his acquaintances, he said, had announced that he was in love with me and that he meant to carry me off. This was a not uncommon occurrence in that part of the country, the abduction being followed by marriage. I merely laughed at this and pointed in the direction of my father, whose very name was usually enough to strike terror. I did, indeed, after this find the eyes of the self-announced lover fixed upon me more than

once, to my great annoyance. My informant told me, moreover, that the arch-priest had alluded to us in church several times by name, attributing my mother's misadventure to a retribution from God. He also declared that some old women always made the sign of the cross when I went by and that they called me "little devil," appearing to look upon me as an object of curiosity belonging to some unknown, possibly dangerous, species. Finally he made bold to repeat some of the encomiums which, according to him at least, some gentlemen had seen fit to pronounce upon this or that point in my personal appearance, and all this he told with the utmost complacency. I was half annoyed, half flattered by what he said, as well as by his own behaviour towards me, at bottom of which, however, I fancied I could detect a note of real sincerity. In the arrogance of youth I thought it quite excusable, since I never attempted to conceal my own sense of superiority, that he should sometimes forget the deference due to the daughter of his employer. So I answered him jokingly in order to make him see that I attached no importance whatever to it all, or I would sometimes amuse myself by suddenly

changing the subject and plunging him, uncultivated and narrow and conventional in all his ideas, into discussions in which he would quickly find himself worsted; then I would burst into a laugh, a loud, shrill laugh, so utterly childish that he would always end by laughing too, though not before an expression of ingenuous wonder had flitted across his face.

Another victim of my unconventional training was an old woman who used to come to the house to help mamma. Chatting away she would sometimes begin to talk about my future, of the time when I should be married and have children of my own and would laugh at the recollection of my present employment at the factory. To all of which I calmly made answer that I never meant to marry, that I could only be happy continuing my present free and busy mode of life, and that I thought, moreover, that all young girls should do the same; marriage was a mistaken idea, papa always said so.

At this the old woman would become very indignant. "But then the world would come to an end! Don't you understand? No more children would be born!"

I held my ground, however. Mamma had spoken to me some years before of the mysterious feminine organism, but without touching on the relations of the sexes. Certainly if my father advocated the abolition of marriage it meant that children would be born just the same. Papa would never want the world to come to an end. Anyhow, I had no feeling of responsibility towards the future. No, certainly, I was never going to marry.

Mamma was usually present during these discussions, but she never took any part in them. She was now more self-absorbed than ever; seemingly enclosed in some interior desert waste. Towards the close of spring papa suggested that she should spend a month at Turin with her own relatives, taking me with her. She agreed. What a feeling of weighty responsibility it gave me to think of going away alone with her! There was always latent in me a dread of her being again suddenly seized with an impulse to commit some frenzied act of madness. Then, more disquieting than ever, would arise the old doubt as to whether I really loved her as I ought and wished to do; whether I were not, as a fact, utterly powerless in the face of this persistent unhappiness!

The journey, though, seemed indeed to restore to her something of serenity and hope, and with these came an improved physical condition. As for me, the sudden plunge into scenes connected with my earliest childhood served to distract me from my vague forebodings and to some extent to restore my confidence.

Once more summer was upon us. I had now completed my fifteenth year; the bathers congregated on the beach as usual, and sometimes I was invited to take part in their pastimes. I could see that I was regarded by every one with interest; that men of various ages looked at me insistently; and first one, a delicate, sarcastic youth, and then another, almost a man grown, strong and agile, with a curly blond head that reminded me of some of the bronzes I had seen in the museums, took my fancy for a week or so. My heart, however, did not beat a whit the faster on their account, nor did they arouse the slightest feeling of coquetry in me. "I wonder if I am falling in love!" I would laughingly say to myself; but it was only an amusing game that seemed to add a fresh zest to the life I was living with such eager impetuosity.

Lying, soothed by the waves, hour after hour

beneath the burning sun, or, swimming straight out from shore, oblivious of danger, till I had entirely disappeared from view, I got to be at one with nature, and at the same time gave vent to the exuberance of my youth. I was a person, free, strong, healthy, a little personality. I realised it to the full and the thought made my breast heave with inexpressible beatitude.

At home, though, the sadness had returned more appalling than ever. Mamma's temper had grown much sharper, and this seemed to accentuate her increasing lack of mental balance, a fact which papa did not hesitate to call to her attention quite baldly. The children were more neglected than ever. How unutterably far away seemed the days when papa had been used to turn into a child again himself so as to play with us! Weariness and indifference now marked his attitude towards every member of the family. When the autumn came he announced that he should have to stay at the factory late every evening, and at home we never saw anything of him except when he sat taciturn through the meal hours. More exacting than ever with all of his employees, he did not abate his severity even with me,

treating me at times with an absolutely icy hardness. Puzzled and distressed, I began to search about for the cause. My fellow-clerk did not let me search for long. As I have said, we were often left entirely alone in the big, grey room lined with cupboards, and tables littered over with papers and ledgers; in the middle there was a large coal stove whose intense heat sometimes made the air quite intolerable. Another clerk was only there during the morning, while a fourth was almost always absent. Between our pieces of work we kept up our former bantering intercourse, interspersed with more serious talk which would be broken off and resumed a dozen times in the course of the day. He was twenty-five years old, with a slight, spare figure, a dark, animated face, and large vivacious black eyes. He talked much and fluently. Certain things about him were a daily offence to me and I used frankly to tell him so; but, beyond being amazed at my daring, my superiority it may be, accustomed as he was to regard all women as naturally inferior and submissive beings, he paid no attention to the criticisms of a small girl. I knew nothing at all about him beyond a vague rumour that a young girl

whom he had professed to be in love with, before going to serve his term with the army, had tried to kill herself on his return because he had taken no more notice of her: Papa did not like him and kept him on solely because he was a good worker; he reprimanded me sharply every time he found us chatting together.

Was it out of revenge? Possibly. At all events it was he who told me what, indeed, was already common talk in the town, namely, that papa was in love with a young girl who had been employed for a short time in the factory, that the affair had begun in the spring when mamma and I were away, and that my father went almost every evening to a house in the suburbs where she and all her numerous and wretched family were lodged and supported at his expense.

My father! A thousand puzzling little incidents now suddenly became clear. It was impossible to doubt the truth of the horrible story. I felt myself bowed to the ground, forced to bite the dust in the agony of my shame and humiliation. My father, that radiant ideal, became in an instant transformed into an object of horror. He who had reared me so carefully in the cult of sincerity

and honour was now hiding one side of his life from my mother and from us all. Oh papa, papa, where now was that boasted superiority of which only yesterday I had been so proud? It seemed to me that we had fallen far lower, even, than any of those creatures about us, the ones for whom I had allowed myself to feel an instinctive repulsion! And my poor, innocent brother and sisters! And mamma, mamma, did she suspect anything? I felt myself suddenly drawn to my poor mother, with my heart full to bursting, full of remorse and of anger towards myself.

When she had tried to kill herself perhaps papa had already been unfaithful to her! I had put away all suspicions at the time with such certainty, such serene conviction. Even now I would not accept it; it was too horrible. Nor was my mother's mental and physical condition any excuse in my eyes for my father's conduct. Oh, if only it might yet be possible to recall him to his senses; to set up my own eager, audacious will against his, to save us all from ruin!

But he who, either from treachery or callousness, had dealt the crushing blow took good care to impress upon me the utter futility of any action

on my part; at the same time painting the future in the darkest colours. He showed his pity for me in ways which under any other circumstances I would have resented, but now I paid no heed. I felt him clasp my hands, smooth my hair, and my being yielded half unconsciously to the sweetness of the contact, while all the time I was trembling with rage and despair.

What was it, what was it, this obscure force which was suddenly confronting me, and of which all my reading had given me so illusive an idea? Was it, after all, something wicked, degrading, and yet so all-powerful that even my father had been dragged down by it?

And life, of which I knew as yet so little but which hitherto I had believed to be founded upon beauty and goodness, now it seemed to me a thing incomprehensible and hateful.

How many days did I live with this horrible tumult in my soul? I cannot tell; I only know that during the periods of dull apathy which would succeed my paroxysms of emotion, a voice young, ardent, was ever at my side murmuring words of admiration which gradually became more and more outspoken. At times, when I felt more than

usually weak and listless, that low, continuous voice would envelop me in an atmosphere of passion. Then I began to respond, though always with a doubting at the heart that refused to be allayed and yet with an eager hopefulness as well. I grew more gentle, more courteous and kindly; I did not tell him that I cared for him, I did not say so even to myself, but I felt that here, at least, was some one to whom I was dear.

How did mamma find out about her tragedy? One evening after supper two or three visitors came in to see papa, I don't remember what about. Among them were my fellow-clerk and a notary, a poor, insignificant, mellifluous-voiced creature whom my father must have taken into his confidence. They were all sitting there, talking, when suddenly my mother burst into a nervous laugh, and turning to the notary said: "Is it true that you walk along the river every evening with my husband? Tell me what you talk about?"

The men exchanged horrified glances, but my mother, now deathly pale, got up with a slight shiver and, excusing herself on the ground of not feeling well, left the room.

Left alone with the guests and my father, I saw

a terrible look of suppressed fury come into his face. Then in a low, measured tone, he said:

“That woman is going mad!”

A sudden impulse seized me.

“I am going mad too, papa!” I cried, and I fastened my eyes on his with a look of wild rebellion, while the blood rushed furiously to my head.

“Be quiet!” he shouted, struck to the heart, and he threw himself forward as though about to strangle me; then, controlling himself with a violent effort:

“Go!” he said.

I can't remember how I got through that night. The next morning mamma, ill and feverish, lay in her room vainly awaiting a visit from her husband, no doubt intending to ask his pardon. I was informed that at the end of the month my employment at the factory would cease. It was the answer to my outbreak of the night before.

When I got to the office that day I could not repress my tears. The busy, active life among all the other employees was very dear to me; I could not bear the thought of having to give it up, nor could I picture to myself any other mode of life half so congenial to my nature and tastes.

I said as much to my companion who was standing beside me.

“And have you no thought for me? What am I to do?” he murmured. Then crossing over to his own seat he threw himself down and buried his face in his hands with a nervous twitching of the shoulders.

I went over to him at once, forgetful of my own trouble. He drew me to him, clasping me, the little, young thing, close to his breast.

“How beautiful you looked last evening, how proud! How I longed to clasp you about the knees!”

I closed my eyes. Was it true? My whole nature called aloud for an answer. I remained still for a moment. His lips closed on mine. I made no attempt to free myself. There was no revolt of my still benumbed senses; my heart stood still, wondering if some ineffable delight were about to steal over it. There was a sudden noise, and I quickly withdrew myself.

The next day, when we found ourselves alone, I again took refuge at his side. He told me that he cared for me but he would not let me speak, covering my lips and neck with kisses. This time

I drew back with a slight feeling of disgust, but in the days that followed his companionship seemed to become almost indispensable. When I was with him I found that I could forget for a time the load of misery I had brought with me from my home, a load that seemed to grow more unendurable every time I met my father's eyes, and that was all I asked, to be able to forget.

He understood perfectly my ignorance and unconsciousness; he knew that my coldness was that of a fifteen-years-old child. Veiling under playful smiles and gestures the eagerness that impelled him, he gradually possessed himself more and more of my person, making me return his kisses and caresses under the guise of forfeits in some game we were playing—the merry prelude to the Grand Opera of love which my imagination was beginning to picture as about to be unfolded before me.

And so I was sitting, smiling artlessly to myself one morning, close to the door which led from the office to my father's private room, when I suddenly found myself held close in a strange, brutal embrace; trembling hands clutched my garments, and I felt myself pushed, almost flung, against

a stool. Instinctively writhing and twisting I emitted a groan which would have ended in a shriek had not a hand closed over my mouth and held me down. Then I heard the sound of retreating footsteps and the slamming of a door. I tottered to a small laboratory at the other end of the office. I struggled to regain my composure, while all my senses seemed about to desert me. Suddenly a dark suspicion flashed through my mind. Rushing out into the room I found the man looking wildly at me, distraught, breathless, abashed. My face must have expressed an immeasurable horror, for a look of terror spread over his features and he came towards me clasping his hands in an attitude of supplication.

IV

AN ENGAGEMENT

SO I now belonged to a man?
I had come to believe it after I know not how many days of indescribable darkness. My recollection of this time is shadowy and vague. My whole theory of life, already shaken by my father's desertion, had suddenly been completely overturned, tragically transformed. What was I now? What was I to become? My childhood was closed for ever. My pride, the pride of being a free and reasoning being, was shaken to its foundations, yet it was still strong enough to deny me the consolation of self-pity or self-excuse, forcing me to accept my full responsibility for my downfall. I tried painfully to discover some justification for this thing which still filled me with amazement. This man, how long had I known him? For about two years. I had seen him almost every day, he had been my companion and had helped me in my work. I had always

treated him with frank, childish liking; his very awkwardnesses had amused me. Then one day he had deliberately destroyed my respect for my own father. Why had I never even for a single moment suspected that he might be lying? Because I knew absolutely nothing about life, and his greater experience, confronting me thus suddenly, had filled me with a kind of respect, and then he had smiled upon me pityingly. He had been a witness of the horrible agony of my soul, cut adrift, all in a moment, from its moorings, and he had appeared to me in an altogether different light from before, like another being, endowed with all those traits which I had just discovered to be lacking in my father. How calmly and disdainfully he had judged papa! And what emotion he had betrayed in defending my poor mother! Once only he had startled me. When I asked him if he would have stood by me with the weight of his testimony had I confronted my father with the truth, he had feverishly implored me to say nothing—nothing!

From that moment he had fairly enveloped me in a flood of endearing epithets. My heart was touched. It never even occurred to me to ques-

tion his devotion; I simply accepted it in the pride, not yet extinct, of my own superiority. Did he ever suspect the overpowering lassitude that possessed me? He held me in his arms, told me that he loved me, and I—listened.

I could not believe myself the victim of cold calculation; it must have been love that had done it. And how all unprepared I had been to welcome the mysterious visitor! Ah, of a truth, I knew nothing whatever at bottom of life, simply from having kept my attention too steadily, too exclusively fixed upon my father. I had never really thought much about my own future, of what I should do as a grown woman. And now a woman I had suddenly become, and precisely at a moment when I could no longer confide in my father, when the entire experience of the past had ceased to be of any value, when my mother was not capable of listening to, much less of advising me.

Not for a moment did I dream of revealing my horrible secret to that poor, tortured mother; she was wretched enough as it was, shut up with her own misery.

Papa—how far away he now seemed, closed out

for ever from my existence. And what torment heaped upon torment to divulge to him the tempest that was tearing at my soul!

Alone, in silence, I allowed a species of auto-suggestion, a kind of lucid madness, to sweep over my senses. Was it a symptom of the physiological shock I had undergone? My memories of it are like the memories of an attack of fever. When did I first begin to say to myself that perhaps I should have to return the passion of this man, accept from him throughout my entire life the support, the refuge that he offered me, and cut myself off thereby from everything that hitherto had made life worth living? I cannot say. I no longer saw clearly; I had begun to think that perhaps I had loved this young man for all these months without knowing it, that something underneath that very ordinary exterior had inexplicably attracted me. Then I began to think that perhaps in this undreamed-of future of love and self-surrender there might be salvation, peace, joy. His wife—was not I already that? He had wanted me, fate had willed that he should have me, all had been settled while I ignorantly supposed myself to be travelling along an altogether different

road. The husband of the story-books, who had always seemed to me a foolish sort of person, actually existed then—was he!

The man saw instantly when his cause was won, perhaps he was not even much surprised. He had, however, trembled for a moment. Now, confident, hopeful, he eagerly responded to the childish, high-flown effusions I poured out in letters and speeches, and, in order to arrest every demand for an explanation before it could pass my lips, he recommenced to shower kisses upon my hands, my hair, declaring with a certain solemnity that his entire life would not suffice to repay me for the gift of mine. He attempted again to possess himself of my person, but the horrible initiation had put me on my guard and I resisted. Like many a girl whose imagination has been filled with vague ideas out of novels which no one has ever explained to her, I supposed that no reality could be like that which had so disgusted me; I dreamed of some compensating future bliss, some ineffable joy that surely must be mine as a wife. The modesty of fifteen was too undeveloped as yet to suffer very acutely and it may be, too, that a sort of instinctive pride lay

at the bottom of the determination to love and to give myself up that I was cultivating with such desperate tenacity of purpose.

Meanwhile papa, noticing my abstraction and uneasiness, suddenly bethought him of his threat and ordered me to come no more to the factory.

The brusque interruption to our intercourse put a fresh strain upon my already overwrought nerves. It seemed to me that I was now living through the most horrible days of my life; then I managed to establish a correspondence with the young man and he persuaded me to tell mamma of our love. To my mother, sad, broken, tottering on the brink of insanity, it seemed, as she listened to the love-talk of her child, as though a fountain of youth were being held to her lips. Was it herself at twenty years old whom she beheld again? Was it the happiness which had eluded her in her own life which she now delusively imagined was about to shine forth resplendent in the life of her offspring? Something of her now seemed to stir within me for the first time. Did she, too, feel it unconsciously? The poor, unhappy mother could never even guess the tragedy which had so rudely destroyed my girlhood. She saw only

a sentiment, marvellously flowering in my soul, which was to save me from a hybrid existence, and she summoned all the self-control of which she still was capable in order to check my tears, in order to see her own gentle dreams verified at last in her daughter.

I watched her with tender melancholy, with a vague sense of apprehension, recognising in myself the selfsame weakness that I saw in her, asking myself if I really were going to be any more fortunate than she had been, whether I were not deluding myself in placing this trust in love precisely as she had deluded herself.

When papa was informed by her of the affair he seemed at first to attach but little importance to it, hardly crediting it in fact; but when both by letter and word of mouth I and my forlorn hero assured him that the only possible future we would either of us contemplate was that of marriage with one another, his anger blazed out furiously. Even he, however, never suspected the truth. How could he ever have conceived such criminal audacity to be possible in view of the fear which he knew he inspired in all who came near him? He was exasperated by the mere idea

of such a silly infatuation on the part of his favourite child, after he had taken pains, too, to teach her to despise all such folly and to depend wholly upon her own faculties in the battle of life. He certainly failed to recognise his own responsibility in precipitating the catastrophe by withdrawing from me his love and care at precisely the time when I stood more sorely in need of both than at any previous period of my life. But he was unhappy. At once complex and primitive by nature he failed to grasp what was going on about him and to apply the remedy. He now realised in his turn that he stood alone, that he had alienated the only person who understood him. The gathering storm of unpopularity that was closing in about him and the foreboding of some approaching disaster seemed to develop in him a perfect mania for tyrannising, for getting his own way at whatever cost. Mamma amazed him by the persistent way in which she took my part; after *that* evening they had always avoided talking to each other, but now she seemed to be holding out to him my welfare as the gage of her acquiescence. It was as though she said: "Yes, I am old; I shall be a grandmother. Peace will come to my spirit

if not to my poor heart; there will be some beauty still in life since my child will have found happiness, and I can contemplate her children!"

To me my father said not a word and I understood that thenceforth I was to be as one dead to him, that he had bade farewell for ever to all those dreams which he had woven about me in those early days.

He told the young man that it was a case where marriage could not even be considered for the present. That I was but fifteen and a half years old and that several years must elapse before I could think of taking such a step; meanwhile he could, however, visit the house in the evening and accompany the family occasionally when they went out walking. What did he propose to do? Find some other more suitable occupation elsewhere? Try to get some executive work? He would give him fair warning that I should have no dowry. For the rest he might continue his present employment for a time.

I had, indeed, supposed that my fiancé would at once throw up his position and look for other work, even if it took him out of the neighbourhood. But nothing of the kind happened;

in fact it never seemed to occur to him that there was anything undignified in his being a dependent of his future father-in-law, a man, moreover, whose conduct he so strongly disapproved of. He appeared on the contrary to be relying confidently on the chance that when the time for the marriage arrived my father would relent and make some provision for me, and meanwhile he came to our house every evening like an accepted suitor. Papa never encountered him, it being his invariable habit to go out every evening as soon as dinner was over. The children sat around the table reading or playing games, mamma and I had our embroidery, and the young man amused himself by teasing me, systematically contradicting everything I said. Every now and then he would suddenly give me a kiss, paying no attention to mamma's protests or to the laughter of the children and making me furiously angry. Towards ten o'clock he would depart, first exchanging an embrace with me in the dark hallway, whither I accompanied him alone. Sometimes his hands, closing feverishly around my arm, would awaken a half-forgotten sense of terror.

For a few weeks discussion ran high in the town about our affairs. My sudden withdrawal from the factory had been interpreted by ill-natured persons as the result of some discovery of my father's; the same tongues had insinuated, only about a year before, that papa's affection for me was something more than paternal; it was ever their chief delight to invent new and odious tales. My parents knew nothing of what was being said and their ignorant security gave me a sense of shame; surely my fiancé would up and smite these scandal-mongers! Not at all: his manner on the contrary seemed to reflect a certain pride in the situation; he carried himself jauntily among his old companions, as though he had suddenly increased in importance. These last, indeed, appeared to regard him with envy and at the same time to rejoice that one of themselves, as it were, had conquered the pride of this family of aliens. As I passed the solitary club I could see the grins that were levelled at me, but now my pride no longer dared to assert itself. The man only laughed when I told him and said it was all nonsense. He laughed, too, when I confronted him with a story which then reached my ears for the

first time, namely, that he had betrayed the young girl who had later tried to kill herself on his account. He did not even take the trouble either to defend or to justify himself.

As the months went by even the gossip gradually died out; moreover, by this time I had become entirely cut off from the local society; my fiancé was jealous and demanded the most absurd sacrifices from me. I was not to stand at the window, for instance, and must instantly withdraw to my own room whenever a man—mamma's doctor included—entered the house. Occasionally, at the memory of that act which I believed to be irreparable, my nature, hitherto so independent, would assert itself, but only to make me realise the more fully my utter helplessness.

And all the time I was writing to my friends that I was happy. I tried to deceive even myself, and so worked upon my imagination that I managed to feel almost an infatuation for the man.

Love him, love him! Yes, I wanted to, desperately; I would not allow myself to dwell for so much as a moment upon any of the disagreeable impressions he was constantly making upon me. I discovered innumerable defects in him hitherto

undreamed of; I had known that he was uneducated, for example, but I had fancied him much more intelligent than he actually was. Above all I was disappointed in his character; there was something shifty, disingenuous about him, and I, straightforward little creature that I was and always had been, had moments of rude surprise not unmixed with indignation. These feelings I tried instantly to suppress; I wanted to believe in my happiness both present and to come. I wanted to think that love was a great and beautiful thing; that love of sixteen years of age which is a summing up of all the beauty and mystery of life. Not a single one of all those about me looked me straight in the eyes, sought to see into my soul, talked to me frankly, honestly, in the language which I could perfectly well have understood!

My face, pale now, and framed in the hair which had once more been allowed to grow long, lost all expression and individuality. Had there really been a time when I was free to fly to the shore whenever I wanted to? To plunge into the water, swim about for hours, or ramble about the fields and indulge in dreams of future work and happiness to my heart's content?

Now the days glided by passed almost entirely in the silence and stillness of my own little room. I was making my trousseau, but there were long periods when I would find myself sitting motionless, staring at my hands as they lay upon the heap of white muslin in my lap. My career of wife was, indeed, taking shape, as papa had agreed, far more readily than I had supposed possible, to our being married within the next few months. I felt that I was ready, even while realising the restricted life that lay before me, nor do I recall having any scruples about deserting my own people—mamma, steadily becoming weaker and more despondent, my brothers and sisters, shorn of all the advantages of either care or affection.

And what were my fiancé's thoughts at this time? Did he begin to have a feeling of something like respect for the thing he had so ruthlessly stolen? Did he, in his self-esteem, delude himself into the belief that he was going to make me happy?

He decided not to resign his clerkship, counting upon an advance before very long and, possibly, upon one day succeeding to my father's post. He argued long upon the question of the dowry,

but had to be satisfied in the end with a monthly allowance; when he suggested, though, that this should be assured in legal form my father indignantly threatened to break off the negotiations.

On his own side my fiancé made no provision whatsoever, grudging to replenish his own wardrobe or even to buy the wedding ring. My father paid for the furnishing of our house, while all the part my future relatives took was to exclaim loudly over the lack of liberality displayed by my family!

The situation became daily more disagreeable for all concerned; why, then, prolong it? The date of the marriage was fixed for the end of January.

A little less than a year had elapsed since my secret tragedy had been enacted, not a syllable regarding which had ever escaped my lips, not even to the guilty party. The preparations proceeded joylessly. On the eve of my wedding day my father, in one of his paroxysms of anger, which were now of frequent occurrence, reproved me sharply for some trifling matter.

That night mamma came to my bedside. She began attempting to prepare me for what awaited me on the morrow, but I quickly interrupted her,

throwing my arms around her and caressing the temples now grown quite grey, while my body shook with convulsive sobs.

Twenty-four hours later, seated at my husband's side, gazing out from the window of the train at the fields lying white with snow beneath the stars, I thought of the two different kinds of misery which, with enormous effort and self-control, had that day been shrouded beneath the smiles worn for the benefit of the people who had gathered to wish us joy. Were they weeping now, my two parents, in their lonely chambers?

V

MARRIED LIFE

THE windows of our little salon overlooked a wide street skirted by kitchen-gardens; beyond these could be seen the profile of a hill and a strip of the sea. The view from the other windows commanded a dreary little garden planted with rows of straggling bushes and bordering on the railroad. Every now and then throughout the day and night the whole house would be shaken by the arrival or departure of a train and a prolonged whistle would re-echo through the rooms. The first floor was occupied by lodgers who were almost always invisible. When my husband and the servant were both out I would find myself instinctively trying to move about without making any noise; my trailing woollen wrapper constantly impressing upon me the fact that I was actually a married woman, a serious person, whose existence was now definitely and finally fixed. When I walked out for the first time alone, leaning

on the arm of my fellow-clerk, along the main street of the town, a hat, trimmed with feathers and weighing horribly, on my head, and my body strapped into a gown cut in the latest fashion, it seemed to me that an abyss of time and circumstance had opened between me and the being who but one year before had been I.

I had a vague feeling that I ought now to assume a sort of citizenship in the place, to identify myself with the ideas and customs of my new relatives, of the district where my husband had been reared and where my own children would be educated. Every time I visited my mother the contrast between the world from which I had come and that which I was now entering was more sharply defined, and an unacknowledged feeling almost of bitterness arose in me towards the past; a grudge instinctive, illogical, unjust, against mamma and the children, against papa and my "Utopia."

Mamma, sensitive like all invalids, was the only one to notice this. Two or three times during those early days of my married life there was a look on her white face, more drawn than ever by suffering, expressive of the hurt surprise which my continued silence caused her. Of my wedding

journey I had preserved only a confused memory or, rather, a memory that had already begun to fade. There had not been one moment of spiritual satisfaction, nor any wonderful revelation of the senses. Oh, the expectations of the child! I had had no opportunity to weave dreams of ecstasy, but the reality was none the less bitter. The only thing that made a clear impression upon me was a quarrel we had on the third day about some utterly trivial matter and which kept us sulking indoors at the hotel at Florence during one entire afternoon. Why was it that I found myself uneasily scanning the faces of my friends and relatives at Milan when I presented my husband to them to see if I could discover any look of surprise or disapproval? I did not care to answer these questions, I did not want even to listen to them in my own heart. That was why the look of anxious solicitude in my mother's eyes made me uncomfortable; I felt that she had hoped to see me return transformed into another being, henceforth to be more like a sister than a daughter, with a heart swelling with emotions of the kind which must have formed almost the sole gleams of happiness in her past. She forced me to admit to

myself that all illusion had been dispelled, that it had never existed in fact, that all had brutally been revealed to me in that black day now a year past, which I had imagined I had almost forgotten.

With my mother-in-law, on the other hand, I felt no necessity to be confidential. All I wanted was to be on good terms with her and the other members of my husband's family, and I felt that this ought not to be difficult. They were prepared to regard me as something different, superior, composed of a finer, more precious metal than themselves and to be proud of this as of something that flattered their self-esteem. The two old people looked upon me as a mere child, while my sister-in-law, though she probably realised that there was some latent force hidden beneath my child-like exterior, apparently thought it a force incapable of developing into anything hostile. For the rest, the entire family looked upon the scion as an ideal husband, one worthy in every way of having won me.

I used generally to find my mother-in-law seated in the dusk in front of the huge chimney-place, the firelight faintly illuminating the dark earthen-floored kitchen, whose door, leading to the kitchen-

garden, usually stood open. With her red cheeks and regular, salient features she looked younger than she really was and almost handsome. She would smile at me diffidently and address me in the second person plural. Neither could my father-in-law bring himself to use the familiar "thee" in speaking to me. Tall, almost gigantic in height, he was bent and slow in his movements. It was he who did the family providing each morning "Is the Lady Baroness satisfied?" he would say to his daughter. The latter, an old maid of thirty or so, was always complaining of something. She was selfish and domineering, cold and ill-balanced, and her mother was afraid of her. In fact her reputation throughout the place was that of a virago, though I was ignorant of this, as I was ignorant of the circumstance that the whole family was unpopular. A number of years before my father-in-law had served a term in prison, not a very uncommon occurrence in the district. His son had told me some long and complicated story of injuries and affronts and reprisals, all meant to demonstrate his father's entire innocence, and his fluency had convinced me. Now, sometimes, in the flickering lights and shadows of the

kitchen I would note something odd in the old man's movements; the walls would seem to contract, to close in about him like those of a cell, the cell in which he had passed two years of his life. He was so mild and conciliatory, sometimes even showing a touch of the geniality which must once have been habitual, that I found myself filled with pity for him, a pity not unmixed with dread.

The relations between the various members of this family seemed strange to me. In my own home everything had been better ordered, there was system, discipline. One thing struck me especially and exercised a species of fascination over me; it was the respect for tradition, habit, that existed in that plain household, the fixed determination of each individual member to uphold the honour and credit of their blood, their name, their land. In a thousand little matters, from the way in which a certain dish must be prepared on a given date, to the rabid defence of everything her brother did and said which my sister-in-law would display to strangers when only a moment before, perhaps, she had been abusing him roundly to his face, did I find a theory of life absolutely opposed to that which had moulded my own

character and tastes. Contradictory, often illogical, capturing my reason almost by force, yet, it was not devoid of suggestion.

Meanwhile a sort of torpor was creeping over me. I seemed to care for nothing but to be let alone; to be allowed to surrender myself utterly to circumstances. I submitted wholly to my husband's will, attributing my increasing repugnance to weariness, exhaustion, and making no attempt, even, to overcome the coldness which sometimes surprised, sometimes annoyed him. A more expansive attitude seemed to me, indeed, quite impossible. My sole compensation lay in the fact of being cared for, yet even that was fast disappearing under the contact with vulgarity and coarseness. I would close my eyes and try not to think, and sink into a kind of lethargy. Then how I slept! How old was I? Not yet seventeen. My sleep was the long, peaceful slumber of a tired child.

Every morning, at eleven o'clock, the woman who came to clean the house would leave. I prepared the dinner and supper myself, perfectly willingly, but without any interest. The days followed one another, I hardly knew

how. I still had some connection with the factory through some work which my father allowed me to do at home in order that I might appear still to have a certain kind of independence, but it only occupied two or three hours of the day. We subscribed to two or three papers, so that I had something to read, and I still wrote to my girl friends and to my former school-mistresses. During the first month the wives of some of the local magnates called upon me and I returned their visits, a little bored yet somewhat pleased too at the novelty of playing the part of a married woman.

What I liked best, though, was when some one of my husband's friends would come to see us in the evening. After vaunting the merits of our coffee-machine a certain wine in flasks would be produced, and they would sit there smoking and sipping their wine and sometimes in their talk so far forgetting my presence as to let slip some expression in peasant-dialect. Whenever the discussion turned upon politics I would join in, losing my reserve for the time. As my opponents were all on about the same intellectual level as my husband, I did not have much

trouble in putting them to flight with the force of my logic.

At other times we would go to the house of one of my husband's relatives, a leader in the local democracy, where a number of the men of the place, sometimes accompanied by their wives, were in the habit of congregating. The idle, gossiping chatter of the women alternated with noisy discussions by the men. I was regarded on all hands with ill-concealed distrust, a survival of the impression made by my childish eccentricities. To one single person, a young doctor recently appointed from Tuscany, who was boarding in our relative's house, did I feel drawn. He had interested me the very first time we met by his thoughtful manner and his correct way of speaking and, as it seemed to me, of thinking, as well. He was well educated and highly intelligent and must have felt a little curious about me if he noticed, as probably he did, the contrast between my circumstances and surroundings and the character looking out from behind my youthful brow.

I would have liked to take an interest in the neighbouring country-people, but I was now cut off from all intercourse with the fisher-folk, the peas-

ants or the operatives. As for the bourgeois they seemed to me to be even more hopelessly vulgar than I had supposed, and without actually saying so to myself, I was really afraid that in time this vulgarity might drag me down with it. Already I had begun to find something rather enviable in the inertia which appeared to possess almost every woman about me. The lazy, ignorant care of their children, their kitchens, and their religious duties filled up their entire existence. The men, though affecting to be sceptics themselves, required a strict religious observance from their women-kind. The same feeling, albeit unconfessed, may have existed in my husband as well. What he did not want, on the other hand, was children, and this he constantly told me. Was it selfishness? Nor had I yet felt the tremor of a new life well up from the depths of my being, a life belonging wholly to me, which would be dear to me, which would transform my own life.

“My friends are all praising your cleverness; they tell me I am to be envied for possessing such a little wife”; my husband informed me. But I was not impressed. Certainly people gave me the idea that they thought me attractive, even

beautiful, perhaps; yet when I looked in the mirror I could not see that such was really the case. In my own eyes I had the look of a child who has suddenly aged; but it troubled me very little.

On one single occasion did my former pride flame fiercely up for a moment. I was setting to rights a small cabinet where my husband kept his papers—my letters and a few memoranda. Suddenly, to my utter amazement, I found, preserved together with my own letters, those written to him seven or eight years before by his first love, the young woman, still unmarried, whose look of hatred would flash out at me now and then on some chance encounter in the street. I read only one of these; it was badly written and full of such expressions as a love-sick servant girl might employ. My husband, seated by the stove meanwhile, smiled in a conscious way, as though he were rather proud of the affair. Continuing to turn over the papers, other, rather shorter, notes from women appeared. “Those are . . . it was . . . when I was in the army, you know. . . . She was the daughter of an inn-keeper.” But I was not paying any further attention; I was reading a telegram signed with a feminine dimin-

utive; looking at the date I found it was the preceding summer, during our engagement!

I tore the letters into a thousand pieces, he not daring to so much as offer a protest. Why was it impossible to believe him when he told me an elaborate story to account for it? And why did I suffer—suffer as I did? Was I so much in love with this man? Or was something giving way? The entire edifice I had so painfully been erecting, was it crumbling at my feet?

The impression seemed to wear itself out in a violent attack of weeping. I forced myself to forget, to abstain from self-torture. Whatever may have happened before, he was my husband now, my companion, the man whom I must strive slowly, steadily, to influence by force of my own decency.

I never used to see my father during this time, but my husband spoke of him sometimes, usually to complain of his strictness and irritability. The children, too, talked of him occasionally and my mother as well. He now, it seemed, spent most of his time away from home, never even troubling himself to know whether his children were being looked after or not. The whole house was in a

state of terror when he did happen to be there, and the moment the door closed on his back the children had the spectacle of seeing their mother burst into wild fits of tears and laments, utterly oblivious of their presence. Then the youngest girl, with infinite patience, would set herself to calm her, finally succeeding in soothing her and bringing back the pathetic smile, like that of a heart-broken child, to those poor, wan lips. My other sister, now thirteen years old, a good, quiet girl, had gradually assumed entire charge of the housekeeping. My brother used to break out into loud complaints of papa to me, because he would not send him to town to continue his education but kept him, instead, at the factory doing work that was too heavy for him. The entire household seemed to be living in hourly dread of some frightful catastrophe.

