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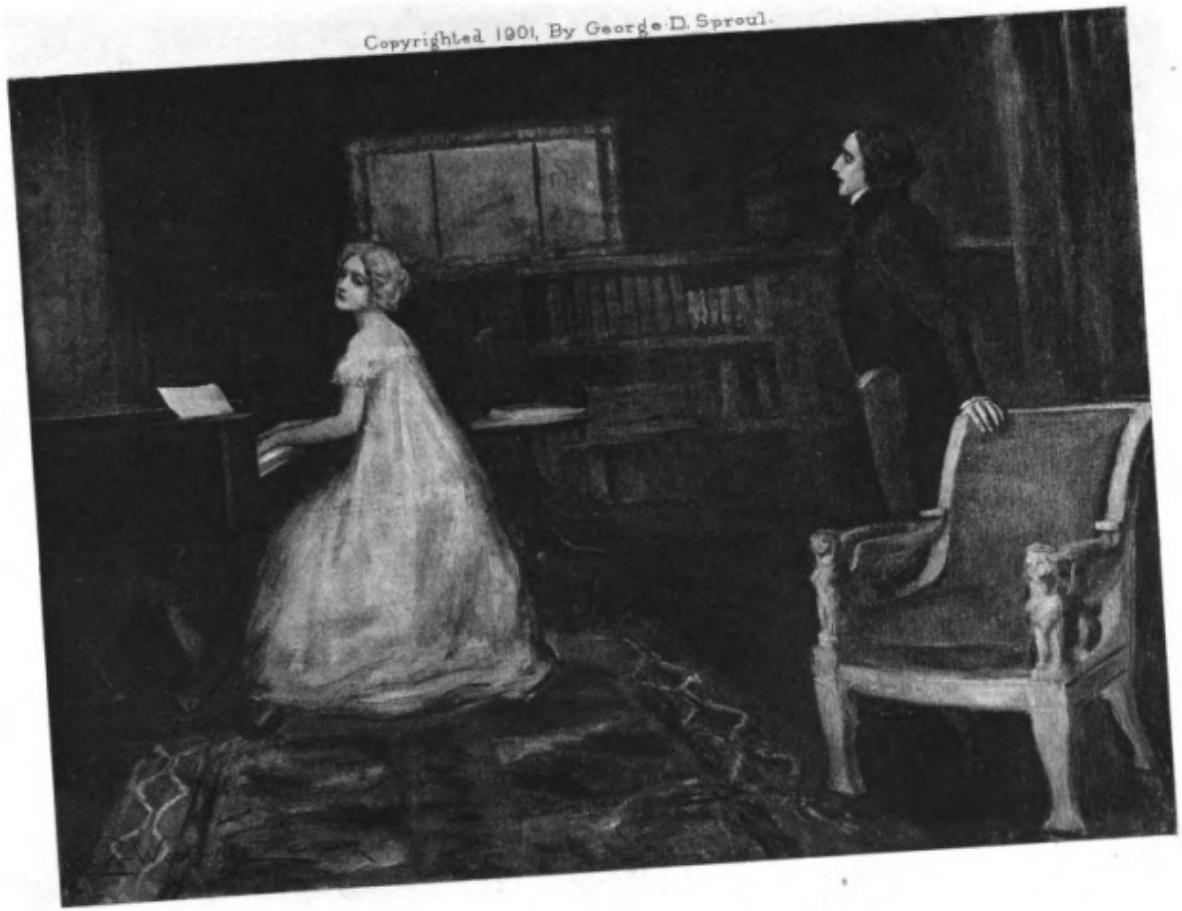

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Edition de Luxe

Spirite
The Vampire
Arria Marcella

The Quartette
The Mummy's Foot

By

THÉOPHILE GAUTIER

Translated and Edited

PROFESSOR F. C. DE SUMICHRAST

DEPARTMENT OF FRENCH, HARVARD UNIVERSITY

VOLUME VI.