I felt as though I had not the strength even to blame my father. There were times when it would flash through my mind that perhaps I was partly responsible for this complete shipwreck of his moral nature, by reason of my own unhappy fate. Had I not turned my back on him without so much as raising a hand in the effort to keep him

at home, near the children who had once been his pride? After all what right had I had at fifteen years of age to withdraw myself indignantly from him to whom, as I now realised, I owed everything in me that was admirable? And some of these reproaches I directed at mamma. Her weakness, her unresisting surrender to her fate, irritated me, all the more that I was forced to recognise a resemblance to her in the manner in which I, too, had resigned myself to my destiny.

My unhappy mother was, however, suffering frightfully; not mentally only, but physically she was passing through a crisis that racked her whole system. Hints which she let fall in her desultory talk made me shudder to the very core of my, now conscious, feminine being. And, oddly enough, it seemed to me that this now more than ever made it impossible for me to act the part of comforter to the woman who was my mother. Ah, why was I not really the loving wife she supposed me to be—the joyous creature capable of tenderest pity for her who held out her empty hands appealingly for lost joys?

And my father, what were his sensations? What did the doctor, as he administered quieting potions

in the sick-room, say to him? And did he try to make his patient realise that she must alter her mode of life, go away, rely upon her own resources, upon time, upon her children? Did he, as well as the poor, unhappy wife herself, adjure the husband to be pitiful, to dissimulate? For I felt that it had come to that, she would have accepted affection from him as an alms, would even have shared it with her rival. But I knew that my father would never go back. He was forty-two, at the height of his material fortunes, at war with every one and everything about him, and more bitterly determined than ever to admit no fault in himself. Certainly he never looked back into the past, never acknowledged in his own heart that he could have averted this catastrophe. Was he unhappy? Did he sometimes have spasms of terror? Not a word, not a gesture enlightened me.

I could see, though, that the now undisguised hostility of the entire neighbourhood, the general revolt of public opinion, instigated by the arch-priest, by envious fellow-townsmen, and by employees whom he had dismissed, hurt his self-esteem; and also that his own offensive attitude obscured his judgment more and more.

And all the while the weeks were flying by; summer had come almost without my being aware of it, so inert was I in mind as well as in body.

One night there came a knocking at the door. It was my mother supported by my father-in-law, her clothing in disorder, with staring eyes, emitting unintelligible sounds. She had left her home unnoticed by the servant and had been wandering about the streets, possibly for hours, until, encountering my father-in-law, he had brought her to me. Perhaps she had yielded to an overmastering impulse to go in search of my father!

I stood like one thunder-struck; then, in a flash, I had a vision of the house standing open, with the unconscious children lying asleep within, and this human tragedy which had sought me out in the middle of the night aroused a sudden feeling of savage revolt. I, too, was shaking with fever and I poured out a torrent of angry, bitter words at the unfortunate invalid as incoherent, almost, as her own. O my mother! And all for love of a man who was utterly unworthy of it!

I see myself, standing erect beside my bed, half dressed, while she, leaning against the wall,

watched me, crying all the while in a furtive sort of way. The doctor, who had been sent for at once, presently arrived; he administered a powerful soothing draught, and she then asked to be taken back to her children. I lay down again. In the darkness and silence I kept going over and over the whole horrible scene. I could feel the fever mounting and with the fever came a wild hatred of life, an unutterable sense of weariness and disgust to which there seemed to be no end.

The doctor returned. A germ of new life, which had barely yet stirred within me—was extinct.

VI

TRAGEDY AND HOPE

FOR many days I lay utterly inert, repeating to myself in a whisper the single word: *Mamma*; wondering if I should have loved that little being of my own flesh and blood, but incapable of feeling any passion of regret for the child I had not had the strength to bear.

And all the time I was pierced with a feeling of remorse, a feeling that held me down, sapped my self-respect, took away all the joy of living. It was the memory of my mother, of the torrent of bitter words which had poured out of my mouth on that dreadful night. What had my mother meant to me? Had I loved her?

I dared not answer these questions, while I saw myself, as well, under a new aspect, in all the desolation of that shattered dream of motherhood which had lightened me for a single instant only

immediately to vanish. I realised that I had never been a source of happiness to my mother unless, perhaps, at the very beginning, as forming a bond between a loving husband and wife. She, it is true, did not form an essential feature in a single one of my shining memories of childhood; but was this enough to excuse the indifference with which I had come to regard that poor, suffering soul?

The entire past now lay spread out before my mind.

For eighteen years my mother had been living the life of a married woman. As a wife, what happiness she once had enjoyed had long since turned into bitter suffering; as a mother, she had never received any adequate recognition from her children.

Her heart had never been able to expand. She had passed her entire life misunderstood by every one. In childhood her family had considered her romantic and fanciful and, at the same time, stupid: although, as a fact, she was far more intelligent and serious-minded than any of her numerous brothers and sisters. She had broken off without much regret almost all intercourse

with her own people because her husband had not found them congenial. Believing in the Catholic Faith, though possibly only in a spirit of half-hearted mysticism and with no real love for its practices, her religion had never afforded her the smallest consolation in her troubles. Endowed with a lively and warm imagination and exquisite taste she had, nevertheless, never applied herself to any of the arts, nor had any great masterpiece ever taken her out of herself for a single moment. Not a friend, not an adviser ever on her path. Uncertain health, a frail constitution, long illnesses. . . .

Poor, poor soul! Of what avail were your beauty, goodness, intelligence? Life demanded strength and you did not have it to give.

Love, sacrifice, and then submission, such had been your fate. Is it, perhaps, the fate of every woman?

About a month had elapsed since my illness. I had seen the invalid only once, on one of her quiet days when she had conversed almost normally. She had startled me by saying suddenly: "Ah, if you had only had a child! Why have n't you a child?"

She had longed for a grandchild, for a renewal, as it were, of her own maternity.

After that the doctor forbade my making any more visits. Every afternoon my brother would come in for a few minutes to see me, bringing my little sister, panting, with eyes dilated. Mamma no longer even recognised their voices! Sometimes she threatened them, at others she was quite wild. The nurse could not manage her now alone! And the child would burst into tears and throw herself into my arms; while the boy would grind his teeth with rage because he was not old enough to interfere and carry the poor invalid off, far from him who would not have pity upon her.

Papa sometimes came as well, moody, enigmatical, taciturn; while we all continued to regard him with a species of terror that held us spell-bound and made us powerless to act.

At last the doctors announced that the patient must have regular treatment in some institution; that, above all, she must no longer be left with the terrified children.

The removal of the poor, afflicted invalid to a neighbouring town was, in fact, after all these months of misery, an intense relief to the poor

little things. That gentle, melancholy face, which they had been accustomed to see at their bed-sides from infancy, had given place to a spectral figure who they could not feel loved them and whom they were afraid of ceasing to love. Oh, soon enough the memory, even, of that dark dream would be erased from their minds!

And I, would I ever be able to implore her forgiveness, to tell her of the sorrow that the memory of my unfilial conduct caused me? Ever make her know that at last I understood her? No; never. Never would my voice steal into her heart; never again would I be able to speak to my mother. I knew it; I knew that it was all over. Of herself, of what she had been, nothing would remain to us but the memory, like a sinister warning.

The round of days and weeks began again.

Slowly I recovered from my state of physical prostration, but mental activity seemed to be extinct. I had no complaint to make. I fancied that the sequence of tragic events which had been crowded into my short life had enlightened me as to the whole range of human destiny, that strange prison-house, where everything is futile, unreal;

joy and sorrow, strength, rebellion. The sole good—to be resigned.

I did not even attempt to look after the little girls, thereby giving some aim to my own existence. A young governess, engaged shortly after my mother's removal, had set herself resolutely to work to enlist all their interest and affection. She was graceful and attractive and I looked on uneasily while she took masterful possession of her rather delicate position, feeling that I ought to interfere and not to allow her to get too complete an influence over her charges. Yet I never did, and they gradually became estranged from me. Papa had less to do with me than ever, and the name of the absent one was never mentioned in his presence.

My husband, who had no penetration whatever, was much pleased by my apparent tranquillity and the evident improvement in my character, which was growing daily more yielding. He disguised his own intense selfishness under a mask of tender solicitude. This solicitude consisted of words only, yet it served to check outbreaks of temper and to ward off explanations. On the surface it looked as though we were both afraid to

face the reality of our situation and had entered into a tacit agreement to keep up mutually cordial and indulgent relations. Yet this was not really the case. He believed still that I loved him and that, for his own part, he, too, loved me a little, as something belonging wholly to himself; a piece of his own property, or, perhaps, from some conventional idea of duty. I flattered his pride by my beauty, which had flowered again, by my intelligence, and by the gentle obedience I yielded to all his jealous whims, never taking offense, but merely smiling at them. The only cause for complaint he had against me lay in my increasing repugnance to every attempt at perversion on his part. He could not understand it and kept searching about for some reason, while I thought of nothing but how to protect myself, mindful chiefly of the physical distress.

Thus the days and weeks wore on—a period which, notwithstanding some occurrences which stand out sharply in my memory, has remained the most indistinct of my life, the most difficult to analyse. The only clear impression I have preserved is that something, I don't at all know what, prevented me from becoming hopelessly

embittered, hopelessly maimed, and forced me to go on living, automatically as it were, and with a certain instinctive pride in my own silent acquiescence in my fate. Hitherto the memory of my childhood had been an oasis to which I could always turn, but with it there now invariably came the vision of my unhappy mother in her tragic surroundings as I had last seen her a few weeks after she was taken away, and instantly I would feel a shudder, something of the sensation of one who, slipping on a glacier, should feel the tugging at the rope as his companion plunges into the abyss. Oh, my mother's voice, so changed already, rambling on incoherently! And that huge building with its babel of laughter and sobs, like the echoes from some tumultuous crowd divided from the rest of the world by a high, impassable wall; and the vast, bare corridors traversed only by the keepers wearing great bunches of keys at their waists, while now and again, in passing some half-open door, one would catch flying glimpses of a wide-eyed, vacantly smiling face, from which even the ghost of the inner spirit had fled.

And then, at last, that white room, with its

barred window before which my mother would stand by the hour calling out to the town lying distant and beautiful in the sun, as a child will sometimes call to the woods and lakes to come to it. I quitted that abode of sorrow with inward tremors, unable to weep or even to speak, conscious only of an acute sense of physical suffering which both unnerved and revolted me. It was an indescribable feeling like an uncontrollable impulse to run away, to escape from destiny, to miss the road that leads to the mad-house.

Thus a year went by, a year of grey, enveloping shadows, and then—then, the tremor within me of a new life and the ineffable period of waiting.

My first sensations were of doubt, almost of terror, a doubt, unexpressed but torturing, as to what kind of disposition my child would inherit from me and from my partner. Then there were other questions, not so profound, but serious nevertheless, as to the material outlook and my own attitude towards maternity.

These first impressions quickly disappeared and I dared to face the future, to accept it with a courage that was all the stronger in proportion

to the profound melancholy that possessed me more completely then, perhaps, than at any other period of my life. I listened while slowly the maternal instinct awoke within me, and I realised that I was going to dedicate myself utterly to the little being mysteriously coming to life. I knew that I should love it with all the force of that love which hitherto I had given to no one, and a joy, shy, inarticulate, watered by the first happy tears I had ever shed, grew and flowered in my heart. At last I had an aim, a clear duty to perform. Not only must my child be born, and live, but it must be the healthiest, handsomest, best, strongest and happiest of children. I would give it every drop of my blood if necessary, my youth, my very dreams. I would plod for it, for its sake become myself all that was best.

My husband was annoyed at first, but this quickly passed and he watched over my condition with solicitude. I thought him kind and noticed the paternal love already strongly developed in him, a love that was purely instinctive, and quite devoid of any sense of care or of the new responsibilities which were opening for us both.

The effect of the news upon my mother-in-law,

to whom our purely civil marriage had been a sort of nightmare, was to make her instantly extract a promise from me that I would "make a Christian" of the baby. I agreed, recalling that my mother had obtained a similar concession from my father. At the same time I made it clearly to be understood that I should not tolerate any interference on the part of either her or her daughter in the matter of how the child was to be reared, having made up my mind to ignore certain barbarous customs still prevalent in that part of the country, and to spare it from its cradle all swaddling-bands, amulets, and other questionable, so-called, precautions. To this my mother-in-law made answer, with a spirit quite in contrast to her usual meek manner, "Ten children have I borne, and nursed every one of them myself!"

Of her ten children, however, six died in infancy, and the survivors had only their good luck to thank. She assured me that all children had to have five or six illnesses, in the course of which God frequently called some of them away to turn them into angels.

Poor old soul! she helped me cut and baste the little shirts and under-waists and, thus occupied,

in the peace and tranquillity of our sitting-room, enjoyed a period of real happiness that softened her but of which she doubtless was half ashamed. People who have suffered throughout their entire lives frequently come to think that they are not intended to be happy. Misfortune, however, was about to strike her once again.

My father-in-law and my husband took to their beds at about the same time, the one with an acute attack of rheumatism, from which he had long been a sufferer, and the other with quinsy. Although the old man did not seem, at first, to be seriously ill, his wife and daughter were both kept in constant attendance at his bedside and I had no one to help me nurse my husband, whose case took a rapid turn for the worse. One night it seemed to me as though his breath had failed entirely; the doctor, summoned in haste, made a gesture of despair; symptoms of diphtheria had appeared, and notwithstanding my own condition, he was unable to hide the fact from me. My determination that nothing should imperil the life of the little creature I was bearing, enabled me however, to face the situation calmly and with fortitude; I kept the patient in ignorance of his

real condition and watched him night and day, hardly taking any time to rest, feeling certain that the performance of so imperative a duty could not have fatal consequences.

In a few days the disease was got under control and the sick man learned for the first time of the danger through which he had passed, but there was no time for rejoicing; my father-in-law suddenly grew worse and a fortnight later he was dead.

It was the first time that death had come close to me, yet I did not feel very deeply shocked. Perhaps I had reached the end of my forces. All my dominant faculties were now tensely fixed upon the event which was to control my future life, but with the rhetoric of grief I became familiar. My husband and sister-in-law, though they had never, from infancy, shown any affection for their father, regarding him, apparently, solely in the light of the keeper of the family purse, now noisily proclaimed their sorrow; perhaps for a time they imagined that they really were intensely unhappy. All this brought back to me assertions which I had frequently heard my father make as to the hypocrisy prevalent in the neighbourhood. He had

declared that parents, among the bourgeoisie as well as among the working classes, were very generally neglected and defrauded by their children. It was not unusual for mothers, in especial, to put up with actual cruelty in silence. No wife ever rendered a correct account of the household expenses to her husband, while he, on the other hand, never brought home all that he made. Very few married couples were faithful to each other, and he had indicated the mistresses of a number of men; women who, living either alone or with their husbands, were in possession of incomes whose sources could not be made public. Not very long before, a terrible parricide had devastated one family in the neighbourhood, the wife of the murderer having been victimised by his own father. Many young girls, without the excuse of hunger or want, sold themselves merely in order to gratify their longing for some paltry ornament. Not one of them remained wholly innocent by the time she had reached the age of fourteen: yet they continued to live at home, vaunting their candour and defying any one in the community to produce proofs against their character. Hypocrisy was accounted a virtue.

Woe to him who should dare to utter a word against the sanctity of marriage, or the theory of parental authority! Woe to him who should presume to let the public know what he really was!

This it was that had caused my father to be so savagely criticised and disliked by the little coterie of people who were his inferiors; and it was this that was driving him ever further and further in the opposite direction. And in such an atmosphere my son was to grow up!

I awaited his coming in a mood of severe introspection, fighting energetically against every tendency to despondency, multiplying the most minute preparations, and deeply moved, withal, by the sense of the dignity with which I was once more invested in that supreme hour. And always, ever present with me, was the image of my mother, of my youthful mother, as she must have appeared in those far-away, unknown years of my babyhood. I felt, in spirit, the glow of that love which must have been lavished upon me even as I was now flooding with my love this period of waiting.

VII

MOTHERHOOD

WHEN, in the uncertain light of a rainy April dawn, I pressed my lips for the first time to the little head of my son, it seemed to me that, at last, something of the celestial had entered into life; that goodness had taken up its abode with me; that I was now an atom of the infinite, a happy fragment detached from both the past and the future, floating in infinite, radiant mystery. Two great tears slowly welled up into my eyes. I clasped my child in my arms; living, living, living! My blood, my essence, was coursing through its veins; it was my very self, all of me already and yet it required everything of me, now, and always. I gave life to him a second time, together with the promise, the offer, of my own, in that long, light kiss, which was like a spiritual seal.

My husband appeared, tearful with joy. I

smiled at him, then fell asleep. Later on, lying restfully among the fresh linen, I remember smiling at my sisters who had come in, and I can recall glancing in the mirror which one of them held before me, and seeing what appeared to be a glowing vision of maternity, a creature with brilliant cheeks, shining eyes, and smooth white forehead. My father had suddenly arrived as well, and the doctor was giving him all the details, telling how I had been taken ill at two o'clock in the night, how the pain had rapidly increased. A half-hour of suffering, the final spasm, and then relief, with the first little wail of the infant, who was, it appeared, exceptionally robust and perfectly formed. The sentences fell upon my ears like an account of some long-distant event of which my senses preserved only a feverish memory. Yes, it was my body that had been wrapped about with tongues of flame. My forehead had been wet with ice-cold moisture. For a second? for eternity?—had I been a wretched creature begging for mercy, forgotten by all the world, frantically grasping the empty air, in a vain searching for some support?—my voice had changed to a rattle; yes, I had thought I was entering the

gate of death at the very moment when my son was entering life. I had uttered a shriek of revolt in the name of my shuddering flesh, of my gnawing vitals, of my swooning consciousness. When had all this taken place? Before, before!—before I had felt myself to be a mother, before I had looked into the eyes of my child. And now it was as though it had never been, since there, in the bed, close beside me lay the warm little body all wrapped in its bands; since I could feel the delicious thrill of physical comfort steal over all my members; since, by the morrow, I would have held to my breast that tiny mouth whence sounds were issuing which made me laugh and weep together.

Should I be able to nurse my child? This had been my most serious preoccupation throughout the entire period of pregnancy. Even as late as the previous evening I had said to myself that I would willingly endure my suffering for days longer if only I might be sure of being able to nurse the child myself. Accordingly, when I saw the little mouth sucking eagerly, and heard the liquid that issued from my breast gurgle in his throat, and then saw the contented look of the

tiny face as it nestled against my bosom, I was seized by another paroxysm of ineffable joy.

For a week I existed in a sort of blissful dream, so filled with spiritual energy that I was unconscious of any physical weakness, and fancied that I was about to conquer the world. During the long hours when the little one lay sleeping in his white cradle at my bedside, and silence reigned in the dimly lighted room, I would give free rein to my imagination following out two separate lines of thought. One, which had to do with the boy, was a summing up of all my dreams of the preceding months, plans embodying all the sweet and serious duties of my office of nurse, instructor, and companion. The other, which was the first distinct impulse I had ever felt towards outward artistic expression, filled me with new and exciting sensations; it was the outline of a book which I was beginning to sketch in my mind and which I thought I would write, so soon as I should be strong enough, in the long, peaceful hours spent beside my boy's cradle. And so I would lie in a semiconscious state, smiled upon by these glorious imaginings.

It was the eighth night after the baby's birth;

I was murmuring a string of foolish, tender words in the little creature's ear, when suddenly I saw the baby face break into a smile, a slow, brilliant, wonderful smile. The effect produced upon me was so overpowering that for a moment I thought I was going to faint.

I did not believe the doctor the next morning when he told me that what I took for a smile could only have been a facial contraction, absolutely unconscious, and the result, probably, of the sense of physical comfort in which the little body, just warmed and fed, had found itself. No, it was too sweet to think that already, between me and my child, a current of sympathy had been established, and that, in the silence and mystery of the night, with nothing before his eyes but my tender, loving face, the baby had begun to assert the individuality of the little man!

The doctor regarded me affectionately, told me not to get excited and above all not to worry as I had begun to do, fancying that the baby was growing thinner. He declared that my milk was quite sufficient and that there was nothing at all to be anxious about.

Throughout the whole of that day I kept warm-

ing my heart with the memory of that nocturnal smile which had flashed upon me, like a foretaste of the joys my son was to bestow upon me later on.

Evening came, and with it my two sisters and their governess to pay me a little visit. I lay talking happily to them, fairly bubbling over with inward content, when, presently, my sister-in-law arrived. Utterly ignoring the presence of the other visitors, she kissed the baby and then remained standing, with a sour look on her face. The others exchanged glances, then quietly continued the conversation, and in a little while went away, merely inclining their heads slightly as they passed the incorrigible marplot. The door had not closed when the latter was at my bedside pouring out a torrent of abuse on the departing visitors. It was an old grudge she had against my sisters for never coming to see her, but she had never let me feel the full force of it till now. My husband remonstrated mildly; I uttered a few scornful words, then fell back exhausted on the pillows, putting the baby away from my breast as I felt the fever mounting in my veins, while the servant anxiously expostulated in an undertone. For a long time the frantic woman stormed and

raved; when, at last, she left I was half dead, speechless, unable either to reproach my husband, or to explain my condition to him. That night the baby cried, unable to satisfy its hunger; when the doctor paid his morning visit he found me vainly pressing the child to my breasts while bitter tears rolled down upon the little head.

I had no more milk. In vain for two weeks did I try frantically every remedy, every expedient; absorbed in the fixed idea that I, and only I, should nurse my child. The energy that had sustained me hitherto seemed now entirely to desert me. I did nothing but cry like a sickly child, looking hopelessly at my breasts, which refused to grow round again, noting miserably that the baby weighed less every time he was put on the scales, and trying to accustom myself to the idea of seeing my child's head resting upon another's bosom. This was a new form of suffering, physical as well as moral; something that was wasting me internally and drying up all the well-spring of those dreams which had flowered so gloriously at sight of the white cradle; something that I indignantly thrust away from me just as

youth tries to repulse death as being a monstrous injustice.

It soon appeared that, if the little creature's life was to be saved, I would have to yield. I arranged that the wet-nurse should live in the house and that the baby should sleep at my side. I believe I should have grown to hate the young woman who supplanted me, with her stupid regular features and her awkward, heavy movements; but it presently appeared that neither had she sufficient milk to satisfy the little glutton who had now felt the pinch of hunger. By the end of a week she, too, had to be replaced. The new nurse, who had a modest bearing, and good, gentle expression, soon calmed all my fears for the little one's health. Divining my maternal jealousy, the poor little woman would not so much as kiss the tiny being she was nourishing at her breast, and exerted all her self-control not in any way to trespass on my rights. Thus I was able to recover my calm, resigning myself to directing the function which I could no longer perform, while my nerves gradually recovered their balance from which they had been extraordinarily wrenched. I see myself as I was at this time, white, both in dress and

complexion; stretched out in a big arm-chair, endeavouring to warm myself in the May sunshine, and, at the same time, listening absent-mindedly to the doctor's discourse; he being the sole person who now, in his almost daily visits, introduced a spark of human companionship into my life. Anæmia had got possession of me, never more to loosen its hold. I paid little heed to my condition, but my nerves, strung to the highest pitch, reflected it painfully. The question of the child's hygiene possessed me like an obsession. I pushed it to extremes and made demands upon the nurse which, at times, must have seemed almost cruel, though in my calmer moments I was intensely grateful to her. Thus, between his two nurses, my boy bloomed like a flower. I could feel my love for him increasing in intensity hour by hour; he laid hold upon the very depths of my nature; my whole life became concentrated upon that one little being.

I did not notice that I had become wholly indifferent to my husband, that I no longer even thought about him. My indulgent attitude towards him had now become a matter of habit. He was the father of my child, the man whom

some day the boy must be taught to respect, and so I acted towards both him and other people in a manner intended to keep up the illusion with regard to his moral character, and to make him appear more worthy of me and of his paternity. I was gratified when he showed signs of being interested or pleased by the little daily progresses made by the baby, when he sympathised to any extent in my ceaseless solitudes, or, except in the matter of nocturnal derangements, bore with my dislike of everything that was not my baby's smile.

As though some fatality were hanging over the nursing of the child, when he was not quite five months old his foster-mother lost a daughter and her breast became dry. Another woman now took up her abode in our house; a dark, red-cheeked, shapely creature, the exact opposite in character to the one who had left. I do not recollect ever having met a more silly, fanciful, or obstinate person than that woman. For many months I struggled with my feelings, trying to force myself to be lenient to her, while all the while the baby developed deliciously in grace and strength. She had a way of bursting into a loud,

foolish laugh whenever she meant either to be obsequious or impertinent, and this laugh seemed to pierce through me, especially when she indulged in it at about a hand's length from the child's face. My husband's expostulations only increased my dislike. Could he not see that what annoyed me in the woman was her inferiority to what I conceived that the boy's foster-mother should be? I dreaded above all the possibility of the baby's imbibing, with her milk, some germ of that coarse, bilious nature; and then, finding my husband persistent in his defence of her, a suspicion crossed my mind that wounded in me all that was most sacred.

So horrible did this suspicion seem to me that I set myself with all the force I could command to avoid verifying it. Indeed, beyond the attention I expended on the care of the baby, I seemed to be ever less and less capable of noticing anything, of loving, even of living. A moral exhaustion seemed to have capped the physical collapse, a feeling of dissatisfaction with myself, the reproach of the better part of my nature, so long neglected; of that ego, deep, sincere, which had been suppressed and hidden. It was not a sickness, but

an inherent flaw in my nature that was making itself felt. The mother in me was not an integral part of the woman, and the joys and griefs, exquisitely pure in essence, which came to me through that rosy, palpitating thing, contrasted with a want of stability, with alternations of excitement and inertia, of longings and miseries, whose origin I could not account for and which made me appear in my own eyes a creature without balance, incomplete.

VIII

AN INTRUDER

I kept a little book at this time in which I jotted down the most important dates as they occurred in the frail life upon which my own depended, and which I inhaled as though it had been, in fact, the very breath of my existence. These entries, together with a few brief notes on certain phases of the infant life, and of the varying emotions which these aroused in me, constitute my *début* as a writer.

I can see again the little, naked body of my son in his bath, supported on my nervous hands; beautiful with a beauty whose perfection I regarded in humbleness of mind, almost apprehensively, imagining possible disfigurements, and wondering whether, had unhappiness set some deforming mark upon him, I should have loved him so much; then telling myself that under any possible conditions I would surely have made life

beautiful for my boy. I can see the look of him now, indescribable, brilliant as a stretch of blue sky; the delicious, flower-like mouth, the little head, covered with fine, chestnut-brown hair, and the tiny restless hands, tryannical, never still. I can see myself, too, bending over the cradle hour after hour, day and night, often, indeed, weary, yet with my breast heaving with a happiness that was solemn, almost mystic.

I was as necessary to my boy as he was to me, and my ceaseless vigilance resulted in making him a splendid example of perfect babyhood. It was I who developed him without aid from any one—I alone—determinately. He belonged to me, for I was the only person who gave herself up to him wholly; his father, his grandmother, all the rest of them, might enjoy the spectacle, but I was its author. Some day he would recognise this and see that to me he owed it all.

The wet-nurse left when the baby was not quite a year old. During that spring and summer I used to soak myself in sunshine, I and the baby together. For a little way I would guide the tottering footsteps; then, snatching the little creature up in my arms, I would bear him far

away, over the fields or along the sea-shore, sometimes fairly panting with fatigue, but always smiling too. What did we talk about, my son and I, from morning to night? Who knows? When he would call "Mamma!" I would answer him, palpitating. Sometimes I held him in my lap as I sat writing to my friends or going over the workmen's accounts; sometimes I read, stretched out beside him on a rug strewn with the strangest medley of objects. Occasionally I would detect a sudden flash of shrewd intelligence in those deep blue eyes, with their fringe of long, thick lashes; an evident comprehension of his own limitless power over me; for there was, in fact, on my side the most complete surrender; I found myself incapable of requiring anything from a creature who regarded one with an expression of such adorable cunning.

My mother-in-law had ceased to repine at my persistent refusal of all her magical charms for warding off the evil eye and other suchlike perils. When she came to see us, looking smaller and frailer than ever in her black clothes, a sudden, fleeting smile would light up her face as she noted the gracious ways of the little grandson. It

was rumoured in the neighbourhood that she now was subjected to, no one could say what degree of, ill-treatment at her daughter's hands. She never made any complaint, but she grew more and more bowed and silent. Were successions of bitter memories passing through her mind?

The influence of the baby had somewhat restored the old relations between my brother and sisters and myself; their governess, moreover, had left to take a better position and there had been no effort to replace her. Every two months we went to see mamma. She now no longer asked to be taken home, and displayed less and less interest in our nervous talk. She was growing very stout, a symptom that worried the doctors, and her manner and language became steadily more childish.

The children were beginning to realise more clearly their condition of moral abandonment and frankly to express their disapproval of papa's conduct, but they did not open their hearts to me. They doubtless knew that I was, myself, far from happy, and perhaps they were even sorry for me, but they certainly considered me a person with very little feeling. The knowledge of this

troubled me, yet I had not the force to fight it down or even to try to win them over.

Occasionally I would see my father, now completely absorbed in the business of money-making, especially since he had leased the factory, and utterly indifferent, alike to the neglected state of his children and to the increasing ill-feeling which this circumstance aroused in those about him. He seemed to regard my boy as a rather attractive little animal, but my husband continued to find scant favour in his eyes, although he had raised him to the post of vice-director. To the life of the place he was now a perfect stranger. For myself, his views had become too cynical for them to be of any help to me as in the old days. Always, now, when I was talking to him, I felt as though I were being swept around and around in an ever-widening circle of ideas only, and, on returning to my room to think it all over, it was just as though I were falling down a deep, narrow, suffocating well. Not even my conversations with my friend the doctor had the effect of drawing out the more original and vigorous side of my mind.

It was interesting to discuss the doctor's calm,

almost fatalistic, views, yet these perplexed, even disconcerted me at times. It may have been that our sympathy was founded on a radical difference in education combined with a great similarity of tastes; but I was not yet sure of myself, and his was not the mind to induce certainty of any sort in mine.

What, moreover, was his real opinion of me? Certainly I had no idea of posing, either for him or for any one else, as a woman to be pitied.

All the same, the task I had set myself with regard to my husband was becoming more and more difficult. It seemed as though even the selfish sort of affection he once had borne me was cooling. New suspicions as to his fidelity had forced themselves upon me in the case of a handsome, bold-faced young operative whose part he had, quite unjustly, espoused in opposition to my father. On the other hand his jealous instincts survived in full force, and he was becoming more and more tyrannical.

One day, in consequence of some trifling dispute, I don't remember what about, I saw him for the first time fall into a towering passion. Seizing a new gown I was about to put on, he tore it apart.

I felt as though it had been myself who had been maltreated, but he, quickly recovering himself, tried to make light of it. I must forget the incident, not attach any importance to it.

Now and then it happened to me to see him as he really was: perfectly sure of himself, perfectly satisfied with his position, weak and subservient to his superiors and the public, utterly without discernment, inept in his affectionate moods as well as in his tempers, useless, a complete outsider in my life. He was never conscious of these examinations, and I, turning my gaze upon my son, would instantly forget the chill terror which that involuntary analysis had caused me, feeling my spirit warmed and tranquillised in the sunshine of the baby-smile.

With the advent of the winter we began again to attend the gatherings which took place once or twice a week at the house of our relative. Besides the doctor, there came there regularly several tradesmen with their wives, the Communal Secretary, a school-master with two or three daughters, and sometimes my brother and a friend of his, a student who appeared to be perennially on vacation. Sometimes upwards of

twenty persons would assemble in the tiny salon to listen to the Secretary's Neapolitan songs, or to join in the gabble of argument and discussion.

One person who never failed to be there was my sister-in-law, and I noticed, with extreme surprise, that, ever since laying off her mourning, she had been indulging in certain feeble attempts at elegance, a sort of self-conscious coquetry. She was, moreover, openly jealous of all unmarried women younger or more attractive than herself. No one, however, paid any attention to her except the doctor; he had attended her a few months before during an attack of neuralgia, and now he would occasionally address some sarcastic remark to her accompanied by a disconcerting smile, upon which she would hang her head, appear curiously confused, and make no attempt to reply.

The doctor expressed satisfaction at seeing me willing to take part in these reunions where, as a fact, there was much that I found uncongenial. I was so utterly shut off, however, from distraction of any kind, that I went readily enough. I found, too, that I was treated with a deference that was very flattering, coming, as it did, from individuals who were accustomed to look down upon all

women. Beside the reputation for jealousy which my husband had got, this was certainly due to my own bearing, that of a thoughtful, quiet child, utterly different from the manner of the women to whom they were accustomed, and which acted as a check upon all these men, forcing them to produce whatever their minds might contain that was least vulgar.

One evening, while the Secretary was playing, I suddenly became aware that the eyes of one of the company, who happened to be seated opposite to me, were fixed upon mine with a curious intentness. He was a "foreigner," as it was customary among the townspeople to term any one not born in the neighbourhood. He said of himself that, until three years previously, he had always lived abroad, now here, now there, from pure love of adventure. He was, in fact, familiar with several languages and, according to the doctor, was the most intelligent and well-informed person in the place. He was in possession of a moderate income, upon which he lived with his wife and their one child, a boy of precisely the same age as mine, and very handsome.

The relations between our two families dated

only from a few weeks back; the wife struck me as being a somewhat equivocal person, wearing a settled sarcastic expression on her pale, consumptive face. As for the man, he was thirty years old, of medium height but athletic build, fair, with a curiously modulated, metallic voice, very correct manners, and an impenetrable expression. He had aroused no especial interest in me, and I had not formed any definite opinion about him one way or the other, nor, indeed, had any of his acquaintances, as they had only come to the neighbourhood quite lately, attracted by the air, which it was hoped might benefit his wife.

Beneath that fixed regard I trembled. What was it that this man wanted? His smile seemed to me ambiguous, though perhaps it was merely self-satisfaction at having forced me to notice his stare; and that silent, inward mirth affected me like a blow on the face. A sort of hypnotism constrained me to seek his eyes again; no longer smiling, they were deep, impelling, ardent.

That night I went to bed with a heavy feeling of foreboding weighing me down. It was as though an enemy had declared war upon me, a war of whose cause I knew no more than of what the

outcome would be. For the first time since my marriage a man, close beside me, had dared to look at me like that, ignoring, as it were, the reputation I had won for pride and aloofness; and my surprise was as great as my indignation.

For several ensuing evenings those bright blue eyes pursued me persistently; gradually, however, they lost the expression of command which had so unnerved me, and assumed a look of singular sweetness, almost the ecstatic expression of one who sees a vision. He habitually talked very little; drawing away from first one group and then another, he would ensconce himself in some corner whence he would fix his gaze upon me unobserved by any eye but mine. At parting he would hold my hand an instant longer than was necessary, without saying anything. I would walk home beside my husband, through the winter night, as one in a dream. Arrived at the house we would find the child asleep, watched over by the drowsy servant eager to get away to her forlorn home. A sudden contraction of the heart, and, beneath the covers, I would feverishly invoke sleep!

Arising in the morning unrefreshed, heavy-headed, I would glance into the street below; a

figure passing slowly gave no greeting, only a steady look. An instant, and then I would turn away and begin to play with the boy. In the evening, before going out, I would find myself lingering before the mirror, a thing I had never done before in all my life.

At our reunions, the school-master's three daughters would sometimes begin talking to one another in an undertone as they watched my sister-in-law listening delightedly to what the doctor was saying. My brother, happening once to observe her in this attitude, said to me in a laughing whisper: "Your sister-in-law's secret is getting to be something like Punchinello's! How proud the doctor must be of his conquest." I wanted to ask him to explain what he meant, but had not the courage. What was he hinting at? What possible connection could there be between my kind friend and that creature? I was perplexed, and then a sudden chill sense of discomfort swept over me; I felt myself more alone than ever, uncared for, unnoticed by any save that one, only. . . .

By this time I could no longer ignore the man's purpose; he admired me and he wished me to

know it. And afterwards? What did he expect? What did he imagine? Now and again, at night, after one of our reunions, he and his wife would accompany us a part of the way along the street; he would direct his penetrating gaze full at me across the latter's shoulder, the frail little woman. For a moment I would not avert my own, turning it, then, upon those other two figures walking, all unconscious, beside me. I would say to myself: Where are you going? Is it you—*you*, who are permitting all this? And a single vigorous effort would have been sufficient: Yes.

The thought of this man now entered into every occupation of the day, pushing all else into the background. Even my child no longer had power to relieve me of the obsession. Yet, there was no passion in the feeling, hardly could it be termed liking. My heart did not, could not, beat any faster for one whom I barely knew, one who could certainly have seen nothing more in me than the attraction of a flower which might be worth snatching from its indifferent owner; and he must have told himself, too, that the game could not possibly be kept up for long.

The first of the year came and went; one day,

during my husband's temporary absence from town, I got a letter. I was implored to grant a single word which might confirm hopes sprung up in a heart distracted at once by love and despair. I smiled. The phrases were not very convincing, and I recognised the prelude to the conventional dénouement. Why did I take any notice of it?

I did send a reply, couched in I don't remember just what terms, but to the effect that the heart would have, manfully, to recover its calm, fleeing this shadow of a dream, and forgiving her who might, out of pure, reprehensible weakness, have permitted vain hopes to arise. I wrote sincerely but with a touch of irony, which did not, however, exclude a certain pity for the barrenness of both our lives. There must have entered into this expressed resignation to fate a tone of weariness, of bitterness. Reading the letter over before it went, I seemed to have written it for myself alone, to have summed up therein the history of my own soul. I could feel my life crumbling into ruins about me. Never before had I wholly tasted the horror of my loneliness, the icy chill of my twenty loveless years, and I wept long and

wildly; when I ceased, I realised my misery to the full.

For several days after despatching my letter, I remained indoors, at once relieved and sorry to have no further sign from him who, without even knowing it, had forced me to turn such scrutiny in upon myself; had dragged from me such despairing admissions. And all the time I never ceased to think of him until, gradually, a feeling of deadly languor crept over me; it was no longer resignation, still less was it revolt, but more like the dread of some unknown catastrophe which was to arouse me to an even keener realisation of my wretchedness.

Before long the silence became intolerable. After absenting myself for several evenings, I went again to our relative's house. Hardly had I entered the room when I espied the dreaded, hoped-for, face. He paled a little and evaded my eyes: later I heard him telling, in a somewhat strained voice, of an indisposition he had had during the preceding days. The next morning by means of some subterfuge, he contrived to get another letter to me. This one was violent in tone. He declared that love could not be over-

come, that passion could not be dissimulated. He had nothing to forgive me, but everything to ask, though it was for me—for my right to happiness—far more than for himself, all unworthy. . . .

Was this cleverness on his part or was it merely chance? Was he a shrewd reader of the human heart, a calculator? Or, was it that I was passing through a crisis in which any voice, no matter whose, calling to me, would sound irresistible?

I have no recollection of what I said in reply, but I know that I let myself go, that I bitterly bemoaned my fate, that I yielded to the temptation of imagining that I had found some one who understood me, a sister-soul, hidden beneath that impassive exterior! I told him that the morrow would be the fourth anniversary of my wedding-day, that my life was finished, that for my child alone could I ever bear to smile again.

And I avoided, now, all analysis of my growing feeling awaiting the outcome of events without being able, in the paralysis of my mind, to form any picture of what this might be.

I knew that his wife, doomed, moreover, to an early death, had a peculiar disposition: cold, re-

served, and incapable alike of accepting or bestowing affection. I did not hold that this was a sufficient excuse for betraying her, nor did I fancy, for my own part, that my husband's conduct had given me the right to retaliate in kind; on the contrary, I found myself regarding both of them with feelings of deep and sincere pity. It was the thought of my boy that really distressed me most; yet even this influence seemed to be growing weaker. More and more did everything grow dark about me. Had I arrived at the sophism common to every woman who tries to reconcile her love for her children with betrayal of her husband? Was my mind picturing a future of ignoble happiness to be divided between maternal joys and the embraces of a lover?

I do not think so. I tried to persuade myself that, at last, life was offering me love, real love, and that I ought to accept it, to give the man who had won me all of my true self as well as that other half of me—my child—simply, loyally. O to love! to love. To give myself voluntarily, to feel myself really a part of another, to live, to be born again.

How many days did the conflict endure? I no longer remember; but not for many.

When I saw him again it was at one of a series of dances organised by some young men of our acquaintance. He put his arm around my waist and swept me into a whirling maze of motion, murmuring against my neck swift words of love—of love! In the entire room, with its absurd decorations, I saw not one being who had reached the heights of the dream I was weaving; I felt young, rich blood coursing tumultuously through my veins; I realised in a flash, from the look in a hundred indifferent eyes, a look that confirmed his ardent words, that I was a beautiful woman, the only one there who was beautiful, beautiful, beautiful. I told myself that one man had felt within him the power to light this flame that swept through me; I told myself that I loved, I believed that my fate was sealed, and I tasted the first, the sole, intoxication of my life.

My husband found that he must suddenly go away for a few days; when I heard it I trembled. It was a grey, icy winter afternoon; he was sitting in front of the fire, I drew near and leaned against his knee, as I had been used to do in those long-

gone days of our turbid idyll, forgetting for the moment that he was the author of all my misfortunes, attending only to the warning of my own heart which showed me him, as well as myself, swept down in the threatened maelstrom. He patted my hair in a way he had not done for a long time, noticed the change in my face and was troubled by it, and met with some affectionate phrases the unshed tears with which my eyes had filled. Did he, then, still care for me? I could not tell; but I did know that I could never have loved him, since now, for the first time, the woman in me was aroused; the woman, eager for the unknown intoxication that was to place her, conscious of her own worth, in the power of a strong. . . .

What could I say to him? I let him go.

The other one, knowing that I was alone, simply and boldly asked me, by note, to expect him on the following evening. We would talk together, and I would then realise that I had received a gentleman.

He came. The situation was awkward and we, both of us, very ill at ease, almost forgot the state of exaltation in which we had been living during

the preceding days. I don't know why it was, but he seemed to me almost ungainly as he sat opposite to me with the round table between us, carefully choosing the words of his preamble, his eyes lacking their wonted fire; while I could not but feel myself to be anything but an engaging object as I sat there stiff and silent, one ear bent anxiously on the adjoining room where the boy lay asleep, and my brow wrinkled with embarrassment.

I can only recall a few disjointed sentences of what he said: "Certainly we had duties, both of us, double duties. . . . But one's feelings could not lie. . . . The heart had its requirements. . . . Without ignoring these duties, without causing unnecessary suffering. . . ."

What else was there? He was not naturally eloquent and I gave him no help.

"Without making any one suffer," the voice went on, "one might reconcile . . . there were duties. . . ." He grew involved, then, on a sudden, adopting a fresh resolution, he cut short his speech, took my hand in his, a light gleamed in his eyes and he said that he loved me, that I too loved him, that before very long we would both

be happy. He called me by the familiar "thou," got up, drew me to him, and suddenly kissed me on the lips; then pushed me from him with a quick movement, declaring again that he wished nothing from me but what I was disposed to give him spontaneously, that he was satisfied merely to know that my heart belonged to him, to hear from my lips now and again, as well as from my pen, the intoxicating words of passion. He drew me to him once more and pressed me close to his heart, his cheek against mine; I had the impression for an instant that I was being swept under, drowned, by one who was drowning himself.

All at once my two hands pushed him violently from me. He was clasping me, caressing me. A memory flashed across my mind. He too! And, while the nausea rose in my throat, I burst into a convulsive laugh.

He drew back, speechless with astonishment. I tore open the door and rushed into the other room.

A little later I heard the front door being cautiously closed. Once more I was alone in the house, alone with my boy. The baby was breath-

ing lightly and regularly; I did not look at him or touch him. Oh, my only, my one pure love, I dragged my clothes off feverishly, and not until I found myself under the covers did I stretch out my arms to him, gnawing at the sheets, praying for death.

IX

FLIGHT

UP to that time I had imagined myself to be equipped with a moral balance so self-evident and unassailable that, by its aid, I might hope to pass through life undisturbed either by doubts or fears of a certain class. If the reason for existence escaped me; if, from childhood up to the present hour, I had seen every object of my love, pride, enthusiasm, shrivel up and decay; if my own nature was an enigma, even to myself, and was constantly being cheated and deceived, yet, nevertheless, I had still cherished a firm belief in the strength of my own will and had been totally at a loss to understand how it happened that the feelings and senses had power to work such havoc, to cause the ruin of a soul. The first great sorrow that befell me was caused by my father, by the discovery of weakness in one to whom I had looked up as to a god. I had to admire before

I could love. Then, when I agreed to unite myself to one who had misused me, who had crushed me—little, young, defenceless—under his heel, it was because I believed myself to be obeying nature, to be fulfilling the woman's destiny which requires that she shall admit her inability to walk alone: yet even here I tried to feel that Fate was not really stronger than I, that my human side was controlling the situation.

And now, had I permitted the ironical intervention, in my forlorn existence, of an extraneous, unknown force? Was I to consider myself its plaything? A vacillating, uncertain being, a creature of circumstance, an easy prey to the vile desires that encompassed me?

That invocation to death in the night had been the first, instinctive cry of the creature. Then sleep had come, and then—awakening—the necessity for taking up the child, for preparing breakfast, for attending to all the multitudinous domestic details, so that the house might go on as usual, with its resistless revolution of life,—the house, where books and papers told of conflicts, evolutions; upon whose walls were stamped memories of those few, brief, glowing instants of boundless

hope which had characterised my dreams of womanhood and motherhood.

My twenty years rose up in rebellion. Why could I not have been happy for one moment? Why could I not have encountered love, a love that should have overpowered every sense of duty, every other desire? My entire being had cried aloud for it. This man had dominated me for weeks, had been able completely to fill my mind. Why? Because I was alone, loveless, thirsty, panting. . . .

And he? Was that contemptible creature who had appeared before me on the previous evening, utterly despoiled of all poetry or illusion, at once brutal and ridiculous, really that man? I was seized by a mad anger against myself, which presently gave place to a sense of utter humiliation. I had surrendered my own self, the small thing that I had become, a creature humble enough, yet resplendent in its pure motherhood, I had flung it at the feet of a vulgarian, a stupid egotist, whose first thought had been to tread me underfoot like a weed on the roadside. Had I really fallen so low? My frantic desire to live had blinded me; and the life which I sought was

error, abasement. I compared myself with my husband; we were on the same level, only, of the two, I was the more debased because I knew.

A few days later I had been with the boy to my father's garden; we had just got back, an armful of flowers lay on the table. My mind was blindly interrogating the immediate future without getting any response, when I saw the doctor enter, with a strange look on his face. It was the hour at which he usually returned from making his professional rounds.

It was only necessary to say a few words. It seemed that he had just come from the man's house; his wife had discovered one of my letters in her husband's pocket that morning. She had been suspicious for some time and the discovery had in no wise prostrated her. She knew she must shortly die, and, moreover, this was not the first time that her husband had deceived her, nor yet the first occasion on which she had been conscious of hating him. Before she died she wanted to have her revenge, so she had sent for the doctor, knowing him to be a friend of mine.

He brought me the letter, which he had induced

her to give up, as well as to promise to say nothing about it.

On seeing my face suddenly contract at the realisation of the insult intended, the kind-hearted fellow brokenly called me by my name.

We clasped each other by the hand, seeming to find reciprocal comfort in that silent pact.

What did he think? Would I ever be able to make him understand?

He said what he could with the idea of averting a catastrophe. For his own part he would be on the alert—take every means in his power.

“But you ’ll not see him again? Will you promise?”

I made no reply. He got up; only then, as I held out my hand again, the knot in my throat loosened, a sob choked me as I tried to stammer that I did not feel that I had forfeited his regard.

“I believe it,” he answered, very sadly.

Two days went by during which I persistently tried to impress upon myself the fact of my degradation. The thought that my husband might find out everything and put the most brutal interpretation upon the facts, filled me with a sense of wild rebellion, together with a mad desire to

confess about my abortive attempt to live, so that he might put me out of his house as a woman who no longer belonged to him, who could belong to others, which, perhaps, indeed, some day might come to pass. In the conflict of ideas which raged within me, I felt the shipwreck of my will, of my personality, of all that I had believed myself to be, and which I now, miserably, renounced.

Meanwhile the other woman was either not willing or not able to keep quiet. She had confided the story to a friend, and the news, all the more relished for being so incredible, was passed from mouth to mouth until, at last, it reached the ears of a chief of the clerical faction nicknamed the "little advocate."

At the very first whisper the doctor came to me again. He said I must deny, deny. No one could bring forward any proofs; the whole matter must be treated as pure, malicious invention.

I noticed that he was becoming more and more agitated. He was evidently watching over me. What was his reason? I could not, would not probe into it in that dark hour, but I was unable to stifle the memory of the suspicion that had flashed across me with regard to his relations with my

sister-in-law. He, too, stood entirely alone amid these hostile surroundings, he, too, perhaps, had given up, had let himself sink in his own estimation. Now he thought he saw another victim in me; and I felt his spirit drawing near to mine, as no other had ever done before: tender, melancholy.

He came back again the same evening and asked to speak with my husband alone. I was putting the baby to bed and I listened like one in a dream to the murmur of their voices in the next room. Presently I was called in. The doctor had come to say that for several days past the "little advocate" had been amusing himself by repeating ill-natured gossip about the reunions at our relative's house as well as about the recent dancing party. I and another lady of the company were the especial targets for his scandalous talk. To her he credited several lovers at once, to me a single one, very discreet and, as yet, platonic, since there was no whisper of anything beyond glances from the window and an interchange of letters.

The doctor spoke very calmly, good-naturedly, anxious, as always, to reassure me; he had advised the other lady's husband, and now mine, together to call the slanderer to account. The

only way, he said, to silence a ruffian like that was to show him, once and for all, that you were not afraid of him.

My husband, very pale, managed to hold himself in check. When we were left alone he contented himself at first with upbraiding me for my light behaviour, for this entirely new craze that had possessed me of late for seeing people and for trying to make myself appear elegant and brilliant. The only way to have peace in that place was to stay in one's shell.

But I could see the doubt beginning to work in his mind; his tone presently grew more acrid and domineering; he was one of those people whose excitement increases at the sound of their own voice until they work themselves up into a passion. Before long I knew that nothing ever again was going to divert him from the path of the inquisitor. I could feel the suspicions spring up, fasten themselves in his brain. At last, unable any longer to control himself, he demanded that I should deny what he was insulting me by alleging and, at the same time, that I should declare that I loved no one but him. The aspect of his face, violent, contorted, with starting eyes, was abso-

lutely terrifying; I had a sudden, realising sense that I was only a poor, defenceless, little creature exposed to some blind, bestial force. I remained dumb and rigid.

All at once, moved by the same excitement as himself, I made a rapid resolve. Why should I lie? I had received the man, perhaps I had been in love with him! Also I had repulsed *him* just as I had repulsed this one, my husband, and I hated them both. He would drive me away! He would kill me! As his talk became more and more utterly self-satisfied my whole nature suddenly rose up. He was not asking me questions; he was threatening—accusing. He did not believe me? Well, I *had* surrendered myself, I would confess it. . . .

I can remember nothing more until I found myself flung to the ground and spurned by a foot, like something unclean, while a torrent of outrageous words poured over me like a stream of molten lead. With my face pressed against the floor, the conviction that he meant to kill me flashed through my mind. With a curious calm I found myself considering whether my soul would ever re-join, anywhere, the souls of my mother and my son.

I have a confused memory of the wild fury that seized me when, after an indescribable night, in the course of which my face was alternately kissed and spat upon, while my body became nothing more than a poor, inanimate wrapping, I heard a proposal made to me that I should feign suicide: "I have got to kill you, but I don't want to go to the galleys. It must appear as though you had done it yourself!"

Silent, ineffectual fury; periods of utter despair; the shadow of madness. Days, weeks of it, all enveloped in a grey mist. I can no longer distinguish the succession of miseries—deliriums; nor the intervals of lethargy. My father, on hearing of the trouble, succeeded, with the doctor's help, in persuading the madman—bad quite as much as he was mad—to forgive me, to believe that it all amounted to nothing at all, unless, perhaps, a momentary aberration of the mind. My sister-in-law and her mother touched very lightly upon the scandal; anything rather than that such a disgrace should become known! And all these people together pressed about me like the spectres in some horrible nightmare. All of them believed me to be a low creature and all of them shielded

me from unworthy motives. Each night I was put to the torture, each day there were renewed scenes of repentance, promises of self-control, assurances that all was to be forgotten. Did I sometimes frighten him?

All this time life must outwardly go on just the same. I had to appear at my husband's side in public; sometimes we would have the boy between us, a sweet flower smiling up between two creatures who hated one another.

My reputation had already become so much a matter of public property that the two factions found themselves obliged to take sides, the one condemning, the other defending me. My defenders, however much they might despise me in secret, had publicly to uphold me, while the partisans of the "little advocate" and the arch-priest declined to have anything to do with me, assuming me to be disreputable. And what, throughout the whole of the loathsome business, was the attitude of him who was responsible for it all? His wife, who had grown rapidly worse, had been taken away by her own people, but it now appeared that she had not been the only one to notice those frequent promenades beneath my win-

dow. Was he the kind of man who enjoys posing as one who has every cause, chivalrously, to defend a woman? The doctor led me to fear that he was.

One day I went with my sisters to visit my mother. Nearly four years had elapsed since her removal to that dreary place. She no longer knew us; her memory, indeed, was completely gone and her eyes had lost every gleam of intelligence. A childish movement of the hands, as she touched our clothing, ribbons, ornaments; and shrill, babyish prattle in words of one syllable, were all that distinguished her actions from those of an infant of a year old. She had grown even stouter than on our last visit, and her fine, delicate features, well-nigh hidden by the drooping cheeks and chin, had a heart-breaking individuality; it seemed as though they still lived, remembered, had a separate existence of their own, and were demanding some account of that sensitive, refined being of whom they once were a part.

I kissed the grey temples, and even as I did so an inward voice seemed to whisper to me warningly: "Never again will your lips be pressed to this forehead. . . ."

Never? Throughout the entire homeward drive that warning voice was like an obsession; I heard it over and over again in my heart. All about us nature looked fresh and green; the two girls chatted together now and then, seeming to find life more care-free than before they had seen the lugubrious vision.

Arrived at the house I found the boy awaiting me. He was two years old now and he loved me, oh! he loved me with all the strength of his little heart. He was strong and handsome, and intelligent, with my mother's sweet expression in his eyes. How many interesting things there were to tell me about the day that was just past! His papa was moody, so we left him to himself; I tucked the little form in between the sheets and stood with my hand resting on the warm, soft cheek till the regular breathing told me that he was asleep. Then I returned to the dining-room.

My husband had that day met the man whom he believed to be my lover, and he fancied that he had detected a look of derision in the other's eye. The man was with two friends, confidants, no doubt. What did they think? How much did

they know? Why, in Heaven's name, did I not speak—say something?

I remained in an attitude of utter prostration, unable to stir a limb. In truth I hardly heard what it was he was saying. It seemed to me as though my whole life, exemplified in a few episodes, were defiling before me, and that I stood watching it with new eyes from an opposite shore. It was brief and it was not beautiful. What account would I be able to give of it some day when my son should have learned the facts? If, this very night, he were able to understand and speak, surely he would ask me to take him in my arms and bear him far away into the night, to face want, hunger, death. . . .

“You don't speak, you don't say a word! What are you concealing from me? What are you planning now, to drag me in the mud? Answer me, answer!”

Then, again, I found myself thrown to the ground; again I felt myself being kicked, two, three times; again heard obscene insults heaped upon me, followed by fresh threats.

While I still lay there, prone upon the floor, finding it a sort of relief to remain quite still with

staring eyes, like a person in a lethargy, I heard him go out, slamming the door behind him with a final curse. Had he awakened the child?

No; when I was able to move I dragged myself in the dark to the baby's bedside. "My son, my son, your mother will never see you again. It has to be; she cannot go on living, she is tired and she does not want to make you suffer too. You have her blood in your veins but you will be stronger, you will come off victorious. Perhaps one day some one will tell you that your mother loved you, that you were the only being on earth whom she ever did love, that she was not bad, that she had dreams of you grown big and handsome. . . ."

I returned to the dining-room. In the cabinet there was a phial of laudanum, nearly full. I gulped down two thirds of it, all I could, before the bitter taste prevented me from swallowing; then I lay down on the sofa. Almost immediately I felt a light drowsiness steal over me, a sense of repose invade all my limbs. . . .

When my husband came back—I don't know whether an hour had elapsed or less—he thought at first that I was feigning sleep, and again he

began to abuse me, though not so violently as before. His voice sounded far away to me. He must suddenly have noticed the phial which I had left on the table. He leaned over me, and then he understood. Seizing the bottle with the remnant of the poison in it, he rushed out into the street; while I thought with satisfaction that it was too late now for any help to avail.

Two women now arrive on the scene; my mother-in-law, lighting the fire, heating the water, and my sister-in-law entreating, conjuring; then he, crying at my feet. I saw all this as through a veil and without any feeling of regret; I almost thought that I was already gone, departed, and that this was my spirit witnessing the final throes of the cast-off flesh.

The woman shook me—gave me the water which I would not swallow. She had a sheet of paper ready at hand: "At least write that you did it yourself, so that this poor dog may not be annoyed!"

Who knows whether the smile of compassion which I felt within me may not have flickered for an instant on my stiffening lips?

The pen was held between my fingers, but they

failed to grasp it; at that moment the doctor came in. I still had strength to motion to him "No," when he held the glass to my lips. Let me alone, oh, let me alone, you, at least, who know!

But the firm, inflexible hand raised my head, forced me to swallow.

X

A CRISIS

MY farewell to life had been sincere and final, albeit pronounced in a moment of frenzy. It was more as though I were obeying a command issued from afar than yielding to the compelling necessities of the moment. My former life must have closed then, the woman whom I had been must have died on that night. There are periods which cannot be brought back, which can only be sealed behind a sepulchre.

How long had the crisis been coming on, all unsuspected by me?

On that day when the brutal act of a degenerate had checked the bloom of my adolescence, a process of decay had set in. Deleterious influences worked within me, slowly penetrating my entire being, corrupting both body and mind. Not a hint of the impending tragedy suggested itself to me till the actual moment came. I knew that I was sad, weary, anxious—and then came defeat,

unexpected but perfectly logical, with no tardy regrets to confront it, not even surprise. A cycle closed, then a new order was established.

From another shore . . . just as I had done at the moment when I hailed death, I now observed the world and myself with eyes which were really new. I had been born again. First I went through the period of infancy; for several weeks I was like a little young thing—I tasted the joy merely of *being* with childish delight, smiling with pleasure at the sun, the tree-tops, which I could see from my arm-chair, at the loveliness of my boy, at everything that was beautiful, resplendent, that bloomed and appealed to the senses, all intent upon the pure business of living. But the mind was inert. I knew that I had tried to die, that everything about me was now different, and that I must still go on. I saw lights and shadows alternating rapidly, but I had neither hopes nor fears, repulsions nor doubts; at the most there was a vague confidence, a timid, almost unconscious self-abandonment. The bitter taste of the poison still lingered on my lips, and my head felt extraordinarily light; every slightest noise dazed and confused me. At the same time the physical

shock was not very serious, and I had only to stay in bed for a few days. No one, not even my father, knew what had occurred. Outwardly life went on in its normal round; I occupied myself with the usual household tasks, omitted none of my customary cares for the boy, and even got so far as sometimes to note in the mirror the look of renewed health which, thin as they were, lent a fresh attraction to my features.

I have no distinct recollection of what passed between my husband and myself at the very first. His heart and conscience must have received a rude shock when he realised how calmly I had faced death, and it left him humiliated. Remorse? Fear? Mortification? Jealousy? All these were confounded in a single, all-pervading sense of misery, real misery, largely physical, which swept him back and forth from states of exaltation to abysses of despair. Perhaps the doctor had flashed before him the possibility of my becoming insane! He must have had a vision, then, of what his home would be without me, and have recognised the fact that it was I who, hitherto, had played the most important part there; that I had been the soul and spirit of the place and had set my in-

effaceable stamp upon it. And it seemed to me that then, for the first time, he began to reflect. Did he realise the little or nothing that he had counted for in our union? Think of all the hopes I had seen die in those four years, of the requirements of my undeveloped organism, of the utter indifference with which he had treated my every signal of distress? Did he now gauge my superiority even while his anger rose afresh at the memory of what he was pleased to account my transgression? His self-esteem still writhed at the recollection, yet he could not rid himself of a strange fascination which my altered personality, tragic, determined, seemed to exert over him. My body—and I recognised this with a cold shudder—had a new, acute, penetrating attraction for him. The memory of my invincible repugnance to all the manifestations of passion did not, perhaps, recall to his mind the crime committed against me, a child, but surely some vague sense of self-reproach must have awakened in him for not having known how lovingly to awaken the woman in me, to throw a veil of purity over the summons.

And he was all alone in his misery; he knew that not another soul suspected the depth and

extent of what he had to suffer, that his mother was pitying him for something infinitely simpler; that the doctor judged him with a tolerance tinged with contempt. And every now and then he would break down and declare, with sobs, that he was utterly wretched.

He had never struck me again. Throwing himself on his knees one day he had begged me to forgive him for not having been more generous, for having driven me to that desperate step.

“Live, live, for our son’s sake!”

Such a petition, spoken by lips so unused to gracious utterance, had in it a note almost of derision, yet I mingled my tears with his, as a child will sometimes cry because it sees some one else weep. In my convalescent, emotional state I was disposed to treat him as an unfortunate companion in adversity, like myself, the plaything and victim of blind chance. I said to myself, vaguely, that we each had need of the other, that we must help and support one another—“if only for the sake of the child.”

Then a strange thing happened: one morning my husband began again to question me about the affair which had been the cause of so much misery

for us both. I patiently recounted the whole story, repeating all the minute details which he had already heard so often. For the first time he appeared to listen to me, and seemed to reflect, sitting silent for awhile after each of my replies. At last he heaved a great sigh; a look of joy and exultation flashed into his eyes. Apparently all those exhaustive examinations to which I had been subjected had counted for absolutely nothing. He had, indeed, never once heard me out, had never been able to restrain the outbursts of his bestial jealousy long enough to comprehend what it was I was trying to tell him! And now that he knew, at last, what had really happened, the whole affair resolved itself into an insignificant, negligible incident. I could see him mentally holding up his head again before that other man, enjoying his discomfiture; I could see that he was grateful to me, that, at last, his faith in me was restored, that he knew certainly that I was really bound to him, that I felt myself to be a piece of his property!

Summer reigned triumphant over the golden fields. The sea must have been one great sparkle,

a blinding dream of beauty for those who saw it, but I never did, for I never went out of doors except, occasionally, in the evening when I would walk a little way along the deserted railroad tracks with my husband. Notwithstanding all that had occurred, he was as jealous as ever. In the morning, thanks to the fact that the servant was still about, I could go about the house, though I was not to enter the rooms overlooking the street. After luncheon, for fear that I might admit some visitor, I was locked in until his return at six o'clock—I and the child, alone in the warm, dim bedroom, whose sole outlook was the neglected little strip of garden.

The boy would sleep for two or three hours while I sat with my embroidery by the window, with the blinds half drawn, amusing myself sometimes by watching the play of my thin hands as they slowly drew the needles full of bright-coloured silk in and out in a ray of slanting light. I did not mind the forced seclusion; I even took a sort of voluptuous pleasure in the total annihilation of all sense of rebellion, in my state of oriental slavery. At bottom, this indifference was physical, my forces were only now slowly recovering.

I thought of my condition with a compassion that was ever more and more impersonal, with a sense of resignation that was almost serene. Love? I allowed him to hope for it and it was not hard to convince him. When he took me in his arms I felt myself, to be sure, grow rigid, but this only drove me to try to make up to him in other ways for my inability to give myself to him wholly. Certainly, I was never intended for the joys, but only for the miseries of love.

He appeared to be satisfied with my tranquil docility. He never spoke of the past now, unless it was to ask what it was I had wanted, or openly to reproach himself. It was difficult to know what to say; I wanted to spare him, yet sometimes the temptation to speak out freely was irresistible. These impulses were more enlightening to me, even, than they were to him; they were the confessions of a spirit vacillating, uncertain, feeling its way along the road, slowly recovering its strength and independence—painful, fragmentary, anxious, reminiscences of a period already wrapped in the mists of a life which had been lived, which was actually closed. As I talked I would feel my face gradually lose all expression of diffidence or sweet-

ness, a cold mask would settle over my features, and my dry, hard eyes would fasten themselves upon some vague, distant point possibly in the past, possibly in the future. It was only by an effort of the will that I could drag myself away from this asylum—evanescent, hardly understood even by myself—in order to arouse more cheerful thoughts in the man whom I would surprise plunged for his part in reveries which would draw a deep furrow across his brow; the puzzled, distressed look of one who searches feebly for the clue to some phenomenon, but only succeeds in uncovering his own helpless uncertainty.

It was the boy who had unlocked our hearts, making us believe in our newly made promises of forbearance. And it was the sensation of still possessing him, of having him there—little, smiling—the memory, ever present, of that nocturnal farewell when I had pictured to myself this being of my flesh and blood left alone in the world, forever ignorant of his mother's secret, and the thought, also ever-present, of the passionate devotion which, thenceforward, I would never deprive him of, that caused me to yield so readily, from the very first, to a renewal of existence. It

was all for him, for him, for him! Live, so as to make my soul effulgent, so as to be a mother in the highest sense of the word. Was it a dream? As I bent over the little bed, gazing at the features of my sleeping child, adorable in their purity, in the already developed firmness of their lines, a calm confidence would steal over my soul. I could only ask his pardon in spirit and I had no sense of humiliation as I did so; was it, perhaps, because I knew that my love had never flagged for a single instant; that he had ever been the crown to all my thoughts, even in my moments of madness, and that I always felt myself worthy to receive his unconscious benediction? Perhaps it was only the law of blood. That member which had come forth from me, I thought, must instinctively be animated with my own breath; then and always must that creature of *mine* reflect my actions in its life, struggle with me to rise.

For the first time I thoroughly appreciated how beneficial was the influence exerted by my son's presence. My love for him had grown both stronger and simpler, losing all element of childishness or morbidness. His name constituted my amulet for the present, my symbol for the future.

Those few, short syllables circumscribed my new horizon.

Meanwhile the material life of the household remained grey and joyless. My sisters, ignorant of what had occurred, had gone to Turin to spend some weeks with one of our aunts, while I was kept confined as closely as ever on the pretext of sparing me from the gaze of curious eyes. Fortunately my mother-in-law and her daughter kept away. Sometimes the doctor would drop in for a few moments in the course of the morning. He was much less talkative than formerly and interested himself almost exclusively in the question of my health; when I alluded, with a faint smile, to the continuation of my cloistered life, he would shake his head, while a shadow crossed his face; then, with an effort that did not escape me, he would treat the matter lightly, advising me, at any rate, not to allow myself to be beaten: to insist upon some distraction, some journey or other, while awaiting happier days. Then he would begin playing with the child, rejoicing in the fact that he was so lively and vigorous in spite of his getting so little fresh air and exercise. At each visit his manner to me became

more friendly and at the same time more reserved, as though he were conscious of a new feeling of respect which both amazed and moved him.

I felt very grateful to him; his presence brought me some faint echo of the great outside world which I had believed to be dead for me, making me feel in spite of myself that I was still a part of, still adhered to, that world notwithstanding all it had made me suffer.

From the doctor I learned that the consequences of my adventure were not yet over. Most of our neighbours had, indeed, disbelieved the charges; they thought of the affair as having been nipped in the bud, though, since the opposite faction had got hold of the story and my reputation was at their mercy, this last would have to be vindicated.

This, according to the conventions, was my husband's affair, but the other man had adopted the attitude of a directly interested party and was doing everything in his power to provoke an attack of some sort, doubtless in order to show his superiority with the small-sword and also to make it appear as though he had personal reasons for defending my honour!

Monstrous perversion of every moral sense; it

would not have cut me very deeply, so well did I know the hypocrisy and corruption that existed all about me, had it not revealed a new phase of my husband's character. I discovered that he felt the necessity for a duel, not to exonerate me, but himself—it was his own self-esteem that was hurt—and, at the same time, he was afraid!

The doctor laboured by every means in his power to patch up the affair. After much negotiation the "little advocate" at last placed in the hands of certain representatives of my husband a pompous, wordy statement to the effect that I was "most respectable." My husband thereupon declared himself satisfied; and satisfied, apparently, were both one side and the other, after having treated my character as a thing to be freely bandied about among them!

I had no wish to condone my own part, but thenceforward all sense of exaltation was stripped from the sacrifice of myself; the comfort of yielding my back to the burden was gone forever, gone the acquiescence of the dissatisfied conscience.

Every humiliation that had been inflicted upon me, every vileness that had crawled beside me, the compromises, the lies, the sensuality, the

vulgarity of mind, incidents that had had a grim irony and incidents that were simply monstrous, now turned to gall in my tortured memory, calling in vain for peace, for forgetfulness. It was the crucial hour in that long day of horror—mid-day shining over the devastated field of battle. All semblance of disguise was now torn away forever; my humiliation could no longer have the poor consolation of framing excuses for its author. There was nothing to raise me up, condemned to walk forever with bowed head. And my son, my son, another victim, hedged in between two who had been vanquished, found guilty—who would save him, carry him far off to some remote spot and show him human virtue?

XI

THE BOOK

WITH the close of the odious incident my husband's self-control returned and there was an end, at last, to those uneasy excursions into the past. For some time, however, the same restrictions were observed. I still went out but rarely, spent my afternoons locked into the house, found the sheets of my letter-paper all numbered, and was allowed to see no one but relatives, the doctor, and the servant. Yet, with it all, a pretence was kept up of my being free to do whatever I pleased, and these arrangements were carried out with an ingenuousness which would have made me laugh had not the experiences of my nearly completed twenty-one years effectually killed any predisposition to mirth. I took care to avoid giving him any cause for uneasiness, but it was more in order to safeguard my own peace and the boy's than from any regard for his feelings. He had become just as obtuse, unseeing, and self-

satisfied as of old. Longing above all else to be comfortable and easy in his mind, he actually came to congratulate himself upon the occurrences which had given me into his hand beaten, resigned, passive. I watched his face rapidly recover its normal contour without any particular feeling of contempt. I had reached a point where I was incapable of anything more, either with respect to him or myself.

In those days of utter solitude, when every human appeal had ceased and every hope and every belief seemed dead, salvation came to me in a book.

It was the first I had opened for many months. It had been sent by my father, whom I now saw but rarely and who thought, no doubt, that I was an uncomplaining victim because I had refused to take refuge with him during those tragic days.

The author was a young sociologist whose fame had spread throughout Italy since the, still recent, appearance of this work. In it he described, with great vivacity and charm, journeys made in some of the new countries, and invited unbelievers and sceptics to consider the serious problems which the contrast between the two civilisations pre-

sented. An acute faculty of insight and a real gift for composition lent a rare quality to this book, immature though it was, perhaps, yet full of vigorous thoughts and with a vivid human interest which illumined every page.