The C. T. Brainard
Publishing Co.
Boston New York

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Contents

Introduction	*Page*	3
Spirite	"	13
The Vampire	"	259
Arria Marcella	"	315

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SPIRITE

Introduction

"SPIRITE" is a standing proof of Gautier's versatility, for the subject of the tale is not one that would usually appeal to his intense love of plastic beauty. However, the possibilities of spiritual beauty that must necessarily be expressed in terms of earthly loveliness, and the attraction of the fantastic and the extraordinary, an attraction he could not readily resist, combined to induce him to try his hand at writing a tender, delicate, ideal, and dreamy poem in prose. He succeeded, as the perusal of the story conclusively proves, in creating a very lovely and winsome character, that of Lavinia d'Audefini, the maiden whose confession of love had so often been on her lips in this world, and at last made itself heard from beyond the tomb.

Gautier has admirably rendered the suavity, the chastity of the young girl's unrequited affection.

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Engaging herself, she compels the sympathy of the reader, and her charming apparitions are watched for as keenly by him as they were by Guy de Malivert.

It was a very difficult subject to treat, but Gautier proved equal to the task. His touch is delicate, his feeling tender; he has cast aside all thought of the earth and of sensuality; his conception of beauty, which is ever present with him, assumes a loftier and more ideal aspect. He manages to describe supernatural happenings without arousing in the reader's mind any doubt of his own sincerity and belief in the truth of what he relates. Though he was not a believer in religion or the supernatural, he felt the influence of mystery, legend, tradition, the picturesque and the imaginative, and this excursion into the realms of the beyond was a delightful experience to him. He must have been grateful to Swedenborg, whose doctrines he had made himself acquainted with, for furnishing him with such a novel and attractive subject.

He has not borrowed much from the seer. He has adopted his theory of the intercourse between man and the beings in the spiritual world, and has turned it to account in the creation of a dainty and delightful love-story. He accepts his theory of the necessity for man

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to repress the carnal side of his own nature and to develop the higher and purer. It is on this that Guy's future happiness is made to depend. But Gautier has not sought, and wisely, to follow the seer in the recondite theories of the nature of God, of Heaven, and of Hell any farther than was needed for the happy ending of his story. Gautier is not at home in the mystic depths of the Infinite, and where Chateaubriand failed, he might well fall short, for he had not the deep faith of the Father of Romanticism.

But he has handled with much skill the various elements that could contribute to the interest of a tale that Parisians were to read in the columns of a daily paper. He has brought in enough of the life of society in his day, enough of the worldliness and the luxury that the *bourgeois* delighted in being familiarized with, to make his circle of readers follow attentively the fortunes of this mystic love affair. He has used his art to paint a delicate portrait of an innocent and pure girl whose heart has been given once and for all to the man of her choice. Indeed his portrait of Lavinia d'Audefini is one of the sweetest he ever drew, and far surpasses in true beauty the richly coloured, but sensuous descriptions of Musidora and Arabella.

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Nor is the character of Mme. d'Ymbercourt sacrificed. Of course she had to be subordinated to Spirite; her charms were to be shown inferior to those of the disembodied being, and her beauty had to lack the peculiar attraction that irresistibly drew Guy to Lavinia. She had to be worldly, and to symbolise, to a large extent, the society that had caused Spirite to suffer so bitterly while she remained on earth. But beyond that, Gautier has not depicted her disagreeably; the reader even feels a natural sympathy for the poor woman when she finds herself compelled to give up hopes of marrying Guy and is forced to be content with the empty-headed d'Avricourt. In her case, as in that of the other characters, including even the mysterious Baron de Feroë, there is a noticeable abstention from the exaggeration of which the Romanticists were so regularly guilty. The characters are more human than usual, more genuine, more true to life, even though so much that is supernatural enters into the composition of the tale.

"Spirite" appeared in serial form in the *Moniteur universel*, the opening chapter being published on November 17, 1865, and the concluding one on December 7 of the same year. It was immediately

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reprinted in book form, and many successive editions of the tale have since appeared.