Possibly if, instead of this volume, there had fallen into my hands at this particular juncture some ringing pagan epic or an appeal to mysticism, my destiny would have been different. Or, it may be that I should have felt no influence of any sort, and would simply have sunk into a state of lethargy.

The book did not make me cry, nor excite me especially, nor make me feel as though a revolution were taking place within me. It was merely a development in substance of ideas with which I had been familiar since childhood. But, precisely because it did not open unsuspected abysses at my feet, precisely because, with a directness and vigour which seemed instinctive, it led me back to regions populated by thoughts that were already latent in me, as though whispering of treasures too long neglected, was this book a god-send to me at that time. A growing fascination took possession of me as I sat in the closed room,

beside the child intent upon his play, meditating upon what I was reading and recalling half-forgotten discourses heard in childhood; joining my own reflections and observations to those of the author, and aiding him in the creation of an ideal world. The spell thus cast upon me thrust all those recent appalling phantoms into the background, reduced them to silence, and turned my enforced solitude into a blessing since it protected me from the thousand little, irremediable realities of my life.

When my husband's common-sense got the better of his jealousy and he would occasionally take me out for a walk, I discovered, to my indescribable annoyance, that I dreaded to meet the gaze of the passers-by, and, worse still, the possibility of meeting face to face him who I felt still had power to awaken all the primitive, brutal instincts of the man at my side. Catching a glimpse, afar off, of the unwelcome figure, either alone or with a group of his friends, my husband, who was equally on the look-out, would suddenly veer around and turn up some side street, and then a sharp pang of self-contempt would shoot through me. Why could I not regard his existence as

something in which I had no concern? It was not exactly hatred that I felt for him, although I shook at the mention of him as one shakes to hear of some pestilence which has carried us, or some one dear to us, to the verge of the grave. Then, sometimes when I was with my sisters, now in the first bloom of girlhood, what a terror-stricken feeling would seize hold of me! Had they ever suspected? And suppose, even after the lapse of years, the slander should some day reach their ears!

Some months before, a young engineer from a neighbouring village had fallen in love with the elder of the two girls. He was very clever and high-strung, with an uneven temperament and a head full of new ideas, the sort of nature that seems inevitably doomed for struggle. I had persuaded my sister, then seventeen years old, to examine very carefully into her own feelings before giving the young man his answer. Now, after a long period of uncertainty, the child had announced to our father that she returned his affection and, so soon as he should find himself in a position to do so, they hoped to be married. In view of the enforced delay papa made no decided

objection, although he allowed it very plainly to be seen that he was far from pleased. The pair, accordingly, now interchanged letters, met on walks, and were growing to understand each other; the passion of the youth settling into a sentiment of love and protection, and her liking developing into real gratitude and devotion. A feeling of mutual respect grew up between these young people and the future looked ever more hopeful to their confident eyes. Thus that house, so long empty of sunshine, was now illumined, by virtue of their love, with the light of a new spirit; lofty, serious, this outside influence pervaded all, gradually developing into a dominating, beneficent force. Gladly did I do everything in my power to encourage this love whose flame seemed like some vivid dream of my own, barely outlined, never realised.

Towards the end of the summer my husband decided that we should take a trip. He thought that, besides providing rest and change for himself, it might restore my nerves to their normal condition and likewise be of benefit to the boy. It was a dreary week that we passed at Venice in spite of the enchantment of the city and the delicious

sense of languor which is sure there to creep into the veins even of the most desperate. The presence of the child made any systematic study of the churches and museums out of the question; my husband, moreover, having no innate love of such things and being absolutely ignorant of everything to do with art, was hardly an inspiring companion and spoiled even my most spontaneous sensations for me. We left with a feeling almost of relief, but in the out-of-the-way corner of the Tyrol where we next settled down, the sense of melancholy did not leave us.

The scenery was wonderful—a narrow valley, noisy with waterfalls and green with pines and fir-trees, shut in by gigantic white peaks. My childhood, my childhood, which sprang into life at the sight of the rugged country, the perfume of wild, growing things, at the sounds of nature all about me! How long had it been lying buried deep in my memory? Oh, if I might live alone with my boy in the heart of these woods, educate him in the school of nature, contrive so that in the far-off future no wave of childish memories should ever be as agonising to him as were my own to me now, so that his entire life might

develop harmoniously; a noble sojourner in noble lands!

How happy the little fellow was, sturdily planting his small legs on the grassy paths, hailing the herds with their tinkling bells! At the little inn where we were staying, he was the smile, the exquisite blossom of the place, which every one wanted to inhale with a kiss; coming, as he did, from a corner of Italy which those fellow-countrymen, homesick, thoughtful, a little taciturn, hardly knew how to place on the map.

My husband, new to the mountains, was equally delighted; full of childish enthusiasms and ingenuous remarks; perfectly sure, as he always was, of his own opinions; very proud of the fact that he was spending his money in so elegant a manner, and expecting me to break into loud expressions of gratitude. When he surprised me in a melancholy mood he was as indignant as though I had practised some deception: what sort of woman was I? Nothing would satisfy me!

Repentant, he would next try to get me to interest myself in making plans for our return home, or suggest my taking up writing again as a

means of distraction. Why did I not feel myself inspired by that magnificent scenery?

I listened wearily as one listens to some passer-by giving us advice about our health without in the least knowing what ails us. I did not know myself what I needed just then. I only realised that my loneliness and moral isolation were increasing. I felt that it was my duty to try to share my impressions with my husband, to try to make my mind an open book for him, yet I knew perfectly well that the substratum of my nature must always be hidden from him. Even had I desired it it would have been impossible to get any help from outside in the process of self-examination which was still going on within me. Something inside of me vibrated incessantly; how can I explain periods like these? Sometimes there will come, in the morning, a vivid impression of having passed the night amid strange phantoms, of having lived, for certain brief moments of semi-consciousness, a wonderful life; but we can never succeed in reconstructing the vision nor in recalling those night-thoughts; and then, we find that some essentially new act is curiously familiar, our innermost consciousness had known all about it before!

The last afternoon we spent in the mountains left a quite extraordinary impression upon my visual memory, extraordinary, that is, for me, who usually retain only what might be termed impressions of the moral characteristics of the places I visit, clothing each spot, in recalling it, in the physiognomy which my mind happened to give it at the particular moment when it impressed itself upon me; I see it framed in my own sensations.

I see myself standing on the wide road down which we were to journey on the following morning—hour after hour, by diligence, towards the railroad, towards Benaco. The atmosphere was grey and humid, at the same time objects and sounds were apprehended with astonishing distinctness; everything appeared larger, more impressive, more immovable. We, moving slowly along in that expanse of grey atmosphere—what were we more than tiny, transitory dots, protected augustly, lovingly, by the old Earth? For the first time in my life, perhaps, I held out my arms to this Earth in a spirit of thoughtful, filial reverence. Time and space seemed to have turned into fluids which swept me along on their currents; I was Humanity in movement; Humanity with no

fixed goal, yet illumined by an ideal; Humanity, the slave of laws, no doubt, yet driven by a rebellious will to spurn them, to construct a new existence for itself, superior to laws. . . .

I had that day finished rereading the book which had taken such hold upon me some weeks before and which had been the constant, silent companion of all my sojourn in the mountains. I fused the two successive emotions—that which the reading of the book had awakened and that caused by the spectacle of Nature around me, which I was about to leave. The result was that occult fervour felt only by profound thinkers and great lovers, those who worship Life, impersonally. I, with all my misery, disappeared, and there remained only the beauty of human energy, forcing itself up throughout the vast expanse of the world. A spectacle which the soul eagerly welcomes and preserves; not the Great Revelation itself, but rather the subterranean working of the germs which feel the near-by heat of the sun and both long for and dread the full splendour of its rising.

On our return the doctor informed me that the *man's* wife had died, and that he, resigning the care of his little son into the hands of his parents-

in-law, had gone off to America, like the adventurer that he was by nature, with no fixed plans beyond a firm intention never to return. It was the last I ever heard of him. After the doctor had gone, I cried. I was free; hereafter life would be simpler, more full of activity in the interests of my son. The sense of security once more restored to him who owned me, I would be able to reassume all my former rights; freed forever from all spectres of the past I would recover my own serenity, gradually all my old confidence in my own powers would return. . . .

Why, then, these tears? It seemed as though, together with the ulcer, a piece of healthy flesh were being severed from me. It was not, then, dead in me, the belief in love, in the possibility of powerful, overmastering, love since I wept at saying farewell for ever to that illusion which, for a single moment, had deceived me? He was taking himself off, he with whom I had interchanged promises of happiness; he was disappearing into the vortex forever. Did I feel as though the memory of him could never more depart from me because his rapid passage had been the signal for my transformation? No, certainly not; and should

my name be uttered in his presence after the lapse of many, many years, it would awaken no feeling in him but one of annoyance.

The sense of bitterness did not return, but my spirit resigned itself anew to an invincible melancholy, to a morbid liking—for days and weeks at a time—for darkness, emptiness, solitude. My husband, more calmly determined than ever to have peace, was, yet, a good deal concerned by the obstinate disorder which kept me bowed to the earth. He wanted me to devote myself to some study, to write—yes,—write my reminiscences, the history of my error! Oh, yes, he was quite self-composed; he could not but admire himself; his own goodness of heart seemed to him worthy to be celebrated in verse. One day he brought me home a huge roll of white paper; as I looked at it I felt the colour mount to my brow. To what point was it possible to carry unconsciousness? A few days later, however, while the boy was paying a visit to my sisters, I found myself holding the pen suspended above the first page of one of the quires. O to tell, to tell some one of my wretchedness, my misery; even to tell it all to myself, to myself alone, expressed in new, lucid

language, which might reveal some still obscure phase of my destiny!

So I wrote for an hour—two hours, I don't know how long. The words poured out, earnest, almost solemn. The psychological moment was described; I questioned grief as to whether it could become fruitful. I was convinced that I detected a strange fermentation taking place in my intellect, like the presage of some far-off bloom. Never, in fact, had I been conscious of possessing so vigorous a power of expression or such a gift of analysis. What might I hope for in myself? Should I marshal all my forces, set forth on the conquest of my peace by assisting in the work of humanity which alone ennobles existence? Oh, would the smile of happiness never, never again, make me beautiful in the eyes of my son?

The pen stopped; I ran into the other room and threw myself on my knees on the precise spot where, on a night already long past, I had whispered to a little, sleeping creature my determination to die. How did it happen that the name of my mother rose to my lips with a sob? Why was it that a poignant longing to pray invaded me, to invoke that occult Power to which my mother

must so often have had recourse, when her heart was bursting with grief? I cannot say. It was the only time in my life that I longed for faith in a divine Will, that I waited for its coming with clasped hands. In that appeal what would I have asked of a God should He have appeared before me? To shield my child from sorrow, to make it possible for me to guard him along illumined paths. . . . And if I were not listened to either? If the chain were to uncoil itself thus eternally?

My husband surprised me still on my knees. He sometimes came home at unexpected hours of the day in order to make sure that I was not abusing such liberty as I had. I got up hastily with a sense of shame. He saw in it nothing but an exhibition of weakness, and laid it at the door of my nerves, poor invalid that I still was.

He asked anxiously what was the matter with me. I reassured him with a gesture, while the tears began to flow copiously, freely. Blessed, blessed tears. At last I had reconquered myself; at last my spirit was ready to accept the heavy burden of isolation, of struggling on alone, of dragging forth into the light all those forces,

that were dying within me, of beauty, strength, purity; at last I could blush at my vain regrets, my long, fruitless sufferings, my neglect, almost hatred, of my own soul; at last I tasted once more the flavour of life almost as I had known it at fifteen.

XII

AN INTERLUDE

A LONG, strange period followed, during which I lived for nothing but books, meditation, and the affection of my child; everything else had become utterly indifferent to me and all I was conscious of was the sense of profound peace, which resulted from my monotonous, secluded life, freed, now, from all shadow of subterfuge or fear.

Instinctively I let sentimental problems alone and ceased to read the romances which had so delighted me in my girlhood. The question of socialism, on the other hand, I felt could do my mind no harm. I had journeyed through life equipped with an extraordinary conglomeration of humanitarian ideas which I had never sought, even, to find any justification for. From childhood I had cherished a secret leaning towards the poor and wretched, while all the time I was listening to my father as he expounded his aris-

tocratic theories. Occasionally my compositions would contain bursts of rhetoric in this connection which would surprise and delight me but which made papa smile good-humouredly. My education had been a queer mixture. No sense of harmony had ever been cultivated in me. No single page of immortal writing had been held before my eyes, as a child. The past hardly existed for me. I never penetrated beyond the period of my own grandparents of whom I used sometimes to hear them speak; and the history that was taught me at school never seemed to me in the least like my own life thrown far back into the past. It seemed more like some piece of old tapestry, or a phantasmagoria. At that time, then, I could only interest myself in the actual realities about me, and there everything became a subject for examination. Entirely on my own initiative, I took to scrutinising the human creature with a curious intensity, and gradually, by efforts that were half unconscious, I evolved a cult of humanity not altogether theoretical. If the circumstances of my family did not lead me to sound the depths of the phenomena of social inequalities, what I did observe of these at school

and on the street aroused a vague longing in me to do something by way of compensation.

When we left the city and settled down in a small provincial place, I came almost exclusively under the influence of my father, and soon lost that wide sense of brotherhood which, in the large centres, is an active, impelling force. I had pictured the world as composed of a small group of intellects served by a mass of hopelessly ignorant, and almost as hopelessly insensible, human beings; but this conception was undermined, first of all, I think, by a little incident which occurred when I was about fourteen years old. The owner of the factory, a *blasé* millionaire, had been taking breakfast with us one day and was sitting turning over the pages of a review to which my father subscribed; he admired it but thought it "too dear." This, in my eyes, greatly enhanced the importance of our family as contrasted with this rich man who possessed two equipages but not one review. I suppose I had been over-encouraged to chatter, for presently, speaking of my office work, I referred to "our factory." Mamma chided me, upon which the visitor remarked:

“Let her alone; she’s like my coachman; he always speaks of ‘my horses’!”

The anger which blazed up in me shook, at the same time, my conception of the framework of society!

Later on my marriage had given a check to the development of my mind, but here, at last, the sense of a wider life had penetrated my being. My own personal problem grew less obscure as the light reflected from other, vaster, problems fell upon it, and an echo broke upon my ear of the longings and palpitations of others. Thanks to books I was no longer alone: I was listening, and agreeing, and toiling in conjunction with a great collective force. I realised that humanity was suffering largely by reason of its own ignorance, its own unrest, and that the elect were called upon to suffer more than the others so that they might push forward the conquest.

Once, when I was a child, my father had spoken to me about Christ. He told me that he had been better than any other man, the chief exponent of love and sincerity, a martyr to his own conscience. I had shut this name into my heart, making it the occult symbol of perfection, though

without worshipping it; happy simply in the knowledge that a *sommo* had once existed, that the human creature could, if it would, rise until it should reach the ideal of divinity, the desire of the eternal! How puerile did the Christian mythology appear to me! If Christ were God he was nothing; but, if he were man, then at once he became the flower of Humanity, not a shrunken Godhead, but man at his uttermost development. And Jesus, always that Jesus of Gennesaret, smiling upon the little children, Jesus, kind to penitents, incapable of ill-will, serene in admonition as well as in prophecy, had shone before my soul, an ideal countenance which had seemed to cloud over with a veil of sadness whenever I strayed away from goodness and truth.

After months, years perhaps, again the smile of Christ illumined my path, again I turned to him as to a fount of inspiration. For a time I wooed a doctrine in which I combined the gentle precepts of the Galilean—offspring of the womb of nature—with the sterner modern doctrines, the products of science and experience, liberty and will, love and justice. It was like orientation, like the affirmation of a harmony.

All about me, meanwhile, numberless things were beginning to assume significance, to attract my attention. I asked myself, with slowly awakening wonder, if I were in no way responsible for all those conditions which I found so distressing and disconcerting in the world all about me. Had I ever thought seriously of the circumstances of those hundreds of labourers to whom my father gave employment? Of that teeming population of fisher-folk who lived, crowded together, almost at my very doors? of those strange representatives of the *bourgeoisie*, of the clergy, of the school-master class, of the government employees, of the nobility, with whom I had come personally into contact? All that mass of humanity had never aroused anything but the most superficial curiosity in me. Without being either proud or servile I had passed between the two poles of the social edifice feeling as though I stood alone. I had never taken in the idea that I might be a person apart, having exceptional opportunities to study the world about me. The cutting short of my scientific studies was an infinitely less serious matter than my failure

to cast my eyes upon the pages of the book of human life.

And now? It was no longer in my power to mingle with people, nor could I ever resume the position whose opportunities had proved so fatal for me. My seclusion, through force of habit, had now become so natural that to attempt to break through it would only have caused a fresh upheaval in the life of the house. I must, therefore, confine myself to gathering up the echoes which rose to my small room from the street below.

Meanwhile my sister's lover had, during the preceding winter, initiated a struggle which was certain permanently to estrange him from my father. He had organised the workmen at the factory and had formed a defensive union. Thanks to him, socialism made its first appearance in the neighbourhood. My father promptly forbade the girls to receive him; the little *fiancée* was crushed; whereupon, in spite of my husband's objections, I at once invited the young man to come to our house. How the child's eyes shone the first time she found her lover, unexpectedly, awaiting her there! For her, for the other girl,



for my brother, now sixteen years old, I could do nothing more than offer them that refuge, hardly, indeed, that. The struggle I was making to recover my own poise was so great that it seemed to leave me no strength to accomplish anything effective for those poor, abandoned creatures of my own flesh and blood.

From the young man I got exact information of the world-wide movement to raise the working classes and to place them, menacing, formidable, in opposition to the class to which I belonged.

He had studied in Germany; then, after travelling for a time, he had come home to direct the laying out of a line of new railroad, and had felt an overmastering desire to try to do something for the miserable population from which he had himself sprung.

My sister accepted everything *a priori*; ideas lived, palpitated in this youth, and she could not separate them from him. But I argued with him, becoming more and more excited. I was slow of speech, owing to my love of sincerity and exactitude, and inexpert in dialectics. After he had gone I would seat myself at my writing-table and, turning to the self-same roll of paper to

which I had confided my misery, I would try to recover my liberty of spirit. I enjoyed yielding to this impulse but, afterwards, I would sometimes find myself blushing at the thought that I might, perhaps, be nursing an incipient, silly ambition to *play a part*, in the same way that, as a child, I had stood before the mirror and pretended that I was a seductive lady. But I kept on, all the same, with enthusiasm.

To think, to use my mind! How had I been able to go on for so long without thinking? Persons, things, books, scenery, everything now furnished subjects for endless speculation. Some of my thoughts amazed me, others made me smile by reason of their ingenuousness, while others, again, seemed to possess such intrinsic beauty that I was filled with admiration, as at something I had read, expressed in glowing language, and destined to move vast multitudes. Their variety was infinite; such richness to exist in me! I told myself, however, that there could be nothing unusual in this, that every human being probably had just such a store concealed in the hidden recesses of his mind, and that it was nothing but the accident of circumstance that prevented

every one from adding to the common patrimony. But I was not really convinced of the truth of this; there was too much dulness and indifference all about me!

The doctor might, by the aid of his science, have furnished a basis for my investigations, but he no longer seemed to care to exercise his mind. The demands of his profession were too exacting, for one thing, and his natural scepticism made him regard as too hypothetical any theory of a possible change in century-old conditions, any attempt to alleviate misery which was physiological, hereditary. He lent me, nevertheless, some books—treatises on biology, manuals of hygiene and natural history—and he smiled rather quizzically when I told him I had been making notes of these and drawing up epitomes.

The phenomenon of the doctor possessed a melancholy interest for me. I still wondered if there ever had existed, if there existed still, intimate relations between him and my sister-in-law; and the mere suspicion of such a thing humiliated me. But why did he live a bachelor existence? The case of my father had opened up many questions to my mind, and I had deduced

therefrom some bitter reflections. Here, for example, was this young man, professing such respect for me, recognising the higher truths, and leading an exemplary life according to the conventions of society, yet, all the time, perhaps, following another, secret, unacknowledged existence!

Who had the courage to admit a truth and then to conform his life to it? This poor, mean, obscure life, to the conservation of which every one clung so tenaciously, every one paid in his share—my husband, the doctor, papa, socialists as well as priests, the pure as well as the depraved; every one wearing his falsehood resignedly. The revolt of the individual was either futile or disastrous; that of numbers banded together, too weak, as yet, to amount to anything, ridiculous almost, in contrast to the appalling strength of the monster they sought to overthrow.

Then I began to wonder if some share, and not a light share, either, of the evils of society were not to be laid at the door of the women. How could a man who had had a good mother be cruel to the weak, disloyal to the woman he loved, tyrannical to his children? But the good mother

must not, like my own, be simply an example of self-sacrifice: she must be a *woman*, a human being.

And how is she to become a woman if her parents deliver her, ignorant, weak, incomplete, into the hands of a man who does not regard her as an equal, treats her as he would a piece of property belonging solely to himself, gives her children and then leaves her alone with them, fulfilling his own social duties and letting her continue to amuse herself in much the same way as when she was a child?

Ever since reading a study of the feminist movement in England and Scandinavia these reflections had been revolving persistently in my brain. I had instantly felt an instinctive sympathy for those incensed fellow-creatures who were uttering their protests in the name of the universal dignity of the race, going so far, even, as to sacrifice their most sacred privileges, love, maternity, sympathy. Almost without my knowing it my mind had dwelt day after day on that word "emancipation," which I remembered to have heard uttered seriously once or twice by my father, when I was a child, and since then always in derision by

every class of men and women. Afterwards, comparing those rebels with the great multitude of the ignorant, the inert, the resigned—types of women fashioned by centuries of subjection, of whom I, my sisters, my mother, every female of my acquaintance, were examples—I had been seized by a species of mystic exaltation. I felt as though I were standing on the threshold of *my* truth, as though I were about to have revealed to me the secret of my long, tragic, and fruitless anguish.

Solemn hours of my life whose memory I can never recall quite distinctly, and yet which live ineffaceably in my spirit. Hours which pointed to a higher human destiny, far away in point of time, to be reached through the efforts of puny, human creatures, incomplete in themselves, yet noble in proportion as they mastered human destiny.

XIII

RENAISSANCE

SOMETHING that occurred in the principal town of the vicinity moved me irresistibly to write a short article and send it to one of the Roman papers, which published it. In this article the word *feminist* occurred; and on seeing this harsh-sounding word in print, it seemed suddenly to assume its full significance, really to mean for me a new ideal.

All this time my portfolio was rapidly filling. Attempts of various sorts followed fast, one upon the other, and with them, sketches from life, rapid portrayals of some *type*. The thread of my reflections upon life began to unwind itself; a hundred fragments fell into place, established their connection with each other, formed into an organic whole; and throughout these pages there breathed a mysterious fervor, which I began to love as something better than myself, almost as though it were my own reflection purified,

convincing me that I could yet live intensely, usefully. Live! Thenceforward I wanted to; no longer solely on my son's account, but for myself, for every one.

I deemed my solitude a blessing. The bitter Calvary was, indeed, ever before my eyes; I would stand regarding it, transfixed by the thought of the innumerable human beings climbing other, similar ones without finding at the summit so much as a cross upon which to await a posthumous justice. Women and men, an agglomeration, yet each, individually, cut off from all succour! *That* humanity? And who would dare to defend it in a formula? In reality woman, a slave up to the present time, was completely *ignored*, and all the presumptuous psychology of the novelists and the moralists did but betray the inconsistencies in the elements out of which they had built their arbitrary theories! And man, man did not even know himself: without his complement, alone in the world, to evolve, to enjoy, to struggle; stupidly cutting himself off from that spontaneous, comprehending smile which might have opened his mind to the entire beauty of the universe, he remained either weak or savage, eternally in-

complete. Both the one and the other were to be pitied, though in a different measure.

None of the books I read were able to overthrow these recent convictions of mine, and none of them made a very deep impression upon me. I realised that my critical faculty, after its long paralysis, had apparently widened and intensified. At the same time there awakened within me a bitter sense of longing for all that had irremediably been neglected in the system of my education; poetry, music, artistic expression both in colour and form, remained almost unknown to me, while my entire being reached out for the joys which such things bring. There were times when the thoughts I lived by might almost have taken flight, have merged themselves with light and sound; and my powerlessness to portray lyrically the dim, interior world of my mind sometimes caused me actual suffering. Everything which I failed to express fell back forever into the unknown abyss out of which it had issued for a single instant.

In the quiet house an old woman, regularly employed in our service, now performed the various domestic duties which had formerly

been almost solely my care. She was tall and bent, with extraordinarily ugly and expressive features. At first I had taken a strong dislike to her, but she quickly won my regard by her intelligence and tact. Her history did not differ greatly from that of many another woman of the people—first broken down with child-bearing, then deserted by the husband, who emigrates, then despoiled of her children. She told me her story diffidently, exhibiting a stoical attitude towards life. My interest pleased her. From the outset my childish aspect, and the long hair and rosy cheeks so exactly the counterpart of my boy's, had caused her great surprise; then the solitary life I led, and the subjects about which I conversed with my husband at table, when he happened to be in a mood to listen to me, filled her with mingled respect, pride, and devotion; together with odd yearnings for herself and for her children.

I got to regard her in the light of a humble and trustworthy companion. I had no other! What pathetic attempts she would make to understand me when I occasionally tried to explain some question to her! And, when, at last, she had to

give it up, she would shrug her bent shoulders, exclaiming: "Ah, *Signorina mia*, given thirty years less, who knows what you might not have made of me!"

She, together with my mother-in-law and a little, wizened old woman who came sometimes to mend the house-linen, represented in my eyes the most complete examples of the submission of my sex, not to unhappiness merely, but to the selfishness of men. Grey heads, shaking continuously, as though instinctively, at the recollection of all the torments you have endured; weary heads upon which, often, one cannot bear to let the eyes rest; how often have I caressed you in spirit, not on your own account, not from any passing sensation of pity for your fate, but because of the great wave of aspirations which, all unconsciously, you caused to surge up in my heart!

Even my mother, in her dreary retreat, was an inspiration to me. I was convinced that, had that poor unfortunate found in her youth some sphere of action outside her domestic round, she would never have been so completely annihilated by misfortune. Did I not, at twenty-two years of age, believe that life without love could still be

acceptable? Did I not even find a species of security in the thought that love could never again molest me?

I did not yet apprehend all the deep deficiencies in my life. Had I done so all my naïve enthusiasms would quickly have disappeared. Woe to me had I attempted to analyse my daily life at that time! As it was I so far exceeded what should have been my circle, and had, so strongly, the feeling of possessing exceptional powers, that the contrast between that which I dreamed of and that which I had did not cause me any distress beyond a vague sensation of physical discomfort.

Towards the middle of the summer a piece of work which I had been turning over in my mind for some time grew insistent, and I completed it in a few days. It was a short monograph upon the social conditions of the region in which I lived, the product of personal observations and intense emotions. I handed it to the doctor, and when he brought it back to me I could see that he realised new potentialities in me; and, moreover, I felt instinctively, without pausing to ask myself whether it gave me pleasure or pain, that, in this new resource which so absorbed me,

he perceived still another obstacle to the feeling which he may have been cherishing for me in secret. As I rose, then, I was to be more alone than ever.

What difference did it make? My detachment from the world was now sincere; with my gifts of youth and beauty, I could yet, thanks to the crises through which I had passed, believe myself exempt forever from all the snares of the senses. My relations with my husband, to which I resigned myself with melancholy docility, in no wise disturbed the workings of my conscience. When, in the course of my reading or my imaginings, I would stand face to face with some of the great figures of asceticism in the ancient or the modern world, splendid in their snowy whiteness, I could not help feeling for a moment that I was their sister.

I remember well the morning when I got the review in which, among the leading articles, appeared the study which the doctor had so patiently helped me to correct. My boy, taking the magazine out of my hand, discovered my signature—he could not read, but he recognised the appearance of my three names; he smiled

at me with the luminous, wise little smile he always wore when he was turning over in his small brain the mystery of printed words. That smile of his was the prize, the daily stamp of approval set upon my labours. It was as though he were saying: "I understand that you are working for me, too, mamma. I know that you are flowering, expanding, living, and that in this way you will grow good and strong, and make life good and strong for me."

That morning I answered my son's smile with another equally wise and luminous. It was as though I found myself standing on some height, holding the child by the hand, and gazing across some boundless, marvellous country, before girding myself to traverse it, sure of my own forces. Behind, about me—nothing. In the dim yet insistent premonition of the future—an absolute peace, a restful oblivion.

A few weeks after this my husband came home one day apparently much preoccupied. I had received the same morning a letter from a famous woman writer inviting me to collaborate in a periodical for women which was about to be

started under the auspices of a new publishing house. I was offered a modest salary. I hoped that he would be pleased. On the contrary he told me to be quiet. He knew that the young engineer who was engaged to my sister had been made the object of a searching enquiry. At the moment, a wave of reaction was sweeping over Italy. My husband found the review in which my article had been printed, and a number of letters from both old and new correspondents who had written to congratulate me upon it, and threw the whole collection into the fire; after adding a pile of magazines and other periodicals, he began looking through my papers.

That whole scene comes back to me as being among the most bitter, and, at the same time, most profound, experiences of my life. As I noted the pettiness of the creature to whom I was yoked, and realised how utterly I was divided from him in spirit, how completely I was alone, I experienced the same recoil as when one witnesses an exhibition in which the grotesque and the sublime are mingled.

When the panic had subsided I went on writing and publishing as before. I was beginning, now,

to hear echoes of my own ideas in other articles and in letters. An Italian professor, who had lately taken up his abode in Switzerland, began a lively correspondence with me, and a young Venetian, a woman doctor, having written to me at his suggestion, a warm epistolary friendship soon sprang up between us two ardent spirits. My mind was filled with scattered images, strange physiognomies, in vague, indeterminate surroundings. Some of my correspondents I did not even try to form a picture of in my mind: a Genoese scientist, for example, who had devoted himself entirely to the work of raising the standard of morals among the sailors, actually became very dear to me, an object of reverent devotion, without my knowing his age or anything about his private life. In the case of others, various young men who published articles and verses in the same magazines that I worked for, I could see their faces at once, some shy, some fatuous. It was the women whom I felt the greatest curiosity about. I wanted them all to be beautiful. Some of them sent photographs of themselves which were, indeed, charming.

Sisters?

Who knows. A few rapid disillusionments had put me on my guard. I was beginning gradually to understand the position of intellectual women in Italy, and the degree of importance attached by them to the feminist movement; with utter amazement I found this to be almost insignificant. True, the example was set them by those higher up; by the two or three woman writers of the first rank, all of them openly hostile—oh, the irony of the contradiction!—to the movement to elevate women. In ideals of any kind, moreover, the entire female literature of the country seemed to me to be entirely deficient—great, sounding, empty phrases without either connection or conviction. And when it came to taking any action, how few women could be depended upon—most of these, being indeed, foreigners.

The very young ones, the bearers of academic titles, had almost a contempt for the conquest of their social rights. Among these was numbered my new Venetian friend, who had a remarkable critical mind. Many of the older ones gave me to understand that they had been tormented, worn out, by life; and they frankly implored me not to throw myself into the fray, to temper my

enthusiasms, and devote myself to the cultivation of some dream of Art alone, if, indeed, I could not rest satisfied with the love of my child—my nest. Sincere, certainly. Their letters left me perplexed.

My son, unconscious little psychologist that he was, always detected the signs either of trouble or satisfaction on my face, keeping quiet when he saw me absorbed, and knitting his brows whenever there was a disagreement between his father and myself. I represented, indeed, all the best side of mankind as he knew it: I was the wisest, the best of human beings: even my rare fits of anger, for which I always reproached myself and which were a result of a chronic physical derangement, never aroused the smallest manifestation of rancour in that little spirit: he always said to himself that mamma *was right*; and usually he would ask my pardon, not out of fear of punishment, but because he hated to see me unhappy. Poor little boy, poor adorable little child! For two whole years his was an absolutely radiant childhood; and he was able to acquire a store of vigorous health such as it falls to the lot of few children to possess. Was it

some secret power which, foreseeing the future, was providing, as far as possible, a reserve force?

Two years! How can I piece together the scattered memories of that strange period? Holding the boy by the hand, I would wander along the deserted highways, each one like all the rest—bordered with hawthorn, fragrant in the spring, dusty in summer. In the distance rose the double chain of heights, hills in front, with the Apennines beyond. Here and there some little hamlet perched on a rocky crag would recall the Middle Ages, with its encircling walls, and dark stone houses all huddled at the foot of a tall campanile. Sometimes both shore and sea would be dazzling; sometimes everything wore the colour of cinders; sometimes there was a brooding silence over nature, strange and sweet; while at others every blade of grass, every drop of water seemed to cry aloud that it was alive, and the air, populous with sound, to become itself a living thing. The outlines of the landscape had been familiar to me for so many years that, just as when I was a child, I never thought of analysing what lay stretched before my eyes; I did not try to discover the secret of the

harmony which moved or excited me, which gave me a feeling of restfulness, or of strength, which identified itself with me. I simply allowed myself to be steeped in the simple yet mysterious charm of it all, and my heart was filled with a passionate sense of gratitude. At last I had awakened to the profound manifestations of life in nature. I saw them whole, distinct, capable of signifying tears and laughter, love, death. The revelation had not come too late.

It now seemed to me as though my past had been ordained by some pitilessly wise power. Had not everything, in fact, apparently been ordered as a preparation for the future?

At the same time I could not see this future very clearly. And, for want of some distinct aim, my experiments were futile. What did I want to be? Not a journalist. I had begun to realise the almost utter uselessness of that scattering abroad of undigested ideas. An artist? I did not dare so much as to think of it, exaggerating my lack of culture and imagination, my failure to comprehend beauty.

A book, *the book*. Ah, I did not desire to write it, no! But sometimes my spirit would swoon

away at the vision of that book which I felt ought to be written, a book of love and sorrow, burning yet fruitful, inexorable and pitiful, which, for the first time, should hold up before the whole world the modern heart of a woman, and, for the first time, make the soul of man—of her sad fellow—palpitate with longing and remorse. A book which should transmit all the ideas surging chaotically in me for the past two years, and which should bear the imprint of passion. Would no one ever write it? Was there not a woman in the whole world who had suffered as I had suffered, who had received from all things, animate and inanimate, the warnings that I had received, and who should be able to extract therefrom the pure essence, the masterpiece, which would be equivalent to a life?

XIV

A TURN IN THE ROAD

ONE afternoon I saw my husband unexpectedly enter the house, his face wearing the ugly expression he always had when his primal passions broke loose. He had quarrelled with my father and had left the office declaring that he would never return.

The memory of something I had seen in the long distant past rose up in my mind: it was the picture of my father on the day when he had thrown up his position at Milan. How calm he had been, almost gay, at finding himself confronted by a future, unknown but free!

I felt the same calm, the same light-heartedness steal over me now, while my husband could not hide his mortification, not at having displeased his wife's father, the man to whom he owed everything, but—at having spoiled his own prospects!

The thing was irreparable. My father, cer-

tainly, would never forgive him. Of late the latter's apparent indifference to his children seemed to have grown into a positive dislike which kept on becoming more bitter, more determined to find something to vent itself upon. Perhaps this was due to the influence of the woman with whom he now passed all the time he could spare from the factory. Perhaps he thought that we considered ourselves defrauded of the money which he spent so lavishly on this woman and on her family. As a fact, I still hesitated to judge him feeling that he, for his part, must be unhappy at having estranged forever the hearts of his own children; that he was still too close to that past of intellectual ideals and of paternal tenderness not to feel an involuntary sense of home-sickness when he remembered it. Two or three times, in his garden, he showed that he knew about my article and had heard it discussed, by beginning to argue on the subject as he walked about from one flower to another. Instantly there would rise up before me a memory of my childhood's years, and of those lessons, so full of suggestion, he had been wont to give among the flowers and

plants. Now he would screw up his eyes with their keen metallic gleams and look at me as much as to ask if I did not think after all, that there was something superior in him to everything else I had met with; and an agonising sense of uneasiness, an indefinable dread would seize hold upon me. What a mysterious, inscrutable warning was the life of that man!

When my husband found that he was not recalled either immediately after his resignation or later on, a wave of despair swept over him. Evidently he had never contemplated such a possibility.

Had I come to a turn in the road?

The question of support did not trouble me. I had been accustomed from childhood to believe that any one who will can always make a living and that no work is derogatory. But the idea of leaving the neighbourhood was very slow to penetrate my husband's mind. He had no diplomas, hardly any money, and was no longer young; in spite of the high estimation in which he had always held himself he was frightened.

And all the time I felt that my emancipation

from those surroundings was now inevitable. There would be an end, at last, to my forced acquiescence in the grinding-down of the workmen practised by my father and justified by my husband, for which I had long reproached myself. Now, it seemed to me, I would recover my self-respect, breathe more freely, especially as regarded my son. Far away! Then he would forget this place which had been so disastrous for his mother, where the effect of her teaching was constantly being neutralised by the force of bad examples.

I allowed my feeling of exultation to appear one day in conversation with my friend, the doctor. He looked at me for a moment and said nothing, and his silence sent a twinge of compunction through my heart.

He seemed tired and nervous. There had been an outbreak of typhoid fever in the neighbourhood, and his back had grown a little bent as he went about from one wretched cottage to another, from morning to night. That voice, with its chronic note of sadness, must have carried hope to many a poor, sick creature; must have mitigated the terrors of the dying and of others

who feared that they might die. He seldom came to see me now.

For some weeks longer we continued in a state of uncertainty. To my husband, the idea of seeking employment in some city seemed humiliating. There was still the allowance made me by my father, but my accountant's work, paid by the month, had ceased at the time my husband left the factory. How, thenceforward, could I best employ my energies to add to the family income?

One morning I yielded to a sudden impulse. My boy had brought me the mail, and, selecting a certain package, had handed it to me first, with the air of a little man well informed as to my preferences.

It was, in fact, a Milanese review which I especially liked. The editor, an old fighter in the cause of liberty, had generously "launched" more than one youthful genius, and every now and then he would affectionately urge me to turn my attention to something less ephemeral than the short articles which, however, he was always willing to publish.

I decided that I would write to him and explain the situation.

In a few days I got his answer. There was nothing to be done at Milan but he had immediately written about me to a publisher at Rome, who had lately started a feminist periodical. Accordingly, I very soon got another letter from the same novelist who had applied to me months before. She expressed herself as being much annoyed that I had never received her first letter, as she had then had it in her power to offer me an editorship which was now filled; at the same time she could still give me some secondary work which would bring in a small salary. I would have to live at Rome but would not be tied down to office hours. The same post brought several numbers of *Mulier* [Woman].

The new review was attractive in appearance though with a suggestion of frivolousness that disturbed me. The announcement contained some excellent passages. "Let us allow woman, at last, to speak for herself. Men pronounce panegyrics or lay down the law for her. Some of them, men, too, of high intelligence, profound thinkers, bear woman an involuntary grudge,

because, all unintelligent as she still is, she does not run after them and admire them as she used to do. Others imagine that they know all about woman from having had much experience and made many victims.

“These last have never taken the trouble really to know even a single one: what they do know is how to enslave their senses, how to extract from them the utmost gratification for themselves—nothing more.

“As a fact *woman* is a thing that exists only in the male imagination: there are *women*, and that is all there is about it.”

The article was unsigned, but there could be no doubt that it was from the pen of the eminent novelist herself, who, although she had not yet created any really individual type of woman, possessed the ability, without doubt, to reproduce some of the various women who, to-day, are beginning to stand out from among the general mass. In conclusion she said: “We do not promise much more than what you have always had; do not expect too much of us. You will not find the woman’s ideal complete in every detail in this magazine, any more than you will find it in life.

We only hope to help to draw it forth from the nebulae of Utopia, and to place it before the world of to-day."

And very little of this ideal was, in truth, to be found in the columns of the review. There was an article on art, the profile of an actress, taken in a number of poses, portraits of duchesses in low-cut gowns, comments on current events, notices of charity-entertainments, a contribution on hygiene, and so forth. An article with a foreign heading, contained the only discussion of feminism in the entire magazine.

I told my husband of the offer without betraying any enthusiasm. He looked carefully over the numbers which had been sent, and then remained long in doubt. It was not so much the character of the magazine that he feared, that appeared to be mild enough; but he thought we might count for too little amid such stirring surroundings: the circumstance that I could do my work at home—remain isolated, seemed, however, to weigh with him. The decision had to be made at once. But what was he to do with himself at Rome? Then he hit upon an idea which seemed to promise a solution. Going to a

number of the neighbouring proprietors, he suggested that he should open an agency at Rome for the sale of their products both there and abroad. Many of them agreed; only a small amount of capital was needed, a few thousand francs to begin with, and these his mother tearfully promised to advance.

The very day before the question was decided, the doctor took to his bed. We knew that he had been terribly overworked and supposed it was merely a temporary breakdown which might, even, be beneficial in the end, and so no one felt especially anxious, though I greatly regretted being deprived of his advice at so important a crisis in my affairs; and I thought how, with the exception of my two sisters, he was the only person I would feel any regret at leaving behind should we decide to go.

One week later he was dead.

Typhus-meningitis had developed, sudden and violent, and had easily overpowered the man who, constitutionally delicate, had, it appeared, been brooding for some time upon death. Within twenty-four hours after he was taken he became delirious, and his body was thus left for the few

remaining days to fight alone against the inroads of the disease. No one could credit the news. The death agony lasted a day and a night; his mother, summoned when the case was seen to be hopeless, was at his bedside; a woman in the seventies whose silvery locks lent her a venerable air though about her lips there hovered a smile of childlike innocence. She was a person of exceptionally strong character; she had already been present at the deathbed of a soldier-son just twenty years old; she took entire care of her husband, threatened with cardiac paralysis, and administered the complicated business affairs of a family scattered over the whole face of the globe. She represented the ideal of active, simple self-sacrifice; utterly indifferent to criticism, content in her firm belief in a hereafter. I can see her now as I did on that last night of my poor friend's life; with one hand wiping the moisture from the handsome, livid brow, with the other now and again forcing a few drops of cordial between the lips already growing rigid, the living picture of a saint! So simple and natural was that act that it seemed almost impossible, even to us, that the miracle should not come to pass.

When the priest came to administer extreme unction the death rattle had already begun. I wanted to be present out of respect for the dying man, but I changed my mind after a few minutes. My whole being rebelled against that senseless rite which the, already departed, spirit had disowned in life. I withdrew to the adjoining room where my husband, the doctors, and a few friends were assembled. The low voices of the women, coming to us in a subdued chorus, as they accompanied the priest's monotone, seemed to me like a liberty they were taking. I begged my husband to take me home, away from the place where, so far as I was concerned, nothing of my friend now remained.

At dawn they came to tell us that he was dead. My husband got up immediately and went out. I wanted to cry but I could not. The mystery, that terrible, august mystery, of *the end*, overpowered me. It was not for an hour, longer perhaps, that I was able to conquer the humbled feeling it gave me. Then came the thought of the loss I had sustained and self-pity and the realisation that I would never again hear that

firm and gentle voice, overcame me, and I broke into forlorn weeping.

Amid my tears I thought of how, throughout the entire period of my marriage—six years—he had ever been at my side. Both of us so different from our surroundings, so alone! For one moment his spirit had come very close to mine. I had felt it. Might I have loved him? How was it that nothing had thrown us into one another's arms, nothing had united our two natures, in reality, perhaps, never far apart. Was it merely a word, an impulse that was wanting?

Fate! He had departed fancying, possibly, that he carried his secret with him. I was left, more alone than ever, and bound—whither? By what lofty ideal safe-guarded from hate and—from love?

I don't remember much about our last days in the place. I cannot recall even a single particular.

I can see my boy bursting into tears when I told him to say good-bye to the room in which he was born, already bare and dismantled. I have, too, an impression of the lump that rose in my

own throat when, on going to my parents' house to say farewell, and to try to extract some expression of kindness from my father, he, after a few curt words, broke suddenly off with a shrug of his shoulders. I see, as³ through a mist, another poignant scene, my sister-in-law hurling invectives at my startled sisters, who had come to my house on the last day to bid me good-bye; and my mother-in-law crying continuously

A last visit to my mother, a final attempt to awaken some memory of the past, the torture of looking into those eyes devoid of all expression, of hearing again that harsh little laugh.

The sea, the country-side, the high-roads, all wore, in those closing days of September, a subdued air of weariness, a look that best expressed their spirit. After eleven years, from the time when I had beheld them first, I was leaving them, turning my face to the unknown. Eleven tragic years in the course of which my spirit had been fashioned in tears, tears of rebellion, tears of submission, yes, and tears of gratitude, too—gratitude to the invincible mystery. Now I was

turning away without one backward glance, almost fleeing from them, almost dreading to hear a burst of ironical laughter issue from their shades, a warning not to be too sure of my release.

XV

AVE ROMA!

THE clouds were sweeping across a glorious sky: ever-shifting, continuous, floating in sunlight. Fountains and squares, stone houses and cupolas, the river, groves of pine-trees outlined against the horizon, desert stretches of the campagna, and the distant mountains all seemed to be following in the slow wake of the clouds, all, like them, to be suffused in that marvellous light; all, like them, to be fluid and eternal.

I, too, had travelled in the slow procession beneath that sky which I was now gazing at, and, in that journey of my youth, I had felt my soul dilate at the sight of the infinite blue. Was I not just the same still? Was not youth beginning now? Rome gives herself to every soul who longs for her with his whole heart, and she bestows just as much as is honestly and fervently demanded of her. Perhaps the day was not far distant when I would be able to comprehend

the unique city in a single look, to feel it in the beating of my own heart. Meanwhile what transport, what bliss, to be able to sit with my boy and watch those long, flaming sunsets from the terrace of our lodgings, with the river and Monte Mario lying before us; after the long hours spent in the silence of my lofty little study!

It seems impossible to describe those early months of my life at Rome; just as I could not describe my childhood. All the rapid succession of impressions, the pulsing life constantly stimulated from without, the glow of imagination, the echoes of new sounds—I cannot revive any of it.

City of exaltation, city of peace!

Leaving the beauties and wonders of the sacred sites to be visited gradually, I eagerly explored the modern quarters, inhaling once more that breath of energy, of human activity, which had so impressed my childhood. But every now and again, repentant, I would find myself taking refuge from the din and confusion of the feverish, modern life with some painted representation of the silence and dreams of a far-gone time which never existed, perhaps, save in legend.

There were other suggestions, too, closer at

hand, more familiar to my imagination; and now and then came a swift impression of the presence of great minds, not yet extinct, not yet far distant from the world upon which they had set so strong a stamp. If I happened to be alone or had only the boy with me, and no outside influences came to disturb me, the strength of my emotions would sometimes cause a sob to rise in my throat. The future faded away in the distance, the present became even more difficult to understand; and my own small personality, with the little child at my side, almost drifted out of the ken of my consciousness. Then, presently, I began to hear the reverberation of yet another message which the city had for me. Around those nuclei of stone, representing splendid memories, or the mediocre present, I knew that there were girdles of misery, agglomerations of beings whose existence society feigned to ignore; yet among whom, perhaps, the secret of To-morrow was already fermenting.

Who had talked to me of this so soon? Oh, was it not you, you who were a mother, not to me only, but to all who needed you on your journey through life! The first time you took

me in your arms it was in your retreat on the Janiculum. The walls were covered with portraits of persons famous, and unknown, of great men and little children. There was a big desk covered with papers and—you, a somewhat worn and bent figure having some faint suggestion of my own mother in the expression of your features. You called me "daughter" from the very first, and, taking my child on your knee, you gazed for a long time at us both with an absent look in your eyes, as though trying to extract the secret of that fusion of us two which made it seem as though the little creature were still a very part of my body. What did you divine? Never, never, have I known silence to be so pregnant with rapid intuitions. Then you began to talk, to tell me of some of the work inaugurated in the course of all those years by your unconquerable sense of justice, and it seemed to me as though your spirit had appointed a tacit rendezvous with mine.

Then, then, the grist-mill of work held me close. The offices of *Mulier* were close to the Piazza di Spagna. I went there two or three times a week but, in accordance with the arrange-

ment, I was able to do my work at home. This consisted of book-reviewing and translating, and making summaries of articles in foreign periodicals. I had been cordially received by the lady-editor who had expressed great surprise on seeing how young I was. I wrote on such serious subjects "with that air of a little Madonna!"

I saw immediately that, while the editor's name was among the review's most valuable assets, most of the actual work was done by the manager, a little, florid man, extremely energetic. The famous novelist, who was barely past forty and still very attractive in appearance, divided her time among her writings, her family, and her salon. Her reputation had been won some fifteen years before and she was now at that critical point in her career when she saw younger writers coming to the front and dreaded lest she might come to be forgotten. It may have been this that decided her not to neglect the fresh opportunity to attract the attention of the public which the new review offered. A column or two of observations, extremely pleasing in style and substance, constituted the chief value of her contributions which were at once too copious

and too little thought out. Lately she, also, had taken up with some of the new ideas, but not very enthusiastically, and, as she had not the zeal of a true disciple, it did not trouble her especially to see her review becoming distinctly a commercial enterprise. Behind her indifference the manager's energy seemed to me to symbolise a whole group of interests full of menace for woman's new aspirations.

That little bourgeois, almost poverty-stricken in appearance, in his worn clothing, always shut into his dusty cubby-hole alongside of the editor's study, represented that mercantile element which grows rich on female vanity and triviality, always insinuating its appeal into the creations of woman artists, the perorations of female emancipators, the exhortations of the comforters, the social mothers.

The model of the new review for women had, like their hats, been imported from France. The editor's good taste and the manager's shrewdness had, however, combined to give a sort of homogeneity to the widely different subjects dealt with in its columns; thus it was possible to extend the circulation among all sorts and

conditions of persons, and if, to a serious-minded woman of real culture, it had nothing to offer beyond a half-hour's diversion, her amiable and idle sisters might, amid their various other distractions, have a vague idea presented to their minds of another and more serious existence running parallel with their own, or, even, a dim, disquieting suspicion of the fermentation of an entire, new world.

All of which was very far removed, however, from the programme sketched out by the editor in a moment of enthusiasm.

For the first few days I experienced a feeling of humiliation, and it was only the fear of provoking my husband's derision that enabled me to take hold of my work—rather responsible for such a beginner—with anything like interest. He could not forgive me for having persuaded him to plunge into the turmoil of city life, and set about his own enterprise without energy or enthusiasm. He had been accustomed for so many years to do the routine work of a subordinate that the new sense of freedom and responsibility weighed him down. He seemed unable to map out any daily plan of work for himself and watched

me sulkily, promising himself, no doubt, to make me feel the weight of his authority at the very first sign of independence.

The chief advantage I got from my new occupation lay in the large number of publications from all parts of the world which were sent to the office and which I was at liberty to take home with me to read. In addition to this was the opportunity I now had to study, in these strange surroundings, some characteristic types of women. There was a lady-doctor of medicine who contributed articles to the paper on hygiene, among which the manager would contrive to introduce advertisements of perfumers, corset-makers, and beauty-doctors. A tall, fair Norwegian, with a little nose held high in air, and serene blue eyes, illustrated the stories and wrote imaginative tales for children. To another young woman the circumstances of whose family were such as to make it impossible for her to make capital in any other way out of her nobility and "distinction," was confided the society news.

In the editor's drawing-room which my husband allowed me sometimes to frequent on condition of my forming no intimacies, one met with

personalities of every shade of interest. From a quiet corner, myself unobserved, I was able to gain a knowledge of things and people quite unattainable from books.

A few days after beginning my work I visited the printing house and saw them setting up the pages of the review; the manager, wearing the accustomed conciliatory smile on his thick lips, acting as my guide. One of the compositors happened to have before him an article of mine; a few additional words were needed to fill out the page and there, amid the din of the machinery, as I saw him translate immediately, into printed characters, the words still damp from my pen, my heart beat against my breast, a mist came over my eyes.

Had they, indeed, come back, those days of honest fatigue, when I had worked, gay and intrepid, among my father's operatives? Had the other been all a dream, that long interval, the months spent down there, immured in a close, suffocating room, alone with the little child, my soul like to burst with its own tragic thoughts?

The Roman autumn was shedding its glories

upon all around me. I continued my wanderings, drinking in the mysterious charm of the spectacle which was being unfolded before my eyes like a succession of symbols. Sometimes fleeting figures, like so many phantoms, passed swiftly by, close beside me, and, for a moment, strange, searching faces would look into mine; scientists, perhaps, or possibly foreigners in whose souls the soil of Italy had kindled some vital spark; or dwellers in Utopia, whose country was the future. I was still a romanticist and I did not regret it; the past held such a sum of vicissitudes, whose traces I could see all about me, that it was not hard to believe that the future might still contain the happiest possibilities for the human race.

I see myself now, on an afternoon of late November, seated in my little study, with the sun pouring in so that I have to hold up my hand as a screen. Before me is seated a pale, emaciated man, with great, glowing black eyes. The face is handsome, at once calm and rugged; the lower part full of force and determination, the high forehead expressive of serene confidence. Every now and then he interrupts himself in what he is saying to stoop down to where the boy lies

stretched out on the carpet at our feet, running a white, delicate hand through the child's curls. At my elbow I am conscious of my husband, distractedly turning the pages of a book so as to give himself an air of being occupied.

The visitor had been introduced to me a few days before at the house of my old friend. He was the author of several monographs which had attracted considerable attention, and his suggestive pseudonym was already familiar to me. I knew that it concealed the name of a high functionary who had been dismissed from office for daring freely to speak the truth; bitterly poor, he was now engaged upon an exhaustive philosophical work. His frank, sympathetic smile had completely won me, so much so, that I had had the hardihood to ask him to come to see us in spite of my husband's manifest indifference.

He told me innumerable things in his warm, eager voice to which the southern intonation lent a touch of softness. He talked without emphasis—as though some inward voice were dictating to him—about women, the laws, morals, expressing many of my own views, but with a vigour and simplicity which I lacked. When it

came, however, to science, to the theories of social reconstruction in vogue at the present time his speech took a note of intense irony, of scorn. He assured me that I ought to count myself fortunate in that my studies had been cut short; demolishing in a few curt sentences the very foundations of the vain and presumptuous researches upon which humanity is now engaged; and then, suddenly rising to his feet, it was as though some wide and wonderful vision were stretched out before the eyes of his soul, visible to him alone. All at once he ceased speaking of mistakes and follies, even of sacrifices; leaning to caress the boy again, he alluded to his own untamed childhood, held out his hand with a rapid movement, as though signing a compact, and departed, taking his secret with him.

My husband did not speak and presently he, too, arose and left the room; the boy, seeing me preoccupied, went quietly on looking at the pictures in a big book. I thought of my father, of the thrills I used to have sometimes as I listened to him in the old days when I was absorbing from him my intellectual life. From then on I had never met any one else who seemed to be

free, individual, who appeared to be able to interpret truths with the authority of a master. I had supposed that the age of seers was over; it was not so then?

For an instant my head swam; then I recovered myself. Was I not prepared to face any revelation? And before turning again to my poor little journalistic work, I stepped out on the terrace and gazed at the blinding disc of the sun, hanging above the cypresses of Monte Mario, and the slanting rays crimsoning the horizon, And I thought that that sunset would live for ever in my memory.

XVI

LIFE'S KALEIDOSCOPE

CHRISTMAS came, with its bushes of red berries on the steps of the Trinità de' Monti, and mangers in the Piazza Navona, all sources of intense delight to my little boy. Then followed the season of theatres and lectures, and February, bringing the first branches of blossoms. Streams of tall, blond young foreigners passed gaily up and down the streets, their arms laden with the white bloom. Sometimes I and the child would carry home, as well, some of those delicate precursors of the Spring. On our walls hung a few photographs: the Sistine Sibyls, the tragic, tender Guidarello resting on his stone pillow; a sketch of the sleeping Furies, given me by the Norwegian artist; then a few likenesses, Leopardi, George Sand, with her bunches of black ringlets, Emerson, Ibsen; the faces of geniuses and of symbolic figures alike seeming to grow animated, to glow with a faint

flush, in the luminous reflection of the flowers. There seemed to radiate from them a sort of restfulness after fatigue, a stimulus to hope. The boy would run out on the terrace to his play; and, as I worked, I would seem to feel all the ideas and impressions gathered in the course of my rambles in the wilds of the Villa Borghese, or along the river dunes, fermenting confusedly in my mind.

Great was the contrast between these thoughts and the half-mechanical work which occupied me. But this gave me no concern. By now my modest ambitions as a writer had faded in the distance; I even found a certain beauty in the humble task of selecting news and collecting facts bearing upon the subjects I had most at heart; and I waxed very indignant over the flood of commonplace publications signed by female names, mere parodies of the works by men then most in vogue, and dictated by a vanity more contemptible even than that of the society dolls whose pictures the manager reproduced in the department headed "Modern Style." How is it that all those "intellectuals" do not see that woman can only justify her intrusion upon the

already overcrowded field of literature and art, by producing works bearing strongly the imprint of her own individuality?

I expressed some such ideas as these to the editor, trembling inwardly by reason of shyness and my customary habit of silence. She looked at me, smilingly, out of her near-sighted eyes; then she sighed and something very like a shadow fell across her face. I was almost sorry I had spoken, fearing that she might imagine that I, a little nobody, her "little Perugina" as she called me, had presumed to criticise her writings as well.

But, that her work did not satisfy her I knew very well; and also that she could not be altogether happy in her private life. Her husband, who was a distinguished jurist, was not the kind of mate she should have had, although he was intelligent and cultivated, with charming taste and all the air of being a model husband and father. He had never interfered in any way with his wife's aspirations; they had a mutual respect for one another, and, on account of their two daughters, continued to live together and to try to make themselves believe that they were


happy. The eldest girl, however, was beginning, perhaps, to suspect something. She was eighteen years old and already gave indications of a strong character. Beneath that beautiful brow, with its delicate tracery of veins, a proud determination was maturing to conform her life to her ideals. She represented the future. In her presence I realised for the first time that there were creatures younger than myself who might inherit some spark from me and transmit it to a future generation.

But, would any gleam of the fire that burned within me ever make itself felt without?

I fancied that I could sometimes read the same question in the eyes of the dear old mother to the poor, when, seated on a stool at her feet, in her quiet study, I would listen while she told me of her wonderful life. If the editor's daughter represented to me the hope of to-morrow, the possible birth of a new, conscious, dignified, womanhood, this elderly woman with her noble brow beneath the snow-white hair, was, indeed, the very personification of the genus of woman manifested from time to time throughout the centuries in some rare individuality stronger than

any bond of law or custom. A fervent follower of Mazzini in her early youth, she had quickly transferred all her revolutionary enthusiasm to the social field. Her temperament impelled her to direct action rather than to propaganda. For thirty years, ever since she had come to the capital from Lombardy, and had united herself in a free union to a sculptor of note, her work among the unfortunate had been incessant and incalculable. Her patience in the pursuit of partial reforms, the betterment of charitable institutions, the getting aid from the public revenues, her persistence in knocking at the doors of the rich so as to collect their meagre alms, contrasted oddly with her belief in the necessity for some ultimate upheaval, by fire and sword, when the oppressed masses would rise up and overthrow the conditions forced upon them by the upper classes. Had she ever allowed this terrible idea to appear in the talks she gave to the young working men at the People's School she had founded? Her rich nature combined a practical love of human life with an indignant, theoretical revolt against all the worm-eaten ordinances; and no one felt as strongly as she

the tragic beauty of this present age, with its feeble social experiments, its presentiments of scientific discoveries which will revolutionise everything, its reaching after new, superhuman ideals. In the course of all these years passed in the cosmopolitan and artistic atmosphere of her partner's studio, and amid that populace whom she made her study, she had met great poets and ex-galley-slaves, unfortunate women and women who were depraved, statesmen and street vagabonds. And even now there appeared in her small study women and men of the most various nationalities; humanity itself, diverse, yet united, seemed to defile before her. Sometimes I would hear them talking of other peoples still, of remote multitudes whose conception of the universe and of life is incomprehensible to us. The thought of our civilisation, travelling over so small a portion of the globe, came to me with amazement. Rome, yes, she is the ideal centre, the common country of the privileged races. They all go their ways, these pilgrims who have so many, many aims in common, and who can not contemplate a united work which shall be irradiated by the heart of the world, Rome!



Alternations of enthusiasm and discouragement. The first time I went with my old friend to visit some of the houses in the San Lorenzo quarter, I felt suddenly leap up in my blood, as well, the obscure instinct of destruction. Out in the street the sky was brilliant, and in the distance the travertine hills stood out like a land of peace. Then you entered a doorway and instantly the sun was forgotten; mounting the steps, dark, and reeking with moisture, you came to landings from either side of which stretched long, black passage-ways; unkempt women appeared in soiled, loose garments, open at the breast, and with a hostile expression on their faces. Out of what depths of horror did these fearful apparitions come? And the hoarse, not even imploring, voices, giving their chronicle of illnesses and births, of loss of work, of injuries, all with the same indifference. Down, from the upper stories, ran some children, still fair, still rosy, their little mouths still arching in a merry smile. They disappeared, and, from the half-open doors, issued intolerable smells, and from the entire building, from cellar to garret, cries, groans, upbraidings.

Oh, that land of peace, still visible on the horizon when we came out at last on the street! If one might only take refuge there amid the greenness and running water, and forget that human beings, just the same as I, and my son, and that sainted creature who was my guide, lived wrapped in rags, gasping for breath, shaking with cold, and ignorant even of what it was, what iron hand kept them shut up in those dens!

Duty lay there, in that seething mass, in the spectacle of that terrifying reality. There should be dragged all who live in the enjoyment of light, pure air, objects of beauty either simple or costly, necessary or superfluous; all those who smilingly wander about amid palaces and fountains, who crowd to the theatres or rush to see the arrival of a prince or the unveiling of some useless monument. Drag them thither, and—when they can still forget—let the hour of doom sound!

One single person seemed to me to be superior to this duty; he held my attention appearing to keep his soul suspended, as it were, high above every vision of either good or evil. This was the mysterious personage who appeared to be

in the possession of some great secret of human life, the "prophet," as the editor of *Mulier* smilingly named him. My husband had made an exception in his favour and allowed me to receive him; reassured, no doubt, by his reputation for asceticism. His visits, however, were few and short. Sometimes we would meet on the street—we both lived in the Flaminio quarter—and he would turn and walk a little way with me. The child would slip a hand in his of its own accord. What attraction had my son and I for this strange, solitary—ill, perhaps—being? It was simply that he sometimes felt the need, without knowing it, to talk, to allow some glimpses to be seen of that world through which he moved entirely alone. And he found that I was willing to listen. But I did not catch so much as a glimpse: all that I actually knew was that the work upon which he was engaged contained a message of vital import for mankind.

The first time, I asked myself, in terror, whether he were a mystic or a mad-man. Gradually the feeling of alarm disappeared. I, who had never dared to let myself take up psychical studies, realising at the same time that this was

a species of intellectual cowardice, now found myself almost accepting the hypothesis that this man might reveal something to me in which, for some occult reason, I would believe.

He talked to me of the unknown, of the efforts put forth by humanity to prove the existence of a superhuman origin and destiny. I was fascinated, and almost blushed to think of the ease with which I, for my own part, had solved the religious enigma in the most serious moment of my life. This man represented to me possibilities of spiritual suffering which, I was bound to confess, I did not possess. Fruitless sufferings, perhaps; but, does not the utmost nobility of which the human being is capable lie in those agonised efforts to rise above itself?

And a humble feeling, at once maternal and filial, something altogether new in my experience, sprang up in my heart for him. The ascetic life he led, and the singular force of character which enabled him to hold himself aloof from all confidential self-abandonment attracted me strongly, as did also his appearance, so frail and yet so proud. Was he aware of this? I did not ask myself; and, at all events, there was no suggestion

of warmth in my manner, even my husband made no comment on our relations.

He talked very little about himself as though unwilling that any should know of his life of privation, his stoical renunciation of every indulgence. It seemed as though every pleasure which fate might now and then bring to his door—children's smiles, the devotion of women, the comfort of the sunshine—he accepted as something addressed to an unimportant side of his nature, a side still capable of taking pleasure in such things, yet powerless to influence either his spirit or his will.

He must have suffered terribly in the past. Perhaps he had found a remedy in self-analysis, self-observation; and he must have convinced himself that man suffers by reason of small, negligible things; privations both material and sentimental; lack of bread, of bodily comforts, of care and affection; from things such as these does man suffer. But the great man is he who inures himself to do without them, who learns to live alone, to attend to his own needs, to sever himself from the rest of the world, from life. . . .

And to such a condition did he mean to lead

us all? It was not conceivable. Yet, what, then, was the meaning of that mysterious exhortation to me, to wait, which he renewed from time to time?

I was talking about him to the dear old mother one day. She had known him for some time and had a special feeling of tenderness for him. I asked if she had ever taken him with her to visit some terrible scene of want.

Yes; and he had seen others, moreover, in different parts of the world, at London,—New York.

“You see, my daughter, he tells himself all the time that every attempt at social reform is useless without the aid of the new faith which he proposes to give mankind. He is in search of the absolute, and nothing could be more useless—harmful, even—than the absolute when we know that everything changes, and that we must die. He is looking, no doubt, for some fresh proof of the immortality of the soul, since the old ones are of no more use. But mankind has believed in this immortality up to the present time without growing any better. . . .”

A shadow came into her eyes:

"No one could long more than I do for the consolation of knowing that, after death, I shall see him whom I have loved best! I hoped for so many years that fate would not make me outlive my companion. It has been otherwise. . . . But the sweetness of our union enfolds me still in memory. I am resigned to journey over this last stage of the road alone. . . . I have had my share of good things. My dear, what is needed is for man to love life in proportion as he is able to be good *to everyone, maternal for every one*: and it is not by gazing beyond the tomb that this end can be attained."

I thought of all the times when I had felt this man to be detached, removed from the world. He had not, even, any disciples; not one among all the young men who filled the columns of the leading reviews, and invoked "the expectation" in verse, ever had the idea to question him, to probe his secret.

My old friend presently recovered her calm.

"He is really a *unique example*, and I sometimes take a sort of æsthetic satisfaction in the fact of knowing him; I am ashamed of this, though, at bottom, for I feel a great compassion for him.

. . . And you child, have you, too, fallen a little under his spell? Women are never indifferent to manifestations of mysticism. If I could give you an example of how I feel about it, it is like this: I believe in the unknown, I even have the windows of my mind open in that direction; but I can't stand all day looking out of the window; there is too much to be done about the house!"

She smiled with a light irony behind which there lurked a passion of tenderness. How delicately she unveiled the souls of men! Would I some day be able to open my own to her, freely? Slowly, slowly, I felt a profound sadness steal over me. To this noble being life was love: and if love is everything in life, then I, as yet, knew nothing of life.

We were at the end of February; influenza was epidemic, and my son fell ill, at first only slightly, but soon the symptoms became alarming. The little creature had never been sick before, and I grew quite beside myself during those horrible days, never to be forgotten, yet, whose memory is indistinct. One night I do recall, clearly. There had been convulsions, followed by delirium and

violent spasms; the dear little face, which so short a time before, had borne the smiling imprint of its five years, becoming unrecognisable, terrifying. There arose in my mind and in those of the other watchers, a sinister suggestion—meningitis! The word rang in my head, filled my brain. We were waiting for the doctor. With only a cape thrown about me, shaking with cold, in the biting night air, and with fever, which for three days past had been mounting in my veins as well, I hung over the child who would push me away or look dully at me without recognising me; I would throw myself in an arm-chair by the bed, then get up. . . . For an hour, two perhaps, believing the child to be doomed, I wrapped myself in a single thought; the tears which, at sight of the child's suffering, had overflowed instinctively, dried upon my cheek. I said to myself: "Am I going to be able to find some means of dying at once, or shall I have to pretend in order to elude their vigilance?" Nothing in life could make any claim upon me when once life had closed for him; for my son, for whose sake alone I had resigned myself to re-open my eyes on that other, tragic night. . . .

The convulsions were got under control; but for nearly forty hours not a single conscious or intelligent word had issued from the little, rosy mouth now so drawn and set; the eyes, larger than ever, seemed to be asking what had happened, and to be uneasy at not understanding. I do not recall all the heartrending phases of the illness but I can feel again the acute suffering of that sight. My own fever was so high that I did not know what was going on within me, and agonising impressions followed one another and grew confused. I remember, though, the awakening. A moment of heavenly joy, when a smile flitted over the poor little mouth—irradiated the white face, and a feeble voice, strange yet familiar, answered when the doctor asked him his name. Oh, that name, my son's name, which from that moment became for me the name of life!

The illness pursued its regular course; the little one was docile, almost concerned, himself, in the business of getting well; there was no need to struggle with him in order to carry out the doctor's orders. When he was most comfortable, in the intervals of fever, he would say to me:

“What was the matter with me, Mamma, the

other night? Everything looked red . . . you were not there, you were not there. . . ." And a little hand would creep up and smooth my face. The violet lights of the March afternoon filtered into the room; outside, beyond the terrace, the sky was flooded with gold-tinted clouds. Then the shadows would fall, and the long hours of the night would slowly succeed one another. I was alone, watching till the dawn.

Sometimes the dim outline of my husband's figure would emerge from the darkness, as I sat, my gaze riveted upon the vague, sweet lines of the little head, resting sideways on the pillow. During the acute stages of our son's illness I had seen him honestly distressed. It had not thrilled me for a single instant; sealed up, as I was, within the tragic circle of my own maternal feelings. Like two strangers, drawn together for an instant by misfortune, our figures, erect on either side of the little bed, we had not even for a moment by word or gesture, turned the one towards the other.

The beloved life was saved, directed once more towards the future. I could think of it now with calm, with the same fortitude with which I had

contemplated his possible end. It was the best part of me which thus rested and revived: the original, innocent, strong side of my nature, able to repel every insidious attack, even as it had lately repelled death. But that other side, that creature alert, racked with memories and presentiments, weak, vacillating, haunted by melancholy experience? She was alive as never before, scrutinising fruitlessly the shadows round about her; afraid, for perhaps the first time with such absolute sincerity, of herself, of her destiny.

Why had I turned so naturally to the idea of dying when my son was in danger? Had I, then, no existence independent of his? Beside the duty of rearing, the joy of helping him, had I no other duties just as imperative?

Nearly three years had elapsed since my attempt at suicide. Throughout the continuous ascent I had tried by my pen and by the force of example to persuade myself, in persuading others, that life must be lived for some wider aim than one's individual happiness, and that every sacrifice becomes possible, easy even, when once we have come to feel the necessity for the tie of brotherhood. How often had I

felt myself uplifted while contemplating this picture, a mixture of asceticism and paganism, a glorification both of action and of contemplation. Without the allurements of pious faith I had yet felt unsuspected forces growing up within me, capable of drowning the voice of the senses and of the heart.

Delusions! Lies! I, who had preached of the strength to live, I, had felt this strength die out in me, as if by enchantment, merely at the sound of a feeble, childish treble. My ideal of inward perfectionment had crumbled to dust confronted by the fact: one single thing, now just as three years before, was really *alive* in me, alive and portentous—the bonds of motherhood.