"Aria Marcella" is a very different piece of work: it is the evocation of a past age, of a vanished civilisation, such as Hugo had attempted with brilliant literary and artistic success in "Notre-Dame de Paris," and Flaubert was to attempt later in "Hérodiade" and especially in "Salammbô." Mingling with this is the legend of the Vampire, one very wide-spread throughout Europe in the Middle Ages, and traces of which have not altogether disappeared even at the present day. It is, at bottom, the same subject that Gautier had already treated in "la Morte amoureuse," which figures in this collection under the title "The Vampire;" but in the present tale the idea of the blood-sucking woman who seeks in the veins of her lover the means to renew her youth and conserve her fatal beauty, is subordinate to the restoration of Pompeï in the days of its splendour, just previous to its destruction. The legendary and mystical part of the story is treated but slightly, and as if by way of justifying the representation of the now buried city as it must have existed. It is the reconstitution of the buildings and public edifices, the recalling

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of a vanished civilisation, unlike that with which he himself was familiar, it is the delight of putting together his classical recollections and turning his reading to account that has fascinated Gautier in this instance. And it must be owned, even by those who contend that all such restitutions as the one here attempted are but vain and illusory, that the author has managed to give at least a strong aspect of truth and probability to the picture of Pompeï which he has drawn.

He had not the ambition to reproduce exactly the city of old; he knew that it is not in the power of any man to do so, no matter how sound his scholarship, how vast his erudition, how powerful his imagination. He was content to give his readers á notion of what a great Roman city was in the days when Rome was mistress of the world, the centre of letters and art, the metropolis of commerce, and the greatest exponent of luxury and splendour. In this respect he has certainly not failed, and his descriptions add much to the interest of the story.

To the student of Gautier, it possesses the additional charm of exhibiting the working of his mind, of his imagination. The mere sight of the mould of the

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lovely breasts of the girl, or woman, who died on that fatal day when Vesuvius sent down the awful shower of ashes under which Pompeï disappeared for centuries, sufficed to excite him to the invention of a tale that has perhaps no probability, but which is undoubtedly dramatic. It is further interesting as presenting a contrast to "Spirite;" the feeling of plastic beauty, as distinguished from the spiritual beauty of the story of Lavinia d'Audefini, is very marked. Indeed, one may say that in "Aria Marcella" Gautier stands again upon his favourite ground and gives free play to that sense of loveliness which, if too exclusively sensual, is none the less a sense of real beauty.

"Aria Marcella" was published on March 1, 1852, in the *Revue de Paris*, having been announced under two different titles — "Pompéia" and "Mammia Marcella." It was republished in *le Pays* in August of the same year, and then appeared in book form, in the volume entitled "Un Trio de Romans," still in 1852. In 1863 it was placed among the "Romans et Contes," in which it has since remained.

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SPIRITE

A FANTASTIC TALE

I

GUY DE MALIVERT was stretched out, almost resting upon his shoulders, in a very comfortable arm-chair by his fireside, in which blazed a good fire. He appeared to have settled down with the intention of spending at home one of those quiet evenings which fashionable young men occasionally enjoy as a relief from the gaieties of society. His dress, at once comfortable and elegant, consisted of a black-velvet, braided boating-coat, a silk shirt, red-flannel trousers, and morocco slippers, in which his strong, well turned feet were quite at ease. His body freed from any disagreeable pressure, comfortable in his soft and yielding garments, Guy de Malivert, who had enjoyed at home a simple but refined meal, washed down with a few

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glasses of claret that had gone to India and back, was in a condition of physical beatitude due to the perfect harmony of his organs. He was happy, though nothing specially fortunate had happened to him.

Near him a lamp, placed in a stand of old crackled celadon, shed through its ground-glass globe a soft, milky light, like moonbeams through a mist. The light fell upon a book which Guy held with careless hand, and which was none else than Longfellow's "Evangeline."

No doubt Guy was admiring the work of the greatest poet young America has yet produced, but he was in that lazy state of mind in which absence of thought is preferable to the finest thought expressed in sublime terms. He had read a few verses, then, without dropping his book, had let his head rest upon the soft upholstering of the arm-chair, covered with a piece of lace, and was enjoying to the full the temporary stoppage of the working of his brain. The warm air of the room enfolded him like a suave caress. All around was rest, comfort, discreet silence, absolute repose. The only sound perceptible was an occasional rush of gas from a log and the ticking of the clock, the pendulum of which rhythmically and softly marked the flight of time.