XVII

THE IRONY OF FORTUNE

THE little one's convalescence was long; at the beginning of April we went, just we two by ourselves, to spend a few days at Nemi, and in the vernal freshness of the woods, the beloved little creature regained, at last, all his vivacity. How ineffably sweet was our solitude beside the still, cerulean basin of the lake! Since his illness my boy's eyes seemed to have become deeper, more thoughtful; his smile to have grown more tender, more thrilling. He had now left infancy and had entered into childhood; henceforward impressions would begin to be stamped upon his brain. The consciousness of my mission was clear enough now, would it be enough to carry me on?

I went back to my work. All my colleagues had been extremely kind and sympathetic; while the manager, as well as the editor, had

shown the utmost indulgence for my prolonged absence.

I used greatly to enjoy the rapid daily walk, in all kinds of weather, between my home and the office of the paper, feeling that I was just like any other working woman, and battling, sometimes with the tramontana, sometimes with the sirocco. I would get there a little flushed by the exercise, sit down, and begin cutting the pages of the new books and reviews. It was in the nature of a brief reconnaissance in the country of culture, where, for me, there were always unexplored regions, changes of scene, unexpected revelations. I would make notes of what it would be necessary to read, the things which must be gone into thoroughly and those for which a superficial glance would suffice; and, this done, I wanted to gather it all up and carry it back to the house with me, to be alone with my ever-fresh treasures. But the manager would appear out of his den; he, too, had been busy cutting leaves and he would call my attention to the most insipid "varieties," indicate interviews, paragraphs of literary gossip, anecdotes relating to the contentions between the Catholic novelists

and the Index, audiences with the Pope, accounts of the intellectual gatherings presided over by the Queen-Dowager; and woe to him who failed to give due prominence to any of these things. We sub-editors used to resort to a variety of devices in order to shift this work off on one another, our chief usually shouldering the most tiresome ones herself. She, indeed, had such a ready pen and so lively an imagination that she could quickly dispose of such tasks; and she always upheld the manager. "You can make anything go just by using a little tact, my dear little Perugina," she would say. "A little tact, and one can sound the praises of the ostrich, the providence of hats, just as well as of Saint Anthony, the protector of marriage!" And in this way, with a jest, she dismissed every question that came up.

Tact she certainly had. The Norwegian artist had made a whole series of drawings of the editor's tact! Dear girl! The first time I visited her little studio on the Parioli she handed me, with a characteristic gesture, that was entirely Northern—a mixture of innocence and shrewdness,—a sheet of paper upon which, to my infinite amazement,

I beheld myself caricatured in a dozen different poses, some flattering, some surprising, and others, again, which cut me to the very quick.

It was like looking into a mirror before which I had never posed and finding reflections of myself taken at moments when I least expected it. I think that then, for the first time, I began to ponder over the gift of satire, that bitter fruit of disillusionment, which I did not, and probably never would, possess, since I could never become completely disillusioned, my ideal being something distant, beyond my own brief span of life.

When my friend brought some of these drawings to our house, where she often came after the illness of the boy, to whom she had become passionately attached, my husband laughed uproariously, and I could not repress a slight feeling of annoyance. Surely, by this time she must know how matters stood between us two.

In order to win my confidence she told me her own story. At the age of sixteen, it seemed, her family had given her in marriage to a pastor.

“Oh, how tiresome it was, little one, how tiresome!”

I came later to understand the real significance

of this favourite expression of hers which she often employed quite inappropriately, as it seemed. When I looked at that mobile, ever smiling mouth—a mouth, however, which expressed every shade of meaning from light-heartedness to tragedy,—contrasting it with the immovably serene blue eyes, and then thought of her five years' experience in the house of her saintly gaoler, it was like a revelation to me of the great art, at once spontaneous and profound, displayed in some of the Norwegian masterpieces.

“He loved me, you understand, we were two servants of God, and he loved me as a fellow-servant. God was always there, in every occupation, at every hour, in every corner of the house! Oh it was so tiresome!”

One day she had told him frankly that she wanted to get away from God. There was a hot discussion; he loved God first and her afterwards; she told him he would have to choose between them.

“The God of Italy is so much more agreeable,” she remarked. “You can serve him without getting so terribly tired, because, at bottom,

you are really not quite sure whether he is paying any attention to you or not. When you want anything you pray, then you make your bow and go about your business."

So she had come off to Italy, all by herself, the country which had lured her from childhood. She had been a governess, first, and then the illustrator for a fashion paper; afterwards the success of her first essays in her own, original art had encouraged her to devote herself entirely to that.

"There were days when a certain lady came to see me," she observed serenely, "Lady Hunger—*Madonna Fama*—She's very ugly, do you know!"

A wave of gaiety always entered the house with her. She made me laugh as I had never laughed since I was a child; and her spirit seemed to revive my own. Even my husband put aside something of his frowning aspect when she was there. At first he had taken exception to her unconsciously winning ways, those of a woman and an artist, who is aware of the charm of her own personality. But later, her playful, feminine wit fascinated him, as did, also, the elegance and

originality of her mode of dressing—long, trailing garments which waved and clung about her person. He not only offered no objection to our growing intimacy, but even went so far as occasionally to accompany us to the play or some other entertainment when he was not too much taken up by the increasing cares of his work. Sometimes he even risked a little chaff which she seemed to enjoy for its exotic flavour, but replied to with such keen raillery that my husband would become greatly excited. Once, indeed, when, with a somewhat malicious laugh, she drew an outrageous caricature of him with a few strokes of her pencil, he abused me for two whole days; until, on her next visit, she mollified him with a pleasant word or two.

The Review celebrated its first anniversary by holding a reception. My friend had prepared a little exhibition in black and white, in which there figured conspicuously a series of delicious sketches of my boy during the period of convalescence, he being, in his own person, an object of general admiration. I had let her order a gown for me for the occasion, a perfectly simple white

tunic, which accentuated my "type," supposed to be fourteenth century.

The editor passed from one group to another, much courted by all the ladies. I now beheld for the first time, and in their festal array, some of the illustrious personages whose praises one of my colleagues had been singing in the society notes of receptions, garden parties, and fox hunts; exceptionally well cared for hot-house plants, these, some a little immature, others full-blown, others, again, sickly. Among them I recognised two women writers, one a poetess who, in exquisite verse, breathed a refined sensuality almost repellent to high-minded persons; the other a Catholic novelist, who excelled in analysing the sins of the passions when crowned by repentance, and in eulogiums on the indissolubility of the marriage tie. These two women, whose temperaments were exactly alike, hated, and smiled upon one another, while their husbands, a couple of militant Roman Princes, the one belonging to the party of the guelfs, the other to the radicals, exchanged icy compliments.

My tall artist friend, wearing a chlamys of an audacious shade of yellow, out of which her fair

head emerged like a spear of golden wheat, and towering almost a head above every one else in the room, leaned over the little ladies as over so many nice little dolls; she seemed to belong to a different type of humanity. There approached her a robust matron, a tragic actress almost seventy years old, just at the moment when a professor, the husband of one of my colleagues, interested in didactic matters, asked me somewhat pedantically:

“Is this the reign of *Mulier*, or of *Fœmina*?”

I could not reply to him in Latin but, pointing to the pair, I said:

“*There* are two women!”

I had met the actress at the house of my old revolutionist: the two had been bound by ties of the closest intimacy for nearly half a century. The heroic figures of the period of national independence constantly loomed large in their conversations. An ardent republican like her great master, Gustavo Modena, the artist now heard the trumpet of fame exhausting itself in sounding the praises of actors who depended more upon their nerves than their brains. She had never paid adulation either to the boxes or the pit, and she still believed that the stage was a mission.

It seemed to me as though, compared with her, all these people surging through the rooms were ephemeral. How few, how isolated were the real women! *Domina*, mistress, the gallant professor had called me. Mistress of herself, woman certainly was not, as yet. Would she ever be?

The Norwegian now came up to me accompanied by a young man as tall as herself, with an attractive, studious face. She introduced him; he was a physiologist who had already made a favourable name for himself. His manner to me was extremely cordial, the artist, I could see, encouraging him. Indeed his liking for me was evidently but a part of the feeling which he had for my friend, and it was not difficult, as I watched them interchange remarks and observations, to see that a mutual understanding linked them together even when they were silent.

My husband, meanwhile, quite out of his element, remained in a corner and did not try to conceal his ill-humour, his brow only clearing when the Norwegian, who was very much sought after, would occasionally cross over and say a few words to him. Thinking it might put him more at his ease to have some one to speak to,

I took the boy over to him, but only to be repulsed:

“Do you want to get rid of him so as to shine more yourself?”

Anger and indignation took possession of me. I pleaded indisposition and we left. Neither on the street nor on getting home did either of us say a word. What was the use? This was not jealousy, it was a deep-seated spite, humiliation, a mania to assert himself, to fling out a defiance, whenever he saw any possibility of my becoming independent. And I did not dare to pause for a moment to consider the irony of my situation! Why was I so terrified lest others might notice these things? It seemed to me as though an inner voice taxed me, not only with cowardice, but with hypocrisy.

The meagre, yet fatiguing work upon which I was engaged did not offer me much consolation for my personal defeats. I began to discover the absence of any nucleus in Italy which should put order and discipline into the attempts and manifestoes of the female agitators for independence.

Unity among the female laity did not, as yet,

exist. On the other hand, Catholicism, which has always imposed the duty of sacrifice upon woman, was now permitting a certain amount of female action, though always under proper direction. Against this new danger no one was preparing to make any resistance. Also, as my old friend pointed out to me, the Free Thinkers of Monte Citorio continued to send their daughters to institutions conducted by nuns, just as those in the country made their wives go to confession.

“Feminism,” she exclaimed, “organisation among the working women, labour legislation, legal emancipation, divorce, the suffrage and a political voice . . . all these, yes, a tremendous undertaking, and yet they are only on the surface. What is needed is to reform men’s conscience and to create one in women.” And the dear old woman, whose energy fought successfully against her unwieldy size, carried me off then and there, to visit some of her new, or renewed, working women.

“Do something, that is the real propaganda!”

Close to a hospital for a certain class of disease, where she was an inspector, she had opened, a short time before, a sort of school for the benefit

of the unfortunate inmates. It was a large, light room where the patients could receive a little elementary instruction, read a few books, hear an occasional word or two which might arouse, down in the depths of their poor, abused bodies, some longing for a renewal, for salvation. One day I went there too; oh, I shall not re-evoke you, unhappy sisters, in these pages! I must first see you again, have you reveal far more to me than was possible on that solitary and now long-distant meeting. It is a vow still binding on me, made at the time when, on returning to my home, I clasped my son to my heart and asked myself in terror, for the first time, if I should have the power safely to guard that flower of life, send him forth free, unharmed, to meet his mate. . . .

Between the two phases of a woman's life, between the virgin and the mother, there is an abnormal being, against nature, created by masculine selfishness, but who takes an unconscious revenge. Herein lies the root of the war between the sexes. The young girl, with her ignorance and her dreams, comes to her husband and finds him melancholy, inert; when she becomes a woman, and experienced, she learns for the first

time how his love has been forestalled by a brutal initiation. Between them, often, there comes an Intruder, the very thought of whom degrades every embrace.

My son! Who would make the sacred revelation to him? Would I ever be able to tell him what one day he must mean to his wife?

In this world that was seething all about us there was so much scepticism, so much vileness. Had I not been present during a session of the Chamber of Deputies when an interpolation on the traffic in women had airily been "liquidated" in five minutes by a minister who declared that Italian legislation was, in this respect, much better than that of other countries, while in the almost empty house, a few honourable gentlemen despatched their messengers or chatted unheedingly among themselves? One clerical deputy lamented lugubriously over the "necessity for this matrimonial safety-valve," and was interrupted by the interpolator, who pronounced marriage a fetish to which human beings were being sacrificed. Two under-secretaries levelled their glasses at the Ladies' Gallery and began pluming

themselves; then the discussion of the budget was taken up.

It seemed to me strange, incomprehensible, that cultivated persons should attach so little importance to the social problem of love. Not that men take no interest in the subject of women, on the contrary, it seems to be nearly, if not quite, their chief preoccupation. Poets and novelists continue to reproduce the everlasting duet—or *terzina*—with sentimental or sensual variations. Not one of them, however, has been able to create a great female character.

This reflection induced me to write an open letter to a young poet who had lately published an eulogium on the female figures in Italian poetry. The article proved to be a happy inspiration for it awoke echoes throughout the entire press, and brought *Mulier* prominently to the fore, to the visible satisfaction of the editor. In it I said that almost all our poets, up to the present day, had sung an ideal woman; that Beatrice was a symbol and Laura a hieroglyph; and that if a woman ever figured at all in the verses of our poets she was sure to be of the kind they could not get; the women whom they did have, who bore

their children, they never so much as alluded to. Why should one go on contemplating in poetry a metaphysical woman and associating in prose with a servant-maid, even if this last be one's lawful wife? Why this unnatural scission of love? Should not the poets be the very first to wish to lead a noble life, complete and coherent in the broad light of day?

Another contradiction, peculiarly Italian, is the almost mystical reverence which our men pay to their mothers, while they have so low an opinion of all other women.

These remarks were alluded to as paradoxical by many of the papers, but some of the letters I got from young men showed me that I had touched a chord that vibrated.

One evening the old actress, from her box at the theatre, saw two tears shining in my eyes. No fiction of art had ever made me cry. On the stage a poor puppet of blood and nerves, taking account to herself of her own inconsistencies, proposed to become a human being by separating herself from her husband and her children, for whom her existence was nothing more than an entertainment, a sort of game. It was twenty

years since that symbolic fable had been put forth by a certain powerful intellect in Norway, and the public, after applauding through three acts, still protested with outspoken vigour at the closing scene. No one, no one was willing to look the simple, shining truth in the face!

"Only give me back a quarter of a century," exclaimed my great artist friend, "and I would *force* them to accept it!"

And I was more persuaded than ever that it rests with woman to vindicate herself; that she alone can reveal her own nature, composed, indeed, of love, maternity, compassion; but also of human dignity.

Summer came, two torrid months which I do not recall very distinctly. All my women friends as well as the "prophet" were away from Rome. My work had increased owing to the absence of the editor who had gone to the mountains in search of fresh air and the plot of a new novel. Nevertheless, I managed to take the boy for a part of every day to the Villa Borghese where, while he with that happy faculty for being amused which belongs to his age, played for hours at a time with

companions whom he picked up on the spot, I read, allowing my eyes to follow, from time to time, the harmonious lines of the great pine-trees.

My husband? I don't know; I don't remember much about him at this time. I have only a wearisome impression of his voice, rather harsh and ever ready to break into fault-finding and complaint, of his sullen brow, where a fresh, perpendicular line had stamped itself, while his chronic irritability had accentuated the lines of the cheek-bones and jaws. An ill-concealed sentiment of hostility was taking root in him. Our relations must have continued to be the same as ever; I don't remember, but I know that he never showed any consideration for me even when I was ill or prostrated with fatigue.

As a fact I was not well. Certain disorders, which had given me trouble ever since the birth of the boy, had increased. My colleague, the lady-doctor, in the course of conversation one day, had said something that terrified me, but I could not summon up the courage to ask her more particularly what she meant; not even when, towards the close of the summer, I became so much worse that I had to stay in bed for over a

week. I got up exhausted, and with a feeling of deadly weariness in all my limbs.

All this while I was getting depressing letters from my sisters. Papa was in a state of acute irritation because the operatives, who were strongly organised, were threatening to strike. At home he found himself in an atmosphere every whit as hostile, and this must greatly have increased his exasperation. Even my brother had taken to frequenting socialist meetings and he and the two girls eagerly drank in the engineer's harangues. There was a strange, suggestive force in this young man. My brother's and sisters' weaker spirits had all fallen under its spell and their dread of papa had decreased proportionately, as they came into contact with this fiery, idealistic nature. For two years, now, the poor young fiancée had had to endure the opposition to her passion. I thought of the proud look in her sweet, dark eyes which told of the enchantment of the dream she was cherishing. Happy? She was that certainly, in spite of the tears which the growing breach between her lover and her father caused her to shed. In the course of the coming winter she would be twenty-one and then she would leave

her father's house and go to that of her husband. It was all arranged, yet she was concerned about the fate of the other child; would our brother be able to make up to her for the loss of all the other affections which, one after the other, she was being deprived of?

Meanwhile the situation at the factory was becoming unmaintainable. Papa set the men at defiance. He threatened to abandon forever the enterprise to which for so many years he had devoted his best powers. He could never submit to be dictated to by a will emanating from his subordinates!

He carried his threat into execution and, at the beginning of autumn, cancelled his contract with the proprietor, giving him one month in which to install a new management. My sister communicated the news to me in an agony of fear lest she might be taken out of the neighbourhood before her marriage.

With a smile that was a little bitter, I said to my husband:

"Perhaps they will send for you now; would you accept?"

I saw him hesitate for a moment, then he

curtly answered: "No," and broke off the conversation.

The next morning a telegram came from my sister-in-law, announcing that the proprietor had settled the differences with the men and that he was going to offer my husband the post of director.

I can hear again the harsh laugh that burst from me on hearing the contents of that sheet of yellow paper. Go away, return down there once more, see my husband in my father's place? Oh, the irony of it!

He remained silent. He was evidently troubled. Watching him, it seemed to me that his face assumed an unwonted expression of dignity, as though the mere fact of being deemed worthy to occupy so important a position had made him feel, instinctively, that he possessed powers hitherto unsuspected. In a moment my gaiety had fled.

The "No," of the preceding evening came back to my mind, and with it a disquieting sense of uncertainty. He noted the silent interrogation of my look and seemed to feel that he must pose, feign indifference. Then my anxiety increased.

The same evening a letter came from my

sister-in-law confirming what she had said in her telegram, and referring to our return as to something already settled. Among other things she said: "Remember, I warned you as long ago as before Easter." So he had been expecting it for, who knows, how long!

Two days later the formal offer arrived. The terms were very fair. It meant assured support; ease in the course of a few months; perhaps, in time, a fortune.

I ought to have rejoiced with whatever pride still remained to me, that he, who had so often aroused compassion on my behalf, would now rise in the estimation of others. Also, I might have had satisfaction in the thought that, after all, it was still to me and to my father that he owed everything; for it was papa who had suggested his name for the position, and he had, moreover, left security for him to the amount of some thousands of francs. Did he do this from a feeling of compunction? Perhaps it was merely in order to establish some link with his successor so that he might not be entirely cut off from all communication with his own creation.

My whole nature rose up as though confronted by some frightful peril, demanding freedom, the right to live. Shutting my eyes and ears to the reasons advanced by others, to the rights of others, the needs of others, a single idea possessed me. So then, the road of the future was being brutally closed to me. I was being led back to the desert, and with me, my son, whom I had hoped to save from the influences of the neighbourhood where he was born. We two back there again, for years, for our whole lives, perhaps; our hands manacled, our mouths silenced; cast into the midst of a population of miserable and inimical working people.

XVIII

SURRENDER

AFTER the negotiations were all concluded my husband became very low-spirited. Had he, possibly, come to his decision hurriedly in order to forestall any attempt at revolt on my part? Not to have to listen to our friends' and acquaintances' expressions of surprise, reproach, perhaps, as well as to escape the spectacle of my misery during the breaking up, he decided to be very magnanimous and to go on ahead by himself, leaving me behind with the servant and the boy for the few weeks which must elapse before my father's departure for Milan would leave the director's house free for us to occupy. He would then return and fetch us.

But when the day came on which he was to start, he did not go out of the house but sat, moody and silent, at the table, writing—I have no idea what—schemes. On the following day he wandered about the city entirely alone, as

though suddenly seized by a violent love of all that whirling life which he was about to leave. In the evening the artist came to see us, just back from the country. The conversation was disjointed, and the question: "But, why are you going?" seemed to recur like the burden of a song. She appeared to be weighed down by an overpowering sense of melancholy; talked of the time when she would again be left almost entirely alone; could not, apparently, bear to think of my being so far away from her. My husband gazed at her like one fascinated.

One night—he had settled to leave on the following day—I woke up to find him sighing, tossing about, muttering one word, indistinctly. I lit the candle; he was feverish. He refused to have anything done for him, hiding himself underneath the covers with a gesture of impatience. After a while when he seemed to have grown quiet, drowsy, perhaps, I went back to bed in the dark. Presently I heard him call out feverishly, in his sleep, my friend's name.

Poor soul, poor soul! Was he struggling, this undeveloped being, struggling with that formidable force which he had never known, never

even acknowledged—love? For how long? Perhaps the truth had been revealed to him only a few days before, when he had decided to leave. Perhaps he did not admit it even yet, imagined that he was feeling badly, was ill. Was this his punishment?

The artist was the first, perhaps, to realise what had happened, and it may have been in the hope that my husband would hear it from me that, after her return from the country, she confided her secret to me. She and the young physiologist whom I had met at the *Mulier* reception were in love with each other; but he had still to persuade his parents, not an easy matter and one requiring time. To seek happiness for himself at the cost of his father's and mother's unhappiness seemed to him selfish.

My husband must have noticed, at last, the closeness with which, in spite of myself, I was watching him, and have been irritated by it; he felt that he must keep up his attitude of superiority. I, for my part, felt that my vanity was wounded. How explain the fact that I had never subjugated this man who for ten years had inhaled my very atmosphere, while it had only needed the silvery

laugh of this perfect stranger to set his whole nature in a turmoil? And an intense longing to *know* took possession of me, to know what the essence of love might be; to know whether he were again the victim of his senses or whether that pretty creature had charmed him by some subtle power which I did not possess. Then a question sounded in my heart, as though from some remote distance: "Am I made to be loved?"

He left, and my friend was more at ease. For several days we were almost continually together, a delightful companionship. We wandered about the streets, through the Villa-gardens, across the fields; the child always between us, unconcerned, happy, almost, at times. She carried her sketch-book under her arm and made rapid studies of the figures of nurse-maids, mothers, children. We passed hours in her studio on the Parioli, which, by now, had no secrets for me. It was a huge, light room, as polished as a mirror, very simply furnished in white wood, with light hangings and two big windows looking out over the campagna up the valley of the Tiber as far as Soratte. Adjoining the studio was a dark little room containing a bed and a chair, nothing more. A

widow who occupied the neighbouring garret with her four children took care of the apartment and cooked one meal a day. The tea, which constituted her supper, the artist prepared herself.

For the first time in my life I was moved, almost unconsciously, to open my heart, to express in words, slowly, carefully, those dreams and visions which, in spite of everything that had happened to me, had always made life seem to be worth living. She listened smilingly. When I alluded to the future, and my eyes would grow troubled, the dear creature would take my hand; this was her only method of imparting courage.

For her, as well, the future was full of uncertainty; she could not see her way to give herself to the man she loved, to hide away with him and live happily careless of the laws of society. Alone, still alone, for how long?

My husband kept writing the most ingenuous letters from down in the country. He said that he found himself out of his element; perhaps, after all, that was no longer the best place for us; he had a most uncontrollable desire to come back! One day I answered him with all the power of human sympathy I could command. I urged

upon him the fact that only by looking the truth squarely in the face together could we ever hope to get the full flavour out of existence such as fate had meant us to enjoy it. Let him confess it, recognise that our lives were diverse, that our union was a chain for him as well!

I trembled as I wrote thus. This, certainly, was questioning the Sibyl.

He replied at once in the insolent tone I had so long been familiar with, denying everything—with the i's dotted—denying and accusing.

I did not take it greatly to heart. The truth possessed me at last. I realised confusedly that I would have soon to act, without knowing yet in what manner. A voice within me repeated incessantly: "You are free, free!"

I saw clearly what was to be my office in the conjugal life ahead of me. The man who had once implored me to live would now, more than ever, regard me solely as a means of gratifying his passions. And, when I considered the only relation existing between us, I felt a growing contempt for myself. No, no!

For two—three—days, I don't remember, the life going on about me did not drag me from my

meditations. I had hardly any work, now, to do for the Review; the manager was looking for some one to take my place, at the same time expressing regret at losing me. "It is so hard to find any one who will read women's books impartially!"

The editor, with her customary courteous, absent-minded air, said she had hoped I might continue to collaborate even down there. Had I ever thought of trying my hand at fiction?

My Norwegian friend was laid up with an attack of rheumatism, not, apparently, very serious. I went to the studio every day and sat with her for a few hours, and every day there came as well her friend the professor. The first time I saw the young man bend over her, I had the sweetest sense of security about their affection for one another. But the dark little room was too close, and, when he had persuaded her to let him carry her bed into the studio, where the light fell upon her, I saw his face cloud over though he still declared it could be but a question of a few days.

In my thoughts I was hastening the day of my husband's return: I meant now to suggest to him a friendly separation. I could live on what I

made, together with the sum still allowed me by my father. The boy could pursue his education with me and go to his father for the vacations.

Why should he not agree? He was at one of those psychological crises which cause us to commit ourselves to actions entirely opposed to our ordinary impulses; everything must appear to him now from an entirely new standpoint.

I was anxious, however, to take no risks in making the attempt. Whose advice could I ask? The dear old mamma was not back yet from Lombardy, and I could think of no one else in whom to confide at that decisive moment. One image there was, however, which had been forcing itself upon me for some time with increasing persistency. Was there not one who declared that he had discovered the truth? From him, surely, I would be able to get guidance.

It was some weeks since I had seen him; I wrote him a note asking him to come to see me about a matter of importance.

The next evening he arrived while I was undressing the boy. He talked for a few moments to his small friend, who gazed at him out of his big, confiding eyes and then went off to bed.

With extraordinary inward tremors I began to speak. He listened impassively; perhaps he already knew. He leaned a little forward towards me in an attitude of encouragement.

Gradually I felt myself gaining confidence; his brief questions served to make my somewhat embarrassed recital more clear and concise. I made no allusion to the more distant past, to the destruction of my youth; I spoke only of my father and mother, of my marriage, of the long period during which, though conscious of my own feelings, I had thought it my duty to stay with the man who I believed loved me, and to whom I thought I might do some good; I alluded to my recent discovery of the existence of a new sentiment in my husband, of my mirage of independence. . . .

My passionate longing for a life of freedom, of activity, in harmony with my own ideals revealed itself to me then, in fact, as it never had before. Every word I uttered seemed to illumine more clearly for me the inner depths of my own mind. A sort of wonder stole over me and mingled with the dazzling light of the thoughts I was finally able to express.

The man looked at me quietly and then began to talk himself. He said he considered it useless to question the justice of the decision thus irresistibly reached by my conscience. Was I ready to face the consequences, no matter what these might be? He could only tell me that everything in life, even the moral problems which our egotism erected, were nothing, at bottom, but—problems. Very little was needed to guide us through life. Some day I would understand this better; meanwhile he liked my sincerity and logic.

He had risen and was walking about the room, touching the books and photographs. I had got up, too, and stood leaning on the table in the middle of the room; he came close to me—he was very little taller than I—and began to speak again, in a low tone. There had been dark hours in his past, as well; he had believed in laws, in progress; he had judged men in the name of One, absolute, unerring, and had condemned them. Then a terrible sorrow had befallen, the death, simultaneously, of both his parents, and he had realised the nothing that is man, and had been filled for the first time with a tormenting desire to project his gaze out, beyond human life.

Years and years had gone by, he had severed every tie that bound him to humanity, and a light, yes, a light, had broken upon his spirit. He thought he could now explain the enigma of our essence, the immortal essence. This knowledge would bring great peace to the human race; it would be the nome for the beneficial exercise of the individual will throughout its earthly passage. He could not explain anything to me yet. Before long . . . sooner or later, . . . I must continue to hope, to have faith in his promises.

From the street below the electric tram emitted, every now and then, its long, sibilant whistle, producing the same effect upon me as the sound of the wind along the shore, at night, during a storm. I felt myself actually enveloped in a cooling atmosphere which calmed the senses, eliminating every impulse, even, towards an individual life, conjured up dazzling visions in which the sight grew dim.

When I found myself alone in my study, the beams from whose lamp seemed to brood watchfully over the entire city, a sense of joy took possession of me such as, up to that moment, I had never before felt. What was it, what was it?

I did not want to know, just as I did not trouble myself about the secret which this man said he possessed. But the old spirit, rebellious of any yoke, which had come to mistrust the very name of love out of hatred for its manifestations, now yielded to the delight of being understood—felt—by another spirit.

This inarticulate, almost unacknowledged, happiness lasted for several days. He came two or three times again, in the evening: he had asked me to copy for him the manuscript of a pamphlet he was about to publish; some of the pages, almost illegible by reason of the notes and emendations, required his explanations. He gave me these with a calm dogmatism that brushed aside every form of objection, whatever it might be. The pamphlet was a keen satire with which I could not help agreeing, and it foreshadowed, without wholly revealing, the dominant idea of the author, the secret synthesis created by his intellect. The only thing which disturbed me was the style, which was involved, often illogical. What troubled me more, however, were certain phrases which he used, sometimes, in talking to me; certain obscure expressions that carried me back to the

early days of our acquaintance when I had looked upon this strange being as upon some one to be feared, a messenger of the great Mystery, incomprehensible, perhaps, even to himself. Even yet I was not able to form a clear conception of his character in my own mind, now less than ever. I thus refrained, very possibly quite unconsciously, from exercising my powers of analysis in his case. I beheld him pale, emaciated, a mere shadow of life; a smile, ever more enigmatical, playing over his white lips with their short, black moustaches; and with the air of a precocious, delicate child who foresees all that fate is going to deprive him of—and I trembled. Frail, poverty-stricken as he was, to me he appeared admirable. There was a power in him which I could not define and yet which seemed to me to be greater than any other. He represented the terrible, unceasing struggle of the human race towards the divine. When the word "mad" would flash into my mind, I would grow frightened.

But he had no doubts of my faith in him. A fleeting gleam would come into his eyes when, sometimes, he surprised me intent, absorbed in what he was saying. He had certainly never

met with a devotion so fervent in so free and young a spirit before.

I talked about him to the sick woman, in the long hours which I still spent at her bedside. Complications had developed and the trouble had reached the heart, the poor heart which, wildly beating and more and more swollen every day, sometimes threatened to stop forever. The doctor, a former instructor of her fiancé, had already confided to me the seriousness of the case; he was fighting, he said, but he had fears. The young physiologist smiled tenderly as he looked at the patient, but now and then he would direct a terror-stricken glance at me. She herself did not suspect the truth; she wished to have no one with her but her friend and myself, and the widow who worked for her. She kept making plans for her convalescence and repeating, "So tiresome, so tiresome."

Then a terrible crisis hastened the progress of the disease, and reduced the patient to the last stage of exhaustion. For two nights I remained at the bedside, watching her suffer, my hand convulsively grasped in hers, and enduring the acute misery of being utterly powerless to arrest

the mysterious force which was bearing her down. For a few hours I thought the end was near. I wrote a couple of lines to my husband explaining the necessity of remaining a day or two longer.

On the third evening the action of the heart became more normal and the danger diminished. The young man, who had been watching with me during all this terrible time, went to take a little rest; I did not feel tired and the smile the dear patient gave when she found I was going to stay with her dispelled any longing I may have felt for the peace of my own little study and the quiet breathing of my boy as he lay asleep under my eye. Hope began to revive.

At daybreak I left the patient in the care of the widow and started to walk home. When I had gone a little way, along the deserted, dimly lighted street, I suddenly saw my husband coming towards me with bent head. He started on perceiving me and could find nothing to say, looking almost shame-faced. A mixture of pity and scorn assailed me.

After I had reassured him as to our friend's condition he began to frame excuses for his sudden journey. I cut him short; I could not endure the

idea, even, of any affront to the dear soul lying suffering up there.

On reaching home we still found nothing to say; after a little while I returned to the sick-room and in the afternoon he arrived and asked if he might see the patient for a moment. I watched him and I then saw that what had possessed him, what had almost overmastered his greed for the coveted position, had lost the sensual charm which had fascinated him. He now saw nothing in her but a poor, wasted creature!

She spoke of me to him—said I had been a saint to her. “Now go home for a little while, go, dear. I am comfortable, I shall rest awhile. You will come back to-morrow morning, won’t you?”

Dear girl! I had to do as she wished.

But between my husband and me there hung an oppressive silence. It was only after supper, when the child had been put to bed, that we spoke our minds, I heatedly, he with some caution. His aim was to justify his conduct, while I hoped that this moment might not be lost, might not merely be a perpetuation of the falsehood, and so, sustained perhaps by the nervous excitement

I had been labouring under for so many days, I spoke as I never thought I would be able to speak. I said the same things to him that I would have to say to my son when he should be grown to manhood, and he could not defend himself, his silence was an admission of the truth of what I accused him of. He still listened when I concluded by urging upon him again the necessity of breaking the tie which oppressed us both.

He began to question me doubtfully: "Did I really think so? Could we never come to some understanding?" I thought I saw a hope of convincing him.

At that moment the door-bell rang. It was the "prophet," whom I had not seen for some days. I had told my husband that morning of his visits and of the work I had been doing for him, but the sight of him arriving like that, after eight o'clock at night, suddenly aroused all the morbid instincts of his nature. He barely held himself in while the conversation dragged on for a little while, then the visitor got up to go, first grasping my hand for a moment to signify that I must take courage.

I felt that my cause was lost. My husband

began by cross-examining me, with coarse sarcasm. I let him talk and talk, hoping that thus, as on former occasions, he might expend the rage that fairly made him grind his teeth. On the contrary my lenient bearing only made matters worse. His anger seemed to mount at the sound of his own voice; he accused me, insulted my friend, vomited vile words, and ended by seizing hold of me, throwing me on my knees, and striking me brutally, while I, in a spasm of fury, fought desperately to defend myself.

From the next room, the child, awakened by the noise, called out to me in terror. I managed to free myself and ran to his bedside in a sort of stupefaction. The child's little hands travelled over my hot, wet face, and his shaking voice murmured: "I don't want you to, mamma, I don't want you to. . . . Don't go back in there to papa, stay here, come to bed; I don't want you to cry!"

Ah, yes. I would obey the pitiful little voice! This was not like those horrible nights in the past, when the weakening spirit accepted without demur every affront that was offered it, conscious of no summons to live. Now my son was preparing to

defend me, he wanted me for himself, he felt that I was good, pure, he even resented that unmerited suffering which, for the first time, he had become aware of.

The man threw himself on the sofa in the dining-room. I took the boy into the bed with me, and once more I lay awaiting the dawn.

When I got up the old servant questioned me anxiously. What had she heard in her little room? She looked at me with an expression of intense pity, took hold of my hands and kissed some red marks she found on the wrists. Perhaps she remembered some of her own hours of misery. Her eyes often had the look of dumb reproach which one sees in those of an animal which has been maltreated.

I don't quite remember the beginnings of a fresh scene which took place at table that day during the mid-day meal, but I recollect finding myself standing up, clasping the boy tightly to my breast while my husband tried to drag him away from me, ordering him to come with him; they were going away together, I could stay behind, alone with my follies. He had laughed when I reopened the question of our separation;

I was free to stay if I chose and to earn my living in any way I liked, but the boy would go with him, oh, wherever he might go!

The little one looked at me in a dazed way. Ah, child, child of mine! . . . Would I die were he to tear you from me? My flesh, my life, my faith; that warm little bundle, shaking in my arms!

With a tremendous effort I rejected the command of my conscience, inexorably clear. I did not want to die, and, in order to live, I must yield. The man, quickly realising that I was conquered, lowered his voice, abated the torrent of odious expressions. Possibly, during the night, he had gone over the situation and had laid out a line of conduct for himself, had seen the sentimental vapours in which he had been living for the past few months suddenly vanish away, felt himself untrammelled, ready to try to wrest from life those material benefits which, alone, were all-sufficient for him. Perhaps he was sure, beforehand, that the threat to take away the child would be enough to bring me to reason. At all events he grew calm and presently was smiling at the

scene which had just taken place as though at something quite unimportant! I think he even asked my pardon. It was agreed that I should stay in town a few days longer, until my friend should be quite out of danger.

XIX

PROBLEMS

THREE days after my husband had gone I met my "prophet" friend on the street; the boy was with me. I saw him coming towards us, through the crowd, buried in thought, a little bent; and then, suddenly, on seeing us, his whole appearance was transformed by a radiant smile. Was the sight of us, then, so joyous an apparition?

He took my son by the hand and began to question him in that tender, serious manner which makes children's hearts leap with happiness, and which so few people know how to employ. Again the scene of a few evenings before rose up in my mind and a wave of indignation kept me silent. He had to interrogate me at last, and I could do nothing but allude to a latent jealousy in my husband's disposition and tell him that thenceforward I would not be able to receive him at my own house. He had guessed the truth, but

on hearing it spoken, in so many words, he could not restrain a movement of scorn. Then I told him that I had given up the idea of being independent, that, in order not to be deprived of my son, I had determined to resume the false and contemptible life I had been leading. He turned and bent upon me an inscrutable, half-fraternal look, and did not utter a single word. Without actually admitting as much to myself, I had a slight sensation of disappointment; it seemed to me that a gesture of pity, contempt, possibly, or even a reproof would have consoled me more. That evening, after supper, while the boy was playing on the floor by the stove, I had a violent nervous attack. I was sitting at my desk when I suddenly found myself holding my head with both hands, shaking with sobs, my face wet with tears. The child stood for a moment transfixed; certainly he never remembered to have seen me thus weeping violently when I was alone with him. In vain he clasped me about the knees, caressed my face, repeated all his little childish phrases of love, in order to quiet me. At length he took up the pen, lying on the desk, and tried to push it between my inert fingers: "Mamma, mamma,"

he said, "don't cry; write, mamma, write . . . see, I am good, don't cry!"

Ah, the pathetic droop of the little, flower-like mouth, the precocious intentness of the tearful gaze he fixed upon me! He actually shared my suffering with all the strength of his loving little heart. And I could do nothing but accept the sacrifice. I, his mother, who had dreamed for him nothing but happiness, triumphs!

Write? The dear little soul understood even that, the necessity, thenceforward, for me to bury myself more than ever in work and dreams. He was not jealous, my son, he thought of my welfare; of the needs, obscure to him, of my complex nature; he did not suppose that he, alone, was entirely to fill my life.

But how could I take up the pen which those little pink fingers were holding out to me? What was there for me to write about? My desolation was reflected in all my ideas, my very dreams were inconsistent, filled with contrasts, bitterly ironical.

My thoughts naturally flew to my friend. He had not been able to advise me. What was I to him? He regarded every one, myself included,

from the standpoint of the passer-by, who bends for a moment over a child, then pursues his way, leaving it to break its heart over some trifling misfortune which he might easily have set right. Could he have done so? The child almost believes it; I, too, had almost believed it.

I began to ask myself for the first time whether this life he was leading, instead of being one of perfectionment, of purification, were not one of hardening, of useless cruelty. What message for mankind could possibly result from it?

He believed that the moment had come to make his revelation to the world, he was only awaiting the necessary ritual, and, while he was preparing his liturgy, I was being shipwrecked, my friend lay a-dying; I might easily have died myself. Was there not something monstrous in this?

I went to bed but sleep would not come. What period of lucid consciousness was I passing through? From the moment when, clasping my child to my breast, I had renounced my dream of liberty, I had never yet asked myself plainly what I expected. And now the answers were crossing one another, contradicting themselves, filling me with dismay.

I despised my own weakness. I felt that I was a coward. . . . I was suffering aimlessly, hopelessly, uselessly, as far as both myself and my child were concerned; and I yearned after happiness as much as he did with all the spontaneity of his six years; and I pictured all the misery he would endure when he should know himself to have been the price of his mother's ignominy.

Then, on a sudden, a new question presented itself: "Suppose *he* had told you to resist! Suppose he had asked you to leave your son, had proposed to you to follow him, to help him, to seek to introduce into his life the harmony you require?"

He! Had this being possessed me to that extent? Was he, then, something other to me than a guide, an example, a comforter?

Then another question flashed into my mind: "Did you love him?"

And again: "Would you have left everything for him?"

I saw him again as I had seen him that day, happy to come suddenly upon me in the midst of all that unknown crowd.

Had no one ever cared for him? Had he never been able to lean upon the bosom of a woman who understood him, who would save him from the terrifying shadows of the unknown?

Sister, he had called me . . . but a sister can do nothing. He must have known others and none had been able to show him the road to happiness; while he was determined to preach renunciation to the world, to persuade mankind that that road does not exist upon the earth.

Slowly the replies came, one after the other. Yes, had he called me a few days before, when I *believed in him*, I would have followed him; yes, *for him* I would, perhaps, have been able to live without my son. In so brief a space this great change had taken place in me. A few months before, when I was afraid my child was going to die, not a single figure rose up before my mind to suggest that there was some one whom I might still live for.

Yet, it was not love that I felt for this man; it could not be love. I wanted nothing from him for myself. I was even conscious that any dedication of himself to me would have lowered him in my

estimation. I could not imagine myself happy under his kisses.

But to kneel before him, worship that mysterious soul of his, serve him freely, give him my talents, my pen, my life, this might have been had he wished it. And my son should have felt himself in no sense defrauded.

Suddenly at the end of a week the patient grew worse again. This time her fiancé said nothing to me, but he looked at me as though imploring—he, from me—some word of comfort. I understood, his beloved was lost, lost. From one moment to another, to-morrow, in a few days at most, her poor heart would cease its mad beating, for ever.

Why, then, prolong that hopeless struggle, why the care, the remedies meant not only to relieve, but to cure, the disease?

Ah, it is because men cannot bring themselves really to believe in science when it pronounces sentence of death on a body still palpitating with life. They are more ready to believe in a miracle, in some unexplained intervention. They hope to the very end.

And we hoped. He, with his youthful, spare figure, his gleaming, sunken eyes; I, looking older than the dying woman, white and weary under the strain of my iron determination to keep up; stationed erect, one on either side of the bed, hour after hour—we hoped.

She merged us, almost, in a single person, a single faithful, protecting presence. During the paroxysms of pain, she held our fingers as in a vice. Poor, pathetic blue eyes, poor flushed face, framed in hair the colour of golden grain! In her intervals of ease she tried to extract the truth from us so as to be prepared, but she did not believe that she was going to die; she continued, at intervals, to make plans, and more plans. She talked of a far-away country, all white with snow. How long it was since she had seen snow. They would go there together, up towards the fiords, soon, at the very beginning of the summer! And then I read the dread announcement in the young man's eyes as he raised himself after listening to the beating in that poor white breast that was like the strokes of a pump; his face growing rigid in the effort to control himself.

How long did it go on? I cannot tell; it seemed

to me interminable, yet it must, on the contrary, have been quite short.

One morning, when I was sitting in the sick-room, the servant brought me a note from my husband; it was addressed to the boy and referred to me in terms that were almost insulting. All his letters, now, were harsh and disagreeable, usually containing some sarcastic allusion to "the prophet"; he never asked, now, for news of the patient.

The latter saw me change colour as I read.

"Is it from your husband?" Then, with a proud movement of the head that I had often seen when she was in health, she said,

"At all costs never go down there again."

I kissed her tenderly, in silence.

"If they were to take your child away from you?" she questioned, almost in a whisper, and regarded me intently, as though she were imposing a command.

The doctor had told me I had better lie down for a few hours and then go with the boy for a walk in the sun, so as to be ready for another night of watching.

On reaching home, I took my child in my arms

and held him there a long time. I did not rest. I could not. Going out with him, I took the tram-car for St. Peter's; I wanted to see my old friend who had just got back. The piazza was nearly empty, the curving line of statues surmounting the colonnade seemed almost alive in the limpid atmosphere, the brooding silence. We walked in the direction of the Borgo Santo Spirito, skirting the wall of the hospital. From across the street ragged women and children broke off their gossip and their games to stare at me and hold out their hands, recognising a stranger. Rows of mouldy rags hung along the walls, stirred by the breeze; up the ascent to Saint Onofrio, more rags, more sprawling children, more grated hospital windows. A group of school-girls, accompanied by two or three nuns, were coming down the steep street. At the top, on the summit of the Janiculum, we paused, a little out of breath. Garibaldi, an idealised conception, standing out against the blue, was calmly contemplating the huge dome, away to the left.

The glitter of the compact mass of houses, towers, trees, spread before my eyes, nearly blinded me. Beyond, a turquoise line of

mountains were pencilled against the sky, and on their slopes white castle walls sent out sparks of light; between the mountains and the city, the Campagna—immensity.

Rome! Perhaps every day, there, on the summit of the hills, some spirit feels a tide of all-powerful energy surge up within it; sees, clearly indicated in that marvellous pile of stone, belonging to so many different periods, yet all equally luminous, significant, the work that must be accomplished. Every day, perhaps, some soul has a vision of a Rome from which, in time, every wrong and every injustice shall have disappeared, in which the harmonious lines of earth and sky shall no longer be broken by the turbulence of men, strangers to one another, misunderstanding, hostile.

My boy, enchanted to have me all to himself, talked and talked. He pointed to the trees, alive with twitterings, and stretched out his little arms as he had often seen me do, towards this or that spot on the horizon, saying: "Look, mamma, look, see what pretty clouds there are over the pine-groves! And there, there, what place is that?"

I found my old revolutionist friend at home, but other visitors came in. Among these was the editor of *Mulier*, with her elder daughter and a young archæologist to whom the child had lately become engaged. The handsome young couple fairly beamed with happiness and confidence in the future. The bride, her mother told me, would be able to help her husband in his work, and the task would be lightened not only by love, but by the glamour of poetry which he knew how to throw over his researches among tombs and rubbish-heaps.

The young people listened smilingly, the blue eyes of the one seeking the black eyes of the other. Never, never had I seen two lives preparing to intermingle like that.

For a moment the warmth of their feeling enfolded me softly, then I thought of that other young scientist hanging over the bed of his dying love, and I felt impatient to get back.

At the door of the house the widow met me: "Two hours ago, Madam."

She was dead. The woman had seen her fall back on the young man's breast as he was in the

act of giving her some medicine; her lips partly opened, the words "Thank you" half uttered.

"Thank you!" She did not realise, poor soul, the profound pathos of those dying words of hers. I could not regret having been too late, having left her free to die in her lover's arms.

Upstairs I found her already laid out upon the bed; but it was no longer she. Some neighbours and one or two of our colleagues had come in; soon one visitor after another arrived. I could not bear to stay in the studio and took refuge in the little bedroom. Here I was presently joined by the young man. I forgot my own sorrow, silently stretching out my hand to him. Yes, he could give vent to his misery before me; we two, only, had loved her. And we, alone, watched beside her for the two ensuing nights, talking together about her, of what she had been to us. The beautiful, flushed face had turned to ivory, lying framed in the fading gold of her hair. From hour to hour it changed, grew rigid, shadowy.

Ended, ended!

I thought of *him*, of the man who believed that he had solved the Mystery; why did he not reveal it to me at this hour? Why, above all, knowing

that my friend was doomed, had he not brought to her the word of enlightenment?

Ah, confronted by the end, how every hope of trusting in, of overcoming the unknown, dies away! How we realise that the human kind is unfitted for the task; fated to journey through the earth without even understanding the reason of that journey! But, at the same time, our inner spirit then reaches its clearest understanding of its own worth. Life, pausing to gaze in the face of Death, realises the high heroism of its own determination to rise, to perpetuate itself in that outer darkness. And the being of to-day hears a vague summons: perhaps it is the being of remote to-morrows, calling to it, encouraging it to persist: that being in whom will be radiant all which to-day seems obscure, and with whom a new epoch will be inaugurated, the epoch of the liberated spirit.

The hours passed beside the lifeless form of one we have loved reveal nothing to us, nor, on the other hand, do they altogether prostrate us, nor deprive us of a realisation of the existence which continues on in ourselves. We seem at such times

to inherit, together with the duties, the qualities of the one who has gone; we find ourselves the richer for energy, or imagination, or love; we feel ourselves more at one with the living as well as with the dead.

The consciousness of having done all in my power to ease my poor friend's intense suffering gave me a certain comfort and peace. Her short and troubled life had closed amid all that loving care could give, and, dying, she had carried away with her the certainty of having been understood, of living on in our grief.

I surprised myself reflecting that, in all probability, I would be less fortunate. Down there, worn out in a few years by the arid life, who would there be to close my eyes after having smiled into them, lovingly? In my last hour only my unconscious son would stand beside my bed. Alone, still alone!

I said something of this kind to my old friend, or, rather, allowed her to divine the thought on the morning of the funeral when she came to say her farewell to the beloved sleeper, already embedded in flowers. We were standing at the window, separated for a moment from the long

line of friends and acquaintances. Our gaze rested calmly on the vague outlines of the form, in its white wrappings; on the lifelike drawings, the products of her inexhaustible talent, which covered the walls; then travelled across the Campagna to distant Soratte. Ah, blessed repose! The sweet, loving creature had earned it well.

Then I heard the kind old voice beside me, in a thrilling undertone: "Why are you going? Don't you know that resignation is not a virtue?"

I murmured my son's name, and she was silent, passing her hand lightly across my forehead several times.

"Don't go back."

The very words the sleeper had pronounced before closing her eyes!

At the funeral, behind the flower-laden bier, amid a group of friends and journalists, I caught a fleeting glimpse of the "prophet." A few days later, happening to pass close by his lodgings, I was seized by a sudden desire to take him by surprise in the place where he lived his austere life, to say my good-bye to him there; for, in a very short time, now, I would be gone.

I rapidly mounted the dark stairway of the damp old building.

It was growing dark, there was a candle lighted in the room; in one corner I made out a low bed, almost a paillasse; on an earthenware stove, two apples were roasting in the embers; a table, littered with papers, stood near the window, and there were some chairs piled with books; on the wall hung the portrait of a stern-featured woman—his mother? And in the middle of the room stood a spare figure in an irresolute attitude, with one arm extended, asking me to sit down.

What did we say to each other? I can't quite remember. He apologised for the room being so cold, asked after the child, and about my departure. I watched his mouth—there was not a tremor. I pointed to the drawer of the table,—was his work there? He made a vague gesture of assent. I don't know how, but in some way I must have betrayed my loss of faith. More, even, than my words, broken as these were, as though by misery, must the look in my eyes have told him of the waning of my ardour, the bitterness of my spirit, liberated anew.

In the silence that followed I saw, for the first

time, and the last, that face, invariably illumined hitherto, as by an inner vision, cloud over, change, express the most human of all griefs, the simple, profound suffering of one who finds himself abandoned. But it was only for a moment; serenity returned to his brow, like the ineradicable stamp of some intangible sovereignty.

For two days the little rooms were once more littered with packing-cases; boxes in which, together with the books and furniture, my dreams and ambitions lay buried. My husband insisted in his letters that he wanted to have me with him; the poor departed was abjured. He had a dawning suspicion of her having been in love with the young scientist and this blow to his vanity had killed the last remnant of his feeling for her.

Once more I had tried to wrest my freedom from him, and all I had effected was to rivet the chain afresh.

XX

A NEW PHASE

FOR the first time I now felt entirely certain that I was morally free. At Rome there had always been underlying scruples which prevented me from asserting my independence, my freedom from any obligation to him to whom the law held me bound. I had been afraid lest some other feeling might enter in. Now I was wholly reassured.

On the morning of my arrival I had noticed various little attentions which had been paid by my husband when preparing the house for my coming. On the writing-desk lay a pile of new books and magazines, and a half-embarrassed smile seemed to betray his anxiety to win me back. He appeared to be under the influence of an odd mixture of conflicting sentiments: annoyance at having allowed his weakness for my friend to be seen; thus giving me an excuse for reasserting the freedom of my own heart; and, along with that, an

anxious desire that everything should be forgotten in his present undisputed possession of me. Blundering and inept, he had not the sense to wait and allow time to do its work. Instantly I felt his present good intentions weighing me down quite as heavily as his old-time tyranny.

The duties of his new position, however, saved me to a certain extent, as they kept him busy and tired him out. I decided to hold myself entirely aloof from the sphere of his work. An investigation of affairs at first hand at once confirmed the impression I had got at a distance. My husband used his power more harshly, even, than my father had done before him, and aroused, in consequence, a much stronger feeling of antagonism. The workmen, all of them familiar with his origin, felt for him none of the instinctive deference which they had paid a stranger. Ridicule is a most effectual weapon for destroying respect, and I could see it gleaming in the eyes of some of the determined-looking young men whom I would encounter occasionally in the neighbourhood of the "League of Resistance."

One thing secretly wounded me,—the fact that I was included in their hostility; yet I could think

of no remedy. Do some work; start a school; provide instruction for the mothers who were allowing two thirds of their children to die; circulate books?—alas I had not the energy to force any of these things upon my husband single-handed, and no one, no one, could or would help me.

My sister's marriage marked the first crisis of unhappiness in my new phase of existence. During the past few months I had been nursing the idea of a possible rupture between them, why, I cannot say. Distrust of love generally? Jealousy at the sight of others' happiness? Or was I fearful lest she might be deluding herself as I had done?—lest she was under the influence of some auto-suggestion? Then, in the weeks preceding the wedding, I saw the child perfectly happy, eager for the fate she had fashioned with her own hands. I found her intent upon finishing her trousseau, aided by my youngest sister, who appeared to be as happy about it all as she herself. And I thought of mamma; this, probably, was just the way she felt; just so did she confidently commit herself to the beguilements of perennial love.

One evening they went together to the magis-

trate's accompanied only by my brother, for the bridegroom avoided all intercourse with my husband and, consequently, with me as well. Papa had persistently refused to give his consent and would not allow his daughter even the smallest dowry. When he saw the lovely girl who for so many years had supplied the place of a mother in his house about to quit it for ever, the child whose firmness and reserve partook of his own character, tears came into his eyes. I, meanwhile, lying in bed, in the dark, was crying too at the thought of that irremediable step which, even then, she was taking; at the fatal chain of errors which was being forged in defiance of all the horrible examples. I thought that it was this that made me cry, but, down at the bottom of my heart, it was, probably, the wail of a lonely woman, the feeling of desolation because fate was separating me from that little sister in the hour of her supreme happiness, because it was not for me to take part in such a festivity, because my name had been stricken out of the number of the confident, eager, loving ones of the earth.

Something new and indescribable was taking place within me. A secret commotion, having

no obvious cause, possessed me continually. I felt the need of gentleness, forbearance; there were flashes of poetry, colour, sound; a languor crept over me, invading my entire being at times, and filling me with dreams of unimagined ecstasy. When I was aroused I could not return at once to a realisation of the things about me. I clasped the boy to my breast with a sort of frenzy, and he, showing no surprise, would yield himself to me with all the ardour of his nature, longing only to see me smile. Why did I thus confide my ills to that little creature, demanding of him what he had not to give? Why did I passionately ask him to supply all the love which was lacking in my life? My mother, my sisters, other shades of men and women, had passed close beside me and gone their ways without ever knowing me, without awakening what was deepest and truest in me. No one had ever in any way contributed to my growth, no one had ever wept for or with me; and, for my own part, I had never done anything for any one. I had never awakened a smile, never helped to win a victory, never wiped away a tear.

And sometimes it seemed to me as though all

the unexpended treasures of my nature were pressing me down, suffocating me. Ah, how strongly I felt that I possessed all those forces intact, and how I dreaded lest the cry of my tortured soul should one day break out and fill the unwitting silence of the days and nights! Since resistance was impossible why should I repine? Why, in the sweet, spring weather, with that human flower of my life, my solitary blessing, at my side, amid the melody and freshness of the big garden, did I give way to homesick longings, visions of beings I had lost, and of others whom I had never known, whose eager, friendly voices, nevertheless, made my heart leap and palpitate? Why, when I awaited my husband at night, did I have the conviction of a right which had never been fulfilled, and, along with it, of an indomitable impulse to win, to know for myself that sweetness and joy which elevates, ennobles; that true union of two beings which endows its offspring with an impulse to new victorious life?

How far removed, how incomprehensible, now seemed to me the quiet woman with no particular desires of any kind, who had been Me but a

few months before; and just as unlike myself appeared that other one, she who, at some remote period, had allowed ignorant persons to attempt to explain to her the essence of humanity. Clearly, inexorably, and for the first time, in the great spiritual desert which stretched about me, the true secret of existence now revealed itself to me. Harmony, nothing else. The pacification of all kindred forces, the senses and the reason, heart and spirit. . . .

Instead of which—enter, the man, into the darkness of the room; tired, out of humour; he strikes a light and walks about, indifferent whether I may be asleep or no. He is my master, I am in his power. I bury my face in the pillow, sick with disgust, my whole nature in revolt, hating him, loathing myself. A sinister word flashes through my mind: "Madness!"

The man sleeps heavily at my side; I lie awake hour after hour listening to his breathing, while my brain keeps up its incessant, involved workings, and something in the top of my head seems to dilate, to be ready to burst.

That is my life. To be accounted a thing solely of the senses, to be degraded in the innermost

fibre of my being, and to see day succeeding night, the one after the other, endlessly.

The weeks and months were, in fact, passing by. My father had left the neighbourhood definitely and had gone to Milan, taking the two younger children with him. The newly married pair had settled near Venice. No one belonging to me was left. At Easter we had taken possession of the house vacated by papa, cheerful, convenient, and surrounded by a large garden. My poor father! A little of his own spirit seemed still to linger here. In the green disorder of the garden, the triumphant, almost wild wealth and variety of vegetation, he had set the stamp of his own individuality, that part of his nature which he found no scope for elsewhere; his love of beauty, his feeling for originality, simplicity, truth. How often must he have held his solitary musings, arrogant, involved, as he walked back and forth amid that mute, flowery assemblage! For him, too, time had rolled by and had rusted the strong framework of brain and energy which had transformed an entire population, arousing it from its centuries-old inertia, and starting it forth upon a new road. Alone, without a

single friendly voice either to agree with his views or to oppose them, he had tried, vainly, to find in the cult of nature those blessings which he did not know how to extract from the love of his kind.

And now my son reigned happily in his grandfather's place. With his little grey linen tunic reaching to the knees, his rosy face, and his blue eyes shining from beneath thick masses of hair with their gleams of gold, he looked like a miniature Siegfried as he burst, with the sun, into the room where I read or dreamed for the better part of the day. He was my only companion. There was no other to balance the frequent, uncongenial society of my husband's family. My mother-in-law had aged greatly and it was hard to be patient under her repeated, irritating exclamations of wonder on each of her visits to the house, the orchard, the garden: "Why, it is Paradise. You live here like a queen! Ah, my son, at last justice has been done!"

As for my sister-in-law, who had grown even more cross-grained and sour after the doctor's death, she must have known, of course, that I was wretched, and have been

glad of it, but she pretended, as well, to think that I was happy.

My husband did not hide his satisfaction at finding himself an object of admiration, of awe, even, to his family. My dislike of everything about him was now increasing with startling, incredible rapidity. At table, in the garden, on the street, I seemed to observe for the first time this or that intolerable characteristic.

Occasionally the monotony of our life would be interrupted by the visit of some important client or business correspondent. These had all to be entertained at our table and they always went away amazed at the elegance of the appointments. My husband attempting to show that he felt grateful to me for this, I would stop him at the first word. Offended, he would retire into himself and not come out again unless it was to be offensive in his turn, indulging in jests and sarcasms and holding all I cared for most up to ridicule. The child would listen with a shade of wonder deepening in his eyes; sometimes he would press his two little hands in mine, offering me a mute support. I noted, with mingled joy and bitterness, that he never betrayed the smallest

confidence in this father who was always sullen, always contradicting his mamma.

On certain evenings, finding myself alone after the boy was put to bed, I would bury myself in a wicker chair in the garden. The dark canopy overhead, strewn with silent worlds, drew my attention magnetically; but the mystery of the universe had no attraction for me then. A human agony, definite, dogging, held me wholly; the indescribable bitterness of my loneliness, a vague dread of the possibility of dying soon, there, amid all those strange and hostile people, without leaving so much as a trace of my spirit. All that space in the heavens, and I, chained, bound beneath a pitiless yoke, incapable of anything but these slow-flowing tears!

Arousing myself, I would go in to the room where my boy lay sleeping. How placid he was, how trustful in the night which his mother found so full of agitation! O that he, at least, might be spared, my one treasure! If I could but think that he would always smile upon life as he was smiling now in his childish slumbers!

It seemed as though he were asking my pardon in his sleep. I carried the little hand to my lips.

Oh, I had nothing to forgive that little creature who, one day, perhaps, would say to me, "Poor mamma, you sacrificed yourself for my sake!" Rather did a vague remorse continually haunt my own conscience. How was he to grow up between his father and me? In that house, he was the sole person who laughed spontaneously, and how rare that was! He had a feeling of great respect for the books he saw constantly in my hands, and realised that there was an intellectual life which I alone, of all those about him, represented. But perhaps he was already aware of the tricks fate was playing on him. Too often it happened that, in some moment of wild revolt, I would vent my overwrought nerves on him, requiring much more of him than was necessary, keeping him at his task or forbidding him some perfectly legitimate pastime. Too often I neglected him, allowing him to play the whole day long in the garden, or to run off by himself to the factory, or to lie on a rug painting the pictures in old periodicals until he was tired out, without paying any attention to his questions. There was lacking in me the sustained interest of the real educator, the balance properly to direct the

little, young life. I was unable wholly to absorb myself in the question of his needs, to forestall them, satisfy them. Sometimes, realising this, I hated myself; what a poor creature I was if, having once agreed to the sacrifice of my individuality, I could not succeed in forgetting myself, in devoting all my energy to that other individuality which was growing up beside me!

That was how it had been with my mother and her children. One day I took out a bundle of papers belonging to her which my little sister had given me before she went away months earlier. I had never had the courage to look them through. They were letters from different members of her family, household accounts, scattered memoranda, rough drafts of letters written by herself to her parents, her sisters, her husband; verses also by herself and written in girlhood, romantic and sentimental yet breathing a note of tragic sincerity. My mother's character, as revealed in these disjointed records, was much as I had laboriously reconstructed it by my own intuitions in the days of her decay.

One letter, however, fairly took my breath away. It was dated at Milan, and written in

pencil, at night, so as to be almost illegible. In it mamma announced to her father that she would arrive on the following day; she said her trunks were already packed with such few possessions as she could call her own, and that she had just been to her children's room to kiss them for the last time.

"I must get away from here. . . . I shall go mad if I stay. He cares nothing more about me. . . . I am so unhappy that I don't seem even to love the children as I ought to do. I must go, go. My poor little children, perhaps it will be better for them. . . ."

The letter was not finished, it certainly had never been addressed or sent. The unhappy woman had not had the courage to carry out a resolution taken in an hour of desperate illumination. Perhaps she had reflected that her father might not be able or willing to take her in; that poverty awaited her, that her heart would break with longing for her children and for him who had had all her youth. She had loved him, did she love him still? It was above all for us that she had stayed; from a sense of duty, from the fear that we might one day say, "She deserted us!"

I had never suspected that my mother had, for one moment, reached such a pass. At Milan my mind, precocious as it was, had never detected the truth. Had I only been but a few years older and she still in the possession of all her faculties, with her nature demanding its rights in opposition to the fatal seductions of the sacrifice! Could I only have surprised her that night, have had her ask me the question: "What must I do, my child?" and have answered, in the name of the others as well, "Go, mamma, go!"

Yes, that is what should have been my answer. I should, then, have told her to obey the dictates of her own conscience, and, above all else, to respect her own dignity; to be firm, to resist, far away, living her own life, working, struggling; remaining apart from us. "We will appreciate the misery this has cost you; only spare us the sight of your gradual ruin here, of all the agony which you know to be inevitable if you stay!"

Alas! we, her children, had no idea that we were allowing her to go mad. If she had gone away, and papa had not allowed us to go to her, well, we would, nevertheless, have known that she was alive and after ten, twenty, years we

would still have been able to reap advantages from her freed and tranquillised spirit.

Why is it that we so worship sacrifice in a mother? Whence have we drawn this inhuman idea of maternal immolation? From mother to daughter, in each succeeding generation, the web of servitude is woven anew. It is a hideous chain. At a certain period of our lives we all have a realisation of what our parents have done for us, and with this there comes a feeling of remorse at not having made some more adequate return for the holocaust of the beloved person. Then we bestow upon our children that which we failed to give our mothers, denying ourselves in turn, and furnishing a fresh example of mortification and self-annihilation. Suppose, some day, the fatal chain were to be broken and a mother should fail to suppress the woman in herself, and a son were to behold in her an example of dignity? Then it would begin to be understood that the duties of parents commence long before their children's birth; that their responsibility comes *before*, precisely at the time when life is most urgently egotistical and seductive. When two human beings feel within themselves the humble

certitude of possessing all the elements requisite to the creation of a new being, strong, complete, worthy to live; from that moment, if there must be a debtor, will it not be the child?

For what we are, for our anxiety to bestow upon them the gift of a nobler and more beautiful life, our children should be grateful to us; not because after having blindly summoned them into being, out of nothingness, we cease to be ourselves.

That night I could not sleep. The perplexing problem of conscience, which I had caught a glimpse of for the first time at Rome, now pursued me with unrelenting clearness; and for days and weeks my spirit slowly matured what I had *seen* on that night.

I had formulated my rule; it would operate, penetrate my fibre, become an instinct adapted to me, and then, one day, I would follow its dictates as naturally as the swallow follows the spring.

Outwardly I had grown calmer. At certain times the idea so possessed me that I considered it only in the abstract and without applying it to my own case, so clear and simple did the truth

of it appear, so far from being practicable either for me or for any one else.

No one noticed anything unusual; only the servant, the good old woman who for so long had been in the habit of watching me in silence, observed an expression that she thought was strained, that frightened her, on the face on which other people saw only the look of a rather thoughtful child. She ventured to give me a little advice, to offer a few suggestions: I must work as in the good days, hope—have faith. . . .

The kindly words moved me. What strange intuition was it in this simple, devoted soul? Perhaps it was the result of her constant intercourse with me; perhaps my reserve, my anxieties, the easy, familiar phrases I addressed to her, had all contributed to charm and stimulate her, admitting her to the secret inner circle of my thoughts.

Ah, were I only able to influence every creature eager for rescue, to arouse a smile, a gleam of energy, in each one of the ignorant, groaning, dying!

My emotional faculty became ethereal, winged; it took flight at the dawns and the sunsets, at

the verses of the poets, at all noble thoughts. It was like plunging into sunshine, scaling sublime heights of ice, gathering ideal blossoms; there were moments of perfect joy like those which come at the unexpected caress of the spring winds, which make us tremble, like the fresh, young branches, at the mere joy of living. I arrived at the conviction that genius is eternal only when its language bears unfaltering testimony to human humbleness and dignity. Epochs pass away, dreams and certainties fade, our longings take new forms, but unchangeable remains the power to love and suffer in the earthly creature, unchangeable the faculty to lift ourselves high enough to hear the voices of our brothers in spaces apparently desert.

The autumn came. The breach between my husband and the workmen widened, just as it had widened a year before between the workmen and my father. While the factory continued to yield excellent profits, a good percentage of which came to the director, the wages were kept down and the rules were very severe. My sense of justice rebelled, and a deep and growing sense of

shame possessed me, at being there, inert and helpless. The workmen who passed our garden-gate in noisy groups, as they went to and from the factory, seemed to me, with their loud, impudent bursts of laughter, to be more worthy of respect than myself; and shrinking, now, from going out in the street, the big garden, in its autumnal pomp, beheld me wandering about in it for hours, like a shade. My mother! Was I not going forward to meet her? Was I not already living a little the same sort of life as she?

A feeling of illness, a general debility seized hold of me: for a single instant the doubt flashed through my mind whether I might not be going again to become a mother.

The terror which filled me at this thought gave me once more the measure of my misery.

Oh, I must fly, fly!

I renewed a request, which had already been once refused, that I might go and spend a few weeks with my brother at Milan.

By the time my husband had, at last, given his consent the dread of another confinement had vanished. My husband, too, had guessed my secret misgiving, and for a few days the tension


between us was almost unbearable. We parted without exchanging a word, he wearing a look of ominous distrust.

Again the city received me, this time the city of my childhood. Without attempting to search through streets and gardens for the child of fifteen years before, I still found my memories all wrapped in a familiar atmosphere; the avenues filled with mist, the squares with their irregular outlines, the long lines of lights at night along the deserted Naviglio, looked to me just the same as in the old days. Here I had received from my father my very first intellectual impressions, here I had learned to respect, almost to worship, human energy. Ever since childhood I had been hearing vaguely of how, in cities, man is constantly and proudly flinging a challenge in the face of nature, for him limited and insufficient. In fact, in circumscribing, to a certain degree, his prison, man feels himself—within the walls of a city—more free, more powerful than when he is beneath the infinite, starry heavens, beside the sea, or among the mountains, all independent of him. And this is what explains, also, the ostentation of “progress” in the great centres.

True, here, as at Rome, as in the villages, the motive of the effort is almost always selfish. Men oppress one another, push themselves to the front, show absolute indifference for every one but themselves. Yet a faint stirring of Conscience is beginning to make itself felt throughout those packed, tumultuous purlieus, in the quarters inhabited by the working-classes, in the schools and assemblies, a conscience which turns to the vision of something yet indeterminate, which finds its stimulus in striving for something not tangible, in the sentiment of reciprocity, in the connection with the past and with the future, in a true expanding of love into space and time. And a few men and women are promoting with serene patience, and almost unaided, this germination. A spiritual affinity exists between them and my old friend at Rome, in whom I had already admired and envied the animating, propelling force which a strong, altruistic will can exercise in a modern city.

I went with my sister to some of the places where attempts at reform were being made, where schemes were being formulated for a communal life in the future, and I anxiously observed

the unfolding in her of a desire to take some part, however small, in the movement and not ignorantly and uselessly to allow life to pass her by. Since coming to Milan she had led a dreary life, being left far too much to herself and with nothing to do. Papa spent most of his time travelling about, and was unstable, restless, discontented. My brother had found employment in a large industrial establishment and hoped before long to be able to provide for himself and this child as well. He attended the People's College, read a great deal, and had a number of interesting friends, but he realised that his sister was somewhat neglected. "She ought to have some girl companion; what can I do for her?" She listened with her big eyes dilated; a sweet little slip of a maid, who swung from moods of exaltation to those of depression precisely because she lacked some settled interest, something invigorating and, at the same time, pleasant. She dreaded, too, lest she might represent the extreme penalty of the mistake which had united our parents, might bear the impress, on her own character, of their hopeless disagreement. She kept saying, "If I only could see more of you!"



And she seemed to be trying to penetrate into my soul, to be speculating about the future.

With a mingling of joy and terror I set myself to awaken in her the questioning of the spirit, the true beginning of that higher life for which I felt myself in part responsible. Would victory crown the efforts of her and of my brother? Together, those two represented to me the man and the woman of to-day, standing on the threshold of life with all its sadness and its hope. While the one must tear asunder the shackles, both outward and inward, in order to conquer her own personality, the other had need to be conquered himself, to be looked in the face by her as by a soul who knows and wills. Would they, both of them, find the beings to share their lives with them, to take part in all their joys and all their sorrows? At times I told myself that I would count myself happy in my misfortunes if, before I died, I might meet with one perfect human pair. I thought of the young engaged couple I had seen at Rome on the day of my friend's death. Yes, some might—must—exist already and quickly bring yet others to life about them. Sometimes, in fancy, I extracted a sort of grotesque

satisfaction out of the very gloom of the conditions under which I lived, and through my head ran words which, as yet, the poets have never sung.