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It was winter; the new-fallen snow deadened the distant roll of carriages, infrequent enough in this peaceful quarter, for Guy lived in one of the quietest streets of the Faubourg Saint-Germain. Ten o'clock had just struck, and the lazy fellow was congratulating himself upon not being in evening dress, stuck in a window recess at some ambassadorial ball, with no other prospect than the angular shoulders of some old dowager whose dress was cut too low. Although the temperature of the room was that of a hot-house, it was evident by the brisk burning of the fire and the deep silence in the streets, that it was cold outside. The splendid Angora cat, Malivert's companion on this evening of idlesse, had drawn so close to the fire as to scorch its lovely fur, and but for the gilded fender it would have curled itself up on the hot ashes.

The room in which Guy de Malivert was revelling in such peaceful joy was partly a studio and partly a library. It was a large, high-ceiled room on the top floor of the building, which was situated between a great court and a garden in which grew trees so old as to be worthy of a royal forest, and which are nowadays found only in the aristocratic faubourg; for it takes time to grow a tree, and the new-made rich cannot

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improvise them to shade the mansions they build with fortunes that seem to fear bankruptcy.

The walls were hung with tawny-coloured leather, and the ceiling was a maze of old oaken beams, framing in compartments of Norway pine, of the natural colour of the wood. The sober brown tints set off the paintings, sketches, and water-colours hung on the walls of this sort of gallery in which Malivert had collected his art curiosities and fancies. Oak book-shelves, low enough not to interfere with the paintings, formed a wainscotting round the room, broken only by a single door. An observer would have been struck by the contrast offered by the books placed on the shelves: they appeared to be a mingling of the library of an artist and of a scholar. By the side of the classical poets of every age and every country, Homer, Hesiod, Vergil, Dante, Ariosto, Ronsard, Shakespeare, Milton, Goethe, Schiller, Byron, Victor Hugo, Sainte-Beuve, Alfred de Musset, Edgar Poe, stood Creuzer's "Symbolism," Laplace's "Celestial Mechanics," Arago's "Astronomy," Burdach's "Physiology," Humboldt's "Cosmos," the works of Claude Bernard and Berthelot, and others on pure science. Yet Guy de Malivert had no pretensions to scholarship. He knew not much

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more than one learns at college, but after he had refreshed his literary education, it seemed to him that he ought not to remain ignorant of all the fine discoveries which are the glory of our age. He had made himself acquainted with them to the best of his ability, and could talk astronomy, cosmogony, electricity, steam, photography, chemistry, micrography, spontaneous generation; he understood these matters, and sometimes astonished his interlocutor by his novel and ingenious remarks.

Such was Guy de Malivert at the age of twenty-eight or twenty-nine. His hair had thinned a little on the brow; he had a pleasant, frank, and open expression; his nose, if not as regular as a Greek nose, was nevertheless handsome, and parted two brown eyes, the glance of which was firm; his mouth, with its somewhat full lips, betokened sympathetic kindliness. His hair, of a rich brown, was massed in thick, close curls that needed not the hair-dresser's irons, and a golden auburn moustache shaded his upper lip. In a word, Malivert was what is called a handsome fellow, and when he had made his entrance into society he had met with many unsought successes. Mothers provided with marriageable daughters were most attentive to

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him, for he had an income of forty thousand a year and a sickly multi-millionaire uncle, who had made him his heir. An enviable lot! Yet Guy had not married. He was satisfied with nodding approvingly at the sonatas young ladies performed for his benefit; he politely led his partners to their seats after the waltz, but his conversation with them during the intervals of the dance was confined to such commonplaces as, "It is very hot in this room,"—an aphorism from which it was impossible to deduce any matrimonial intentions. It was not that Guy lacked wit; on the contrary, he could have readily found something less commonplace had he not feared to become entangled in the web more tenuous than cobwebs, woven in society round maidens whose marriage portion is small.

If he found himself made too welcome in a house he ceased to call there, or started on a long trip; on his return he noted with satisfaction that he was entirely forgotten. Perhaps it will be supposed that Guy, like many young men of to-day, formed in shady society temporary morganatic unions which enabled him to dispense with a more regular marriage, but it was not so. Without being more of a rigorist than became him at his age, Malivert had no liking for the

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made-up beauties who dressed their hair like that of poodles and wore exaggerated crinolines. It was a mere matter of taste. Like everybody else he had had one or two love affairs. Two or three misunderstood women, more or less separated from their husbands, had proclaimed him their ideal, whereunto he had replied, "You are very kind," not daring to tell them that they were in no wise *his* ideal. Malivert was a well-bred young gentleman. A little supernumerary at the Délassements-Comiques, whom he had presented with a few louis and a velvet mantle, had attempted to asphyxiate herself in his honour, but in spite of these stirring adventures, Guy de Malivert, entirely frank towards himself, perceived that having reached the solemn age of twenty-nine, when a young man turns into a mature man, he was ignorant of love, such, at least, as it is depicted in novels, dramas, and poems, and even as described by his companions when in a confidential or a boastful mood. He consoled himself easily for this, however, by reflecting upon the troubles, calamities, and disasters due to that passion, and he patiently awaited the coming of the day when chance would bring to him the woman destined to fix his affections.

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Yet, as the world is very apt to dispose of you as best it fancies and as best suits it, it had been decided in the society which Guy de Malivert most frequented, that he was in love with Mme. d'Ymbercourt, a young widow whom he visited very often. Mme. d'Ymbercourt's estates marched with those of Guy; she had about sixty thousand francs a year, and was only twenty-two years of age. She had suitably mourned for M. d'Ymbercourt, a crusty old fellow, and she was now in a position to take a young and handsome husband, of birth and fortune on a par with her own. So the world had married them on its own authority, reflecting that they would have a pleasant home, a neutral ground where people might meet. Mme. d'Ymbercourt tacitly accepted the match and looked upon herself as already somewhat Guy's wife, though he made no haste to declare himself; thinking rather of ceasing his calls upon the young widow, whose airs of anticipated proprietorship palled upon him.

That very evening he was to have taken tea at Mme. d'Ymbercourt's, but laziness had mastered him after dinner. He had felt so comfortable in his own apartments that he had rebelled at the thought of dress-

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ing and driving out with the thermometer at ten or twelve above zero, in spite of his having a fur coat, and a hot-water bottle in his carriage. He satisfied himself with the excuse that his horse's shoes had not been sharpened for frost, and that the animal might slip on the frozen snow and hurt himself. Besides, he did not care to keep standing for two or three hours, exposed to the cold north wind in front of a door, a horse that Crémieux, the famous dealer of the Champs-Élysées, had charged him five thousand francs for. From this it will be seen that Guy was not very much in love, and that Mme. d'Ymbercourt would have to await a good deal longer the ceremony that was to enable her to change her name.

As Malivert, feeling sleepy in the warm temperature of the room, in which floated the blue, fragrant smoke of two or three cabanas, the ashes of which filled a small antique Chinese bronze cup on a stand of eagle-wood, placed near him on the table that bore the lamp, — as Malivert was beginning to feel in his eyes the golden dust of sleep, the door opened gently and a servant entered, bearing upon a silver salver a dainty letter, scented and sealed with a seal well known to Guy, for his face immediately clouded. The odour of

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musk exhaled by the note seemed also to produce a disagreeable impression upon him. It was a note from Mme. d'Ymbercourt, reminding him of his promise to come and drink a cup of tea with her.

"The devil take her!" he exclaimed most ungallantly, "and her wearisome notes too! Much fun there is in driving across the city merely to drink a cup of hot water in which have been soaked a few leaves coated with Prussian blue and verdigris, while I have here in that lacquered Coromandel caddy caravan tea, genuine tea, still bearing the seal of the Kiatka custom-house, the uttermost Russian post on the Chinese frontier. Most assuredly I shall not go."

His habits of courtesy made him change his mind nevertheless, and he ordered his valet to bring him his clothes; but when he saw the trousers' legs hanging pitifully on the back of the arm-chair, the shirt as stiff and white as a sheet of porcelain, the black coat with its limp sleeves, the patent-leather shoes with their brilliant reflections, the gloves stretched like hands that have been passed through a rolling-mill, he was seized with sudden desperation and plunged fiercely back into his arm-chair.