It was an interlude in my life. I felt alert, strong, capable. All I had been storing up in my mind during the months of solitude I had passed down there now leaped into lucid shape. What seemed almost like the exquisite joy of a creator took possession of me as I reflected upon those ideal beings who should no more carry in their veins, like me, my brothers and sisters, my child, blood which was continually at war with itself; in whom a single will should manifest itself through the example and the memory of active, loving parents, and the prospect of an ever increasing oneness of life.

In the future, in the future! The certainty of such a future had been taking root in me, unconsciously, ever since my girlhood; earlier, perhaps, when the unhappy atmosphere of my home, where two hearts had ceased to be in sympathy with each other, had driven me to passionate investigations. How my logical, positive mind had pursued these across every obstacle! At times a sort of impersonal admiration would

pervade me as I contemplated the road I had travelled. I had the quickness of intuition to seize hold upon whatever was unusual in the history of human emotion, to be numbered among the depositories of a truth manifested, here and there, to an unhappy, privileged few. Thoughtfully I asked myself if, one day, I should have the power to put forth a single memorable word for the salvation of others.

XXI

THE DECISION

MY husband met me at the station; his manner seemed to me constrained and during the walk home he occupied himself exclusively with the child. Arrived at the house I was surprised at the apprehensive look the servant cast at me, but, as my husband's mother and sister were present, I forced myself to assume the air of quiet courtesy with which I invariably treated them, and to bear my part in the little festivity which they had prepared for the somewhat restive and weary boy.

Observing my husband more attentively I was amazed to find him incredibly aged; his features were white and drawn as though from some internal havoc. I asked myself if it could be true that only a few weeks had elapsed since we parted; years, they now seemed to me, and, moreover, I felt as though I never had belonged to him, so far away, so strange did he now appear to me.

When we were alone he told me of an indisposition he had had during my absence, talking rapidly and incoherently. It was the merest trifle, he declared, a return of an old trouble contracted many years before during his term of military service. Something flashed into my mind, a confused memory of certain words I had once heard—where? In town? Was it the woman-doctor? It was nothing, he repeated, nothing of any consequence whatever. He had been obliged to keep quiet for a few days but now he was entirely well again. The doctor, it was true, had advised rest, but that was quite out of the question.

The narration had been interlarded with oaths, the usual accompaniment of all his complaints. I listened in silence, feeling that I had failed to grasp the true meaning of what he was saying.

Presently he got up, put his arms around me in a hesitating manner that was almost respectful—something entirely new in him,—and sought my lips; instinctively I lowered my head; he pressed his mouth to my forehead murmuring: “You are so good, so good, I am not worthy of you. . . .” He drew me closer; I could feel the hot blood coursing through his veins . . . A half-

forgotten phrase, the memory of a bitter smile I had once seen on the face of the woman-doctor, again shot through my brain and a savage, indomitable impulse of self-defence seized me. After an instant he let me go and I shook as though I had emerged from a bath of flame.

The next day the doctor called from a neighbouring village; he spoke of rest—care, and, after regarding me ambiguously, departed. The servant, too, had a curious way of looking at me, or, rather, of looking away from me, of averting her eyes. At last she let out that her master had spent several days in town during my absence and that, on returning home, he had been taken ill. I had asked no questions, yet she added: "Don't ask me to tell you any more."

There was no need. My imagination now traced, unaided, the picture of a man betaking himself in a moment of anger to some resort of vice. I recognised the involuntary impulse of shame that had seized him in the presence of his relatives, his determination to keep the truth from me, his subterfuges. And what was there in it all to surprise me? Nothing. It was as though a portrait whose execution I had long been watch-

ing, day by day, now stood before me completed, perfect.

To him I uttered not a word. I could not have unlocked my lips even had I wished to. I had a room prepared for me next to that of the boy and in the evening, as he was going out to make his regular tour of inspection through the factory, I told him. He turned a little paler, but possibly he had anticipated something of the sort, for he appeared to attach no importance to it. "Merely a question of a day or two," he muttered.

A shudder seized me every time I saw him come back into the house, while he, wearing all the time the air of a martyr, seemed not to notice any change in me. He interested himself mainly in consulting his sister and in trying the various remedies suggested by her, and, when he was not complaining of his health, which in spite of all got no better, he vented his ill-humour on the socialists who at that time were trying to organise a strike. Sometimes coming suddenly upon me seated beside the boy, my head resting upon his, while I read aloud some story or showed him a picture, the man's mouth would contract in an ugly sneer and he would fling out some jeering

remark: "So you are trying to make a scholar of that unfortunate child as well!"

The little boy now had his regular studies and our two natures seemed to draw together in a union even more intimate as his intelligence awakened and his mind began to stir and expand under the influence of its first emotions. While he, seated at his little table, worked at his lessons, I read or wrote beside him, interrupting myself now and again to answer his questions. Thus we passed together moments of real sweetness and peace; but when he had run off to his play, an icy chill would creep over me.

I read at this time with quite extraordinary pleasure Amiel's *Journal Intime*. Phantom shapes haunted my study, rose up amid the plants of the garden, stalked abroad in the streets and along the seashore,—my young mother, leaning over my sister's cradle, resigning herself helplessly to her forlorn fate; the philosopher, ill, bending above his desk, painfully elucidating his law of kindly pessimism all intermingled with tears and stifled groans; a celebrated author, the object of my youthful enthusiasm, whose twenty-year-old son had died only a short time before,

the victim, probably, of his parents' dissensions. Blood-stained symbols, these, of the vanity of the sacrifice, terrible examples of the punishment that surely overtakes every conscience which commits moral suicide. Was not my own one of these consciences? The appeal of my reason and of my inmost conviction had not availed; I had continued to belong to a man whom I despised and who did not love me. Before the world I was still posing as a contented wife, in a manner condoning an ignoble slavery, sanctifying a monstrous lie, for my son—in order not to run the risk of being deprived of my son! And now I was contemplating that final act of cowardice, the temptation to which so many women have succumbed, I was thinking of death as of a release. I was ready—for death—to leave him; I lacked the courage—for life—to lose him.

At times a wave of unreason swept over me. Once, after having endured the society of my husband's family all evening, when I was left alone, facing the man whose attempts at reconciliation, whose very way of looking at me, were a degradation, I broke out into some ironical remarks about his everlasting complaints of the

industrial conditions and the attitude of the workmen; my voice, rising in a sharp note of irritation, carried far more meaning than my words; then, suddenly, a small voice broke in unexpectedly, "Mamma," and a moment later, "Mamma, come here!" Starting up I went towards the little room where he lay abed in the dark. He saw my figure in the doorway outlined against the light and called me again, this time in a more subdued tone, "Mamma." Then, feeling me close to the bed, he stretched out his arms, seized me about the neck, and drew my head close to his own. Silently he passed his hand over my eyes, my cheeks; I could feel the tremour of his warm, soft fingers. What was it that the dear soul wanted? Just to assure himself that I was not crying, that papa had not been making me cry. I flung myself across the little bed, stifling in the covers the uncontrollable sobs that shook me. Again came that one tremulous word, "Mamma"; and my face was bathed in tears—my own and his . . . in my heart I was imploring his forgiveness . . . "My son, O my son, forgive me!" I remained with him a long time bowed, silent, awaiting for the

child, compassionate sleep; for myself, the numbness which usually succeeds a crisis.

One day a telegram arrived announcing the dangerous illness of one of my uncles at Turin. He was my father's eldest brother and had always, in spite of time and changes, shown a lively affection for me, often sending me presents and lending me money especially during the most struggling period of our stay at Rome. He was the exact opposite of my father and had all the characteristics of the industrious bourgeois—narrow in his ideas, hide-bound by custom, self-satisfied, but, with it all, good to the core. How many memories of my childhood went back to him! Notwithstanding the enormous divergence in our later principles and ideas, I was always deeply moved by a meeting with the dear, fat, rosy, bearded old man with his halo of some twenty nieces and nephews, the children of various sisters and brothers.

Would I be in time to see him once again? Would he know me? My husband made me start the very same evening, after first pretending to hesitate, giving me a great deal of advice as to how I should bear myself towards the rich uncle

and the other relatives, advice which seemed to turn all spontaneity of feeling in me to stone. Is it always like that in life?

The next morning, after an interminable night journey, I found my father and an aunt waiting for me beneath the smoke-begrimed roof of the station. They asked me how I did; my father complained of railroads in general, and my aunt reproached him for not having kissed me. How many and many a year it was since I had last felt the pressure of fatherly arms about my neck!

My uncle had died during the night.

So, one of the beings belonging to my past had vanished, the sole, perhaps, who had still thought of me as of a branch belonging to the old stem. I was conscious of a void and, simultaneously, of a sense of freedom. Thus do the new generations, when they cut loose from the old, suffer and—dream.

I stayed at Turin for three days. The air all about my uncle's corpse seemed fairly to palpitate with the eager hopes of the nieces and nephews—the direct heirs—and of the innumerable throng of more distant connections. It was a

relief to me when my father drew me away from this depressing atmosphere and made me walk with him through the dear, quiet streets of his native town. He talked, rather wearily it seemed to me, and both of us, after a momentary return of our ancient tenderness, saw, with no other feeling than one of mild surprise, the impulse die away. We had got to be very egotistical by now, my father and I. Each one intent upon following his own tortuous path, we gave one another neither counsel nor sympathy, nor could we imagine ourselves at any future period, either of emancipation or disaster, being of the smallest help to each other. Our talk was limited to such mutual interests as yet remained to us out of our past, and to the discussion of such tastes and opinions as we held in common.

It was my father who communicated to me the contents of the will. I was left twenty-five thousand francs while my brother and sisters received only five thousand each. Why?

My first sensation was one of revolt, an instinctive impulse to divide my share equally with the less favoured ones, and mingled with this was a feeling of shame at the possession of

money that had not been earned by my own hands and which gave me an advantage, however small, over, not alone my own relatives, but all my human brethren possessed solely of a pair of arms and an active brain. Nevertheless, when once this keen and complex sense of repugnance had passed, I could not but be conscious of the practical bearing of the event on the circumstances of my own life. I was now materially independent, for this fortune, not, certainly, very large, would nevertheless suffice to provide for the boy while I was earning my own living.

A clause of the will stated that it was not to go into effect for six months.

I wrote to my husband telling him of the circumstances and announcing my immediate return. I felt that I was now in a position to confront him with more assurance. Hereafter I would be able occasionally to take a holiday, to travel sometimes, to buy books for myself and the boy without being obliged always to beg for permission. A bizarre fancy suddenly presented itself in the midst of these vague plans. Somewhere on the peninsula I had a lover. Sup-

pose from time to time I were to join him, satisfy the passionate craving of my nature, then return to my dreary home and resume the yoke which my maternal heart forbade me to cast aside altogether! There could be no question of deception, since my husband knew already that I despised him. I would merely be responding to a need of my being, acquiring strength to resist, to endure. . . .

Madness! It was well enough to give the rein to my imagination but, though I might not be able to foretell very clearly what things I might do, I knew only too surely the things that I would not do, ever, under any circumstances. I had a feeling that my future already lived within me: a solution easy or difficult, near or still far off, but sure—almost predestined.

I had arrived home in the morning; the boy was playing with some puppets and I was playing too, seated beside him on the floor. My husband sat moodily reading the paper; thus far we had not exchanged a single word. Presently my sister-in-law arrived, gay and most affectionate, and evidently hoping for details

which I was in no hurry to give. At last she could refrain no longer:

“Well, well, so we are rich, eh?”

My head was resting on the edge of the mimic theatre, I did not raise it. The boy, intent upon his play, did not hear, but in a moment the strident voice resumed:

“And our darling child has another fortune now as well! Ah, some day I hope to see him the great man of the place.”

Then the two dear blue eyes were raised to mine, saying plainly:

“Go on, mamma, don’t mind her. I listen to no one but you. You alone shall direct my life. . . .”

Forward, yes, but that same night the man came to my room and I had an encounter with him which left me once more praying for death.

The next morning I said to the child in a low tone:

“Do you know, I may die, but you are not to cry, you are only to remember.”

Die! Back, in some cell of my brain I seemed to hear a low chorus, as it were, heavy, ominous; an indistinct muttering becoming gradually

clearer, till one darting thought detached itself with sinister illumination: *He*, my husband, *he*, too, *might cease to exist!* The beings all about us died. It was like a breath—a sigh; then they disappear, and all the other men and women walk about, look you in the face, talk, and never speak of those who have gone. It is just as though they had never existed. . . .

That is what might happen to me. And—my child? Whereas, on the other hand, *after* . . . I and the boy alone! Think of it. I walk about my house, no one there! I go out in the garden, on the street. The sea is there, the distant landscape, and in all this wide world we are free! My boy and I—free!

It was a waking dream. When I was aroused by the voice of the child calling to the servant, I trembled, amazed above all else to note how little horror I felt at having actually pictured this thing. Then the garden gate opened and my husband came in. It was mid-day. As he approached I could feel his eyes fixed upon me and turned away my head. Throughout the meal I busied myself with the boy, but when we were left alone for a moment, I turned

towards him feeling my features harden as I did so:

"I shall have to have a lock put on the door of my room."

He brought his fist down on the table, got up and strode about the room, then threw himself into a chair trembling with rage:

"You may do whatever you choose!" he exclaimed. Presently, leaping to his feet, he went into the garden, but returned almost immediately pouring out a torrent of vile words. I leaned down, drew the child closer to my side, and continued mechanically to follow with my finger the line of a book we were reading together. Presently, interrupting the flow of oaths, I looked him squarely in the face and said:

"There is but one remedy, the one I proposed a year ago—separation!" He grew livid. I might go, I might go, he said; he would have no trouble in finding another woman to take my place!

Quite calmly I resumed:

"So be it, but not where my son is. I will take him with me and we can stay with my father until the law shall have adjusted the new status of affairs."

He was standing beside the glass door leading into the garden; raising one arm he let it fall again; his face was swollen with anger.

"The boy!" he burst out. "Just try it!"

His voice had risen; it must have penetrated beyond the garden wall and into the street. The little body beside me began to tremble and to shrink closer to me, shaken with suppressed sobs.

"And you," he said, turning to the boy, "get up! You are to come to the factory with me. Up with you!"

Instantly the childish treble began to utter objections. "I have to study my lessons," he said. His limpid, star-like eyes met those of his father—turbid, frightening. There was a moment of perfect silence. Motionless I sat waiting, no longer conscious of anything but the pressure of a small, damp hand. Then, I heard the door slam and steps upon the sidewalk growing fainter and fainter.

Alone in the house in the murky afternoon. The boy dried away the tears which coursed slowly down my cheeks, demanding with a grieved air:

"What did he want? What was the matter with papa? Why did he call out like that? Why is he always making you cry, mamma?"

"I must go away, my son, do you understand? I must go away."

"What?" What was I saying? He pressed both hands on my shoulders with all the strength of his agitated little body.

"Mamma, mamma, I shall go with you, shall I not? Tell me, tell me. . . . I don't want to stay here with papa, I don't want to leave you. . . . I don't want to, mamma! You will take me, too? Say you will take me. . . ."

And he fell upon my breast in a passion of grief that pierced my very flesh; grief which was at once manly and childlike, which seemed to be an expression of the misery of the whole world. My son, my son . . . I draw you closer and yet closer, weeping with you, desperately, feeling our two natures melt into one as though I gathered you again into my womb and launched you forth a second time into the world in a spasm of mingled bliss and suffering; understanding in that moment the sovereign intensity of the tie that binds us—eternally.

I wrote to apprise my father, then I once more took up the volume whose pages I had studied with such agony of mind during the previous year at Rome. Clear and unmistakable were the articles of the Code: I had no existence except as a slave. My master could dishonour me, betray me: adultery and vice on his part would not loose me from him. Cruelty and threats? But not one of those other poor slaves who had been in a position to penetrate into the secrets of our household would come forward and testify in my behalf. The law? It weighs with scrupulous exactitude every clod of earth, every grain of seed that changes hands between one man and another, but, of the human blood which is drunk, drop by drop, in the secrecy of the home, the law takes no account. It will not intervene short of a catastrophe. It might, perhaps, pardon me were I to commit a crime, but innocent, it would never say to me, "Go, take your child with you; you are free." The law is on the side of the stronger; to him it gives, as his right, my money, the fruit of my labour, and myself; and should I escape, taking my child with me, it would aid him to bring me back.

A period of horrible tension ensued; days when, not daring yet to face the sole solution, I was occupied in slowly concentrating my forces—oh, not in order to withstand the fury of my keeper, but so that I might vanquish the spasm of maternal anguish which seized me at the agonising thought of being shut out from the entire sunshine of my life. At times I was conscious of feeling neither revolt nor resignation, only the iteration of the words, "You neither love nor are loved; you are but two strangers; there is one, only duty." Then, "You have recognised this duty." And again, "Now or never more." The voice was implacable.

At Rome, the year before, the temporary rebellion had been a mere instinctive impulse which had surprised myself. But now, after this year of torment, this period of almost unremitting reflection, and after the glimpse I had had of the abyss, it had become a command which either I must obey or die. Chance, fate—or was it the obscure logic of events?—had ordained that at last I should be compelled to show the man whose slave I was the loathing I had of his embraces. After ten years! Misery!

And the most frantic tugging at the chain had not, after all, been during those long hours when my soul was on the rack. The flesh had been more rebellious, had shrieked aloud, had torn off the chains; to it I owed my liberation. To go away, go away for ever; never again lapse into falsehood, for my son more, even, than for myself. Endure everything, the boy's being far away from me, his forgetfulness; die, go mad, but never again to feel that sickening disgust of myself, never again lie to the child, training him falsely to respect my own dishonour. My son . . . but why should the sentence fall on the innocent? How could the law possibly intend that that poor little child should remain bound to its father? That I should be forbidden to protect and educate him, to build upon the foundations I had so carefully laid in him?

That was my terrible dilemma. If I went the boy would be orphaned, for there was little doubt that he would be torn from me. If I stayed it would be to set a degrading example before him throughout his entire life; he, too, would grow up in the midst of strife and madness.

The child came running to my side and began

to smooth my temples where grey hairs were already beginning to appear. The cry of my blood triumphed for a moment. This creature was my very own and I wanted it above all else. I wanted my child's kisses even at the cost of his and of my own salvation. I could not—I could not endure the thought that he would grow and develop and my eyes never comfort themselves with the sight of his flowering; that his childhood, his youth would smile upon others but never, perhaps, upon me! One day I asked him if, rather than remain with his father, he would go away to school. I had myself never fancied the idea of such restraint for the little creature, but, when a choice has to be made. . . ? The poor little man nodded assent.

Often in the course of the day I would see him grow pale at the sound of my voice, and he would ask: "What did grandpa write to you? Will papa let me go to Milan with you?" He, too, began to have secret doubts, yet, if he saw me downhearted after some fresh dispute with his father, or came suddenly upon me sitting gazing

off into vacancy, instantly forgetting his own griefs, he would essay to cheer and encourage me, telling me how much he loved me, how I would always be the only person in the world for him, always . . . always . . .

“You will always remember me, will you? If I should die, if I had to leave you?”

“Yes.”

His soul was in that tearful answer: “Yes”; but he made no effort to search through the mysterious labyrinth for the meaning of our drama. He simply made a promise to himself which, buried deep now, would one day rise again and enlighten him.

How long a time passed in these alternations of surrender and resolve? Two weeks, it may be. Meanwhile, something had leaked out in the village; I guessed that my rebellion was attributed to the state of my husband's health which, indeed, was known and commented upon.

One day his mother came to me in tears. “My poor girl,” she said, “don't you know that ever so many others are in precisely your situation? There is so-and-so, and so-and-so . . .” Then came my sister-in-law. “Oh, yes, I know,

it is debility. It happened when he was in the army." And one evening when her brother was in one of his paroxysms she seized his arm exclaiming: "Do you want to compromise yourself? Don't you know this is exactly what she is hoping for?"

Hours of discussion; inconsequent, exasperating. They wore me out. I would have liked to sob myself to sleep, submissive, like a child; to close my eyes forever. Only some reserve force enabled me to go on resisting. I asked to be allowed to leave, to go to consult with my father, to seek a little rest. Apart, both of us, perhaps, might see things from a new standpoint.

But they all, with one accord, refused, refused, refused. From time to time the example of my father was thrown in my face, my mother's misfortune, my own lack of religion, all the wearisome tattle of the past. . . .

Perhaps I frightened them sometimes, as I had done in those far-away days which my husband now cited with such bitter malignity. There were occasions at last when I surprised a vague look of wonder in his eyes, a look almost

of respect, when the force, the certainty, of my inward conviction had carried me out of myself in a sort of delirium. Then hope would illumine me, lay its hold upon me. Ah, if it should be that this man had not lived at my side for ten years in vain, if he should be found capable of not forcing his child to pay the penalty of his own fault! Was he not imploring me to stay if only for the sake of the child, for its education? Perhaps, when he once became convinced of the impossibility of our living together, he would yield out of love for the boy. He was still young, there was time yet for him to remake his life. If losing me were going to cause him real pain, might not that help him, ennoble him?

At last, one evening, he consented to let me go to Milan for a few days, but without the child. That very day my father had written to me again, promising to interpose to the very best of his ability to procure me the custody of the boy, and urging me, in the meantime, to come away, even without him, in order to put an end to the hazardous situation. After sitting ponder-

ing awhile, my husband began to roll his eyes about and to emit smothered moans. I went close to him and shook him; he looked at me wildly. Was he really out of his head for the moment? Or was he only pretending? I forced him to swallow some liquid, and he slowly returned to himself. He thanked me: "Don't leave me, don't leave me! See, I love you so!" And he held me by the knees. He went on uttering entreaties as though he were half delirious. I tried to calm him, speaking quietly; then he attempted to draw me to him, murmuring broken phrases.

How shut up within myself I felt—how estranged! And how vile this man, vile and deluded in his man's strength! He wanted to hold me back by the force of his passions!

I remained perfectly rigid. "I shall leave to-night." I said.

Again master of himself, without allowing his mortification to appear, he nodded assent. Yes, he would let me go, but not the child; the child should remain with him, and I, when once I got away, would realise that I could not live without my family. By the time I was ready

to come back, we would have arranged the new order of things.

He went into his room. I did not sleep. Seated at the bedside of the child, unconscious of everything, I could not even think. I was waiting for, I don't know what—the light, perhaps, or warmth,—some bodily sensation which should make me realise that I was alive. I was desperately in need of strength!

Oh, that quiet breathing which, throughout all the coming nights, I should listen to no more! A distant clock struck, I started. How slowly, though, they went, the hours! Perhaps my father would help me, even by the use of force, to see the poor little child again. The future loomed before me full of struggles, problems, agitations. From this chaos my son's face looked out at me. In the street, at a corner, I would suddenly appear before him, now and again; and he would live in constant expectation of meeting me. Meanwhile men change—laws change. A person who is a living idea, who is possessed—may succeed in convincing the most obdurate. And then—death!

Death! I shivered as in a night long past.

But had I not conquered the longing for death, even for the death of my enemy? To live, that was my duty! To live and wait, with a desperate faith in myself and in my son; he who shared my blood, my very soul.

I lit the lamp and drew the covers over him. There was a murmur: "Mamma." I flung myself on the bed, and a sudden idea darted into my mind. What if I were to take my child in my arms, wrapped in his bedclothes, and walk with him out into the night? But the man, in there. . . !

The boy slid his hand in mine and fell asleep again. Perhaps, I thought, he would not hear, I might be able to run along the deserted street, reach the station. . . .

"Do you want to come with me?" I whispered! "Yes, mamma," answered the drowsy little voice. "Shall we go to grandpapa?" "Yes." And he sighed in his sleep. I remained perfectly still, almost without breathing.

Midnight. Three hours yet. I would be recognised at once at the station . . . would they understand? Would they detain me? And then the man would come, and drag the child

away from me! For a moment the scene rose before me so vividly that I thought I heard the boy give a cry and felt the dart of agony shoot through me. I started up, frightened lest I might have cried out myself. Silence.

I was growing stiff with cold and my knees seemed to be giving way under me. I threw myself into the armchair and closed my eyes, gently withdrawing my hand from the child's so as not to chill the little fingers. Then, suddenly, everything seemed to grow blank. Did I fall asleep? I was so weary. We would not be able. . . .

Three o'clock struck. I leaped to my feet. I heard the tremulous voice of the old servant and then, the sound of the man, stirring. I put on my coat and leaning over the child, awoke him: "I am going now," I said in a low tone; "it is time. Be good, be good and love me dearly; I shall always be your mamma. . . ." And then I kissed him, unable even to shed a tear as I stood swaying above him and heard the sleepy little voice murmur: "Yes, . . . always love you . . . send grandpa for me, mamma . . . I'll stay with you. . . ." Then he turned tran-

quilly over towards the wall. Then—then I knew that I should never come back; I felt that some power outside of myself was controlling me, that I was going forth to meet an entirely new destiny, that all the misery that awaited me would never surpass the misery of the present moment.

I found myself on the train without knowing how I got there. The first jolts of the car racked me as though some part of my flesh were being torn away. And a sense of the inevitable took possession of me more than ever now, as I saw myself being borne away by that iron power.

I had been like one who walks in his sleep and suddenly awakes to find what he is doing. Oh, the awful agony!

How could I do it? Now, my child, my boy, fallen asleep under my kisses, would awake and call me; perhaps he was calling me already. . . . He would think that I had deceived him. Ought I not to have awakened him wholly, to have told him that I should never come back, and that I did not know whether he would be allowed to rejoin me soon? Perhaps my husband was there, now, beside the little bed, and was lying

to him in his turn, telling him that I would soon come back, and the child would believe him, and ask hesitating questions. . . . What would he do to-morrow and the next day? And my entire future life, perhaps, was to be full of just such questions, with never any answers. . . .

How could I do it? Oh, I was no heroine! I was only a miserable creature from whom the surgeon cuts off one hand in order that both may not perish.

How long did that horrible journey last? At every station I was seized by a frantic desire to get out, to wait for another train which would take me back. Then, when the train would again get in motion there would flash through me, at intervals, the idea of suicide, so easy there, from that little door, instantaneous.

But once arrived the same power, something almost extraneous, stronger than myself, again controlled me. I made my way, forlorn but without hesitation, through the smoke and the crowd, out of the station, wretched, lost—through the noisy streets where the sun was dispelling the clouds.

XXII

RESURGENCE

A LONG time has elapsed. A year by now. I have never been back. I have never seen my son again. My dark presentiment was fulfilled.

How many months did I keep up the fight; continuing to nurse the delusion that I should yet get possession of my child?

The first few days were almost restful, under my sister's earnest, watchful care; then, week followed week in an interchange, ever more rapid, of letters; letters between my husband and myself. My husband and my father, finally between our lawyers, in the course of which he betrayed a growing wonder at my continuing to hold out, deluding himself with the idea that I would yet come back. Had he not the child by way of hostage?

And the boy, aided by the servant, would

send me small missives wherein his uncertain fingers had traced words of love and suffering. "I want to run away, mamma; but how can I do it? They say dreadful things about you here. I love you dearly, dearly. I will never forget you, not in a hundred years. But what are you doing? Can't you send and fetch me?"

In the tiny room which I had taken temporarily in the same house with my sister, and where these effusions of the little suffering heart reached me, I paid no heed to the passage of the hours. At night, burying my head and hands underneath the covers, I would choke back the savage rattle in my throat. I would call the child by name and talk to him, talk to him. Then, leaping to my feet, I would imagine that my mind was fully made up. I was going to start at once,—go back to him. What difference did it make if I were debased, trampled upon, contaminated? Only to feel once more the joy of my child's caresses, his aspect, his trembling embrace!

What was holding me back, what implacable power? An inward voice, hardly mine, not, surely, of my poor, conscious organism, told me

that the step I had taken was irrevocable, and that, thenceforward, I could no longer lie to myself; that I should die of shame and disgust were I unable to endure the torment, did I not prefer death.

Oh, that fearful, inexorable voice from within! For months and months I looked forward to death just as a person does who has an incurable disease.

The conviction grew upon me, ever more strongly, that I would never obtain any concession, that his revenge would be relentless. After trying threats he next sent derisive messages; he knew that I could not institute proceedings for a separation for want of a legal cause. My father had got tired of the affair and refused to interfere any longer; from the very first, however, he had warned me not to hope. I could not get possession of my uncle's legacy for lack of my husband's authorization. Finally, even the lawyer declined to take any further steps. I was still that man's property and I might count myself lucky if he did not compel me to return by main force. Such was the law.

Before long my old servant was dismissed, and then even my son's brief letters ceased. Knowing that a young governess had been engaged, I wrote to her; she did not answer.

No one could do anything for me.

Why did death so delay its coming?

Oh, I was already dead, nothing still lived in me but a memory.

Time glided, flew by. My son could no longer be just the same as when I had seen him on that last evening; perhaps his voice already had new inflections, perhaps his eyes had a different expression. But I could see him only as he was. My motherhood had really ended, then, with that final kiss?

After some months had gone by I experienced a dull feeling of surprise that I should still be alive, that nothing vital in me was really dead, and that, around and about me, a thousand enigmas were secretly besetting me. Going out into the streets, I let my eyes rest upon the children who might remind me of my own, far off, beloved one. I gazed at them intently, and now and then one of them would gaze back,

a little uneasy. Not one among those happy little creatures had any need of me. But sometimes, in the misty early morning, or when it was growing dusk, indistinct little figures would brush against me. A childish voice in distress would cause me to stop. Beneath my caress the little face would lighten for an instant, with pleasure. Where did they sleep, how did they live? Amid the preoccupations of my new life the thought of those children, of those mothers, wandering about the highways of the city, filled me with a haunting sense of discomfort.

One morning I went with my sister to one of the dispensaries for poor sick children which had been established by an association of women. I offered myself as an assistant to serve my turn twice or thrice a week.

But how appalling those first days were! Ignorance, dirt, hunger, bad treatment had produced, out of unhappy childhood, tragic martyrs. Oh, my beautiful, healthy boy! And I fancied that I would never be able to endure the actual suffering induced by such a sight forever repeating itself.

From this time I resolutely made up my mind to live, having realised anew the lives and sufferings of *others*.

For then, too, I felt the necessity of hoping afresh for others if not for myself. And when I found once more, intact, within me, in spite of all the tragic force expended, the power to believe in a happier human destiny in the future, then, oh my son! I was able, at last, to shed tears of relief.

And, in a little room which I have rented close to my dear ones, in the intervals between the lessons, which are my sole means of livelihood, and visits to the hospital, I seat myself at my table and write the pages wherein are renewed those appeals, already launched at society by many another soul, but which, in my case, are inscribed in tears and blood. My outcry must, indeed, be heinous since all those publications which before applied to me, now turn me away; but justice cannot be choked; it is a living fire. I am not asking for fame, but only to be heard. From my window, at dawn and at sunset, I can trace the distant line of the Alps above the pink bed of clouds; and

often I catch the chanting of a funeral procession winding its way to the cemetery. Looking in the face of life and death, I am not afraid of either, perhaps I love them both.

In the heavens and on the earth a perennial passing. Everything mingling, merging, and a single fact irradiating all: my inward peace, the unfailing sensation of being *in the sequence*, of being able, at any moment, to close my eyes for the last time without any feeling of remorse.

At peace with myself.

Do I hope for anything? No. Perhaps tomorrow may bring me a fresh reason for existence; perhaps I may yet grow familiar with other aspects of life and experience the sensation of a new birth, of a new smile resting upon everything. But I expect nothing. Perhaps, too, tomorrow may find me dead . . . and the last effort of my life will have spent itself in the writing of these pages.

For him.

My son, my son! And his father, believing, possibly, that he is happy! He will grow rich,

provide the boy with playthings, books, masters; surround him with ease and luxury. My son will forget or hate me.

Let him hate, but not forget me!

And he will be trained in a knowledge of the law, which those in power find so useful; he will learn to prize authority, and tranquillity, and comfort. . . . How often do I take out the likeness whose childish features now appear, in their gaze, to proclaim my grief; now, in the lines of the mouth, his father's hardness! But he is mine. He is mine and he must resemble me! Carry him off. Clasp him tight. Shut him into myself! . . . Then disappear utterly so that he may be all of *me!*

Some day he will be twenty years old. Will he start forth, then, at random, in quest of his mother? Or will he already have another feminine image enthroned in his heart? Will he not then feel that my arms are stretched out to him in the distance and that I am calling to him, calling him by name?

Or, perhaps, I shall no longer be alive, no longer have power to repeat to him the story

of my life, the history of my soul, . . . no longer be able to tell him that I have been awaiting him for so long a time!

And that is why I have written. One day my words will reach him.

THE END.

*A Selection from the
Catalogue of*
G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS



**Complete Catalogues sent
on application**



"The plot of the story is unique, the sentiment and pathos genuine, the humor delightful, and the style above reproach."

Flower of the Dusk

By Myrtle Reed

Author of "A Spinner in the Sun,"

"The Master's Violin," etc.

Barbara, the heroine of Myrtle Reed's new romance, confides to her lover that it is her ambition to write a book "of the sort that people who are fond of each other would choose for a gift." Just such a book Miss Reed herself has written, as all her admirers will agree, a story which, if it has not surpassed all preceding tales by the same author, is certainly on a level with the best of her work. The love story here will set the hearts of her devoted readers aglow, for they will find quite irresistible the heroine, a delicate and beautiful girl, who bears up against difficulties that would have broken a spirit less brave, and the feminine half of them at least will certainly agree that the hero, as a lover, is a complete success, ardent, whole-hearted, devoted even to a fault.

Crown 8vo, with Frontispiece printed in colors. Cloth, \$1.50 net. Full red Leather, \$2.00 net. Antique Calf, \$2.50 net. Lavender Silk, \$3.50 net.

G. P. Putnam's Sons

New York

London

"One of the strongest tales of the year."

Judith of the Cumberlands

By Alice MacGowan

**Author of "The Last Word," "Return,"
"Haidah," etc.**

With Illustrations in Color by George Wright

No one can fail to enjoy this moving tale with its lovely and ardent heroine, its frank, fearless hero, its glowing love passages, and its variety of characters, captivating or engaging, humorous or saturnine, villains, rascals, and men of good will. The descriptive vignettes that abound in the story are done with a fine art, and conjure up like magic scene and situation together.

Those who like a tale of primitive power, in which an impassioned love story contends for the reader's interest against the startling incidents of a mountain feud in which the illicit distilling of "mountain dew," gun-play, and assault and battery have each its place, need go no further; here is the tale they are seeking.

Crown 8vo. \$1.50

G. P. Putnam's Sons

New York

London

Unique—Strong—Interesting

A WOMAN AT BAY

(UNA DONNA)

BY SIBILLA ALERAMO

TRANSLATED FROM THE ITALIAN BY M. H. LANSDALE

"The Italian novel, *Una Donna*, made a great sensation on the other side of the Alps, at the time of its appearance. It has received great praise and great blame. In fact, it would be impossible to read this story, so vivid, so direct, so poignant, without more or less taking sides for or against the 'woman' whose sorrowful story it tells. . . . The book vibrates with passion, conviction, and revolt. It breathes a pessimism which does not fail to act strongly on the reader. . . . From a literary point of view *Una Donna* is a novel of value, a noted and striking début, one of these books, in a word, that there was good reason to translate."—*Maurice Muret* in *Journal des Debats*.

CROWN, 8vo. \$1.50

G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS

NEW YORK

LONDON

"One of the most striking novels of the year."—*British Weekly*.

MAROTZ

By John Ayscough

A STORY of the present day, containing vivid word pictures of Southern Italian and Sicilian life, written by a distinguished Catholic. The passionate peoples of the South, tempered by the sweet influences of religion, despite science and modernity, are depicted with great fidelity. It is safe to say that no truer account of Convent life has ever been printed.

"A literary masterpiece."—*The Observer*.

Crown octavo. \$1.50

G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS

New York

London