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"I shall stay at home after all, Jack; get my bed ready."

As I have already mentioned, Guy was a well-bred young fellow and kind-hearted besides. Feeling some slight remorse, he hesitated on the threshold of his bedroom, every comfort in which smiled invitingly upon him, and said to himself that ordinary decency required that he should send a few words of apology to Mme. d'Ymbercourt, pleading a headache, important business, an unexpected obstacle, in order to explain, with some show of politeness, his not having called upon her. But Malivert, entirely capable as he was, though not a literary man, of writing a tale or an account of a trip for the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, detested writing letters, and especially merely formal, ceremonious notes, such as women dash off by the score on the corner of their toilet-table while their maid is busy attiring them. He would much sooner have wrought out a sonnet with rare and difficult rimes. His incapacity in this respect was complete, and he would walk from one end of Paris to the other rather than scribble a couple of lines. The thought of having to reply to Mme. d'Ymbercourt suggested to him the desperate expedient of going to see her himself. He went to the

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window, pulled the curtains aside, and through the damp panes saw the darkness of night, full of densely falling flakes of snow that spotted it like a guinea-hen's back. This led him to think of Grimalkin, shaking off the snow heaped up on his shining harness. He reflected upon the unpleasant passage from his coupé to the vestibule; of the draft in the stairs unchecked by the warmth of the stove, and especially he thought of Mme d'Ymbercourt standing by the mantelpiece, in a very low-necked dress, recalling that character in Dickens that was always known by the name of "The Bosom," and whose white form advertised the wealth of a banker. He saw her superb teeth set off by a fixed smile; her eyebrows, that might have been drawn with Indian ink, so perfectly arched were they, yet that owed nothing to art; her beautiful eyes; her nose, so perfect in shape and modelling that it might have been reproduced as a model in a student's text-book; her figure, which all dressmakers declared perfect; her arms as round as if turned, and laden with over massive bracelets. The remembrance of all these charms that the world had assigned to him, by marrying him, little as he cared for her, to the young widow, filled him with such intense melancholy that he went

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to his desk, resolved, in spite of the horror of it, to write ten lines rather than go and drink tea with that lovely woman.

He took out a sheet of paper embossed with a quaintly interlaced "G" and "M," dipped in the ink a fine steel pen in a porcupine holder, and wrote, well down the page in order to have the less to say, the word "Madam." Then he paused, and leaned his cheek on his hand, for his inspiration failed him. He remained for some time thus, his wrist in place, his fingers grasping the pen, and his brain unconsciously filled with thoughts wholly foreign to the subject of his note. Then, as if Malivert's body were tired of waiting for the words that did not come, his hand, nervous and impatient, seemed inclined to fulfil its task without further orders. His fingers extended and contracted as if tracing letters, and Guy was presently much amazed at having written, quite unconsciously, nine or ten lines which he read and which were about as follows:—

"You are beautiful enough and surrounded by lovers enough for me to tell you, without giving you cause for offence, that I do not love you. It is not creditable to my taste that I should make this confession — that is all. Why, then, keep up an

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intercourse which must end in linking two souls so little intended to be brought together, and involve them in eternal unhappiness? Forgive me; I am going away, and you will not find it difficult to forget me."

"What is this?" exclaimed Malivert, when he had read his letter over. "Am I crazy or a somnambulist? What a strange note! It is like those drawings of Gavarni's which exhibit at one and the same time in the subscription the real and the expressed thought, the true and the false. Only, in this case the words do tell the truth. My hand, instead of telling the pretty fib I meant it to write, has refused to do so, and, contrary to custom, my real meaning is expressed in my letter."

Guy looked carefully at the note and it struck him that the character of the handwriting was not quite like his usual hand.

"It is an autograph that would be contested by experts," he said, "if my correspondence were worth the trouble. How the devil did this curious transformation take place? I have neither smoked opium nor eaten haschisch, and the two or three glasses of claret I drank cannot have gone to my head. I carry

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my liquor better than that. What will become of me if the truth takes to running off my pen without my being aware of it? It is fortunate that I re-read my note, never being quite sure of my spelling in the evening. What would have been the effect of these too truthful lines? And how indignant and amazed would Mme. d'Ymbercourt have been had she read them! After all, it might have been better had the letter gone such as it is. I should have gained the character of being a monster, a tattooed savage, unworthy of wearing a white neck-tie, but at least that wearisome engagement would have been broken off short. If I were superstitious, I might easily see in this a warning from heaven instead of a most improper forgetfulness."

After a pause Guy came to a sudden decision. "I shall go to Mme. d'Ymbercourt, for I am incapable of rewriting the note."

And he dressed in a very bad temper.

As he was about to leave his room, he thought he heard a sigh, but so faint, so soft, so airy that but for the deep silence of night he would not have noticed it.

Malivert stopped short on the threshold of his room, for that sigh affected him as the supernatural affects

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the bravest of men. There was nothing very terrifying in the faint, inarticulate, plaintive sound, and yet Guy was more deeply moved than he cared to confess even to himself.

"Nonsense," said he; "it must have been the cat plaining in its sleep." And taking from his valet a fur coat in which he wrapped himself with a skill that testified to long trips in Russia, he descended, very much out of sorts, the steps at the foot of which his carriage awaited him.

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II

LEANING back in the corner of his coupé, his feet on the hot-water bottle, his fur coat drawn close round him, Malivert gazed, without noticing them, upon the strange effects of light and shade produced upon the carriage window, slightly obscured by the frost, by the sudden blaze of light from a shop brilliantly lighted with gas and still open, late though the hour was, and at the prospect of the streets dotted with brilliant points of light.

The carriage soon crossed the Pont de la Concorde, under which flowed the dark waters of the Seine in which amid the sombre gleams were reflected the lights of the lamps. As he drove on Malivert could not help recalling the mysterious sigh he had heard or thought he had heard as he left his room. He explained it by means of all the common-sense reasons with which sceptics explain the incomprehensible. No doubt it had been due to the wind in the chimney, to some noise from outside altered by an echo, to the

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low vibration of one of the piano-strings responding to the passage of some heavy dray, or after all it was but a sound uttered by his angora cat dreaming by the fire-side, as he had at first believed. This was the most probable explanation, the most reasonable. Yet Malivert, while recognising the logical soundness of these views, was inwardly dissatisfied with them; a secret instinct told him that the sigh was not due to any of the causes to which his scientific prudence attributed it; he felt that the soft moan had been uttered by a soul and was no mere vague sound of matter. There was at once breath and grief in it. Whence, then, did it come? Guy dwelt on it with that sort of questioning uneasiness experienced by the strongest minds when they find themselves face to face with the unknown. There had been no one in the room, save Jack, a by no means sentimental person. The softly modulated, harmonious, tender sigh, softer than the soughing of the breeze in the branches of the trembling aspen, was unquestionably feminine — it was impossible to deny it.

Another thing puzzled Malivert — the letter which had, so to speak, written itself, as if a will independent of his own had guided his hand. He could not seri-

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ously explain this away, as he had at first endeavoured to do, by attributing it to absent-mindedness. The feelings of the soul are controlled by the mind before they show on the paper; and besides, they do not write themselves down while the mind is elsewhere. Some influence he could not define must have mastered him and acted in his stead while he was dreaming, for now he thought of it he was quite certain he had not fallen asleep even for an instant. He had certainly felt lazy, somnolent, comfortably stupid the whole evening, but at that particular moment he had unquestionably been wide awake. The unpleasant alternative of going to Mme. d'Ymbercourt's or writing her a note of apology had even somewhat feverishly excited him. The lines that expressed his real feelings more accurately and forcibly than he had yet confessed even to himself, were due to an intervention which he felt compelled to consider supernatural until it was explained away by investigation or another name were found for it.

While Guy de Malivert revolved these thoughts in his mind, the carriage was traversing streets more deserted, owing to the frost and snow, than was usual in those rich and fashionable quarters in which the day

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does not end until very late in the night. The Place de la Concorde, the rue de Rivoli, the Place Vendôme had been quickly left behind, and the coupé, turning into the boulevard, entered the rue de la Chaussée-d'Antin where lived Mme. d'Ymbercourt.

As he entered the court-yard Guy experienced a disagreeable shock: two files of carriages, the coachmen muffled up in furs, occupied the sanded space in the centre, and the restive horses, shaking their bits, cast the foam from their mouths on to the snow on the ground.

"This is what she calls a quiet, informal evening; tea by the fireside. That is always the way with her. All Paris is here and I have not put on a white tie," grumbled Malivert. "I ought to have gone to bed, but I tried to play the diplomat like Talleyrand, and did not follow my first impulse just because it was the right one."

He slowly ascended the steps, and, after throwing off his fur coat walked up to the drawing-room; the doors of which were opened for him with a sort of obsequious and confidential deference by a lackey, as for one who would soon be the master of the house and in whose service he desired to remain.

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SPIRITE

"There!" said Guy de Malivert to himself, as he noticed the man's servility was more marked than usual; "the very servants dispose of my liberty and marry me on their own authority to Mme. d'Ymbercourt! Yet the banns have not been published!"

Mme. d'Ymbercourt, on perceiving Guy advancing towards her with rounded back, — the modern way of bowing to ladies, — uttered a slight exclamation of pleasure, which she endeavoured to make up for by assuming an air of coldness and dissatisfaction. But her ever smiling lips, accustomed to exhibit teeth of irreproachable pearliness, could not form the pout called for, and the lady, observing in the mirror that her attempt was a failure, made up her mind to show herself good-natured, like an indulgent woman who knows that nowadays masculine gallantry must not be overtaxed.

"You are very late, Mr. Guy," said she, holding out a hand gloved with such a small glove that it felt like wood when pressed; "no doubt you remained at your club smoking and playing cards. Well, you have been punished for your remissness by not hearing the great German pianist Kreisler play Liszt's 'Chromatic Galop,' and the charming Countess Salva-

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rosa sing Desdemona's air better than ever Malibran did."

Guy, in a few well chosen words, expressed the regret, not very deep, to tell the truth, he felt at having missed the galop by the virtuoso and the aria by the society leader, and as he felt rather awkward at having on, among all those people dressed up to the nines, a black-silk tie instead of a white-lawn one, he tried to escape and to gain some less brilliantly lighted spot where his involuntary solecism in dress might more easily be concealed in relative shadow. He had much difficulty in doing so, for Mme. d'Ymbercourt kept recalling him to her side by a glance or a remark that required a reply, brief though Guy strove to make it.

At last, however, he managed to gain the recess of a door leading from the great drawing-room to a smaller one, arranged like a hot-house, with trellises covered with camellias.

Mme. d'Ymbercourt's drawing-room was furnished in white and gold, and hung with crimson Indian damask. The chairs, arm-chairs, and sofas were easy, comfortable, and well upholstered. The chandelier with its gilded branches was filled with tapers in rock-crystal foliage. Lamps, vases, and a tall clock,

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all evidently the work of Barbedienne, adorned the white-marble mantelpiece. A handsome carpet, the pile of which was soft and thick like sward, lay under foot. Superb, full curtains draped the windows, and on the wall smiled, even more than the original, a magnificently framed portrait of the Countess painted by Winterhalter.

There was no objection to be made to this drawing-room filled with rare and costly articles, the like of which, however, any one rich enough not to fear the bills of an architect or a house-furnisher, could easily obtain. The commonplace luxury of the room was entirely suitable, but it lacked distinctiveness. Not a single thing indicated the individuality of the owner, and if the Countess had been absent, the room might as well have been that of a banker, a lawyer, or an American making a short stay in the capital. Soul and individuality were wanting. So Guy, naturally artistic, considered the luxury exceedingly vulgar and disagreeable, though it was exactly the background best suited to Mme. d'Ymbercourt, whose beauty was composed merely of commonplace perfections.

In the centre of the room, on a circular divan sur-

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rare exotic plant, — whose name Mme. d'Ymbercourt had not even the least idea of, and which had been put there by her gardener, — were seated, in dresses of gauze, tulle, lace, satin, and velvet, the swelling folds of which surged to their shoulders, ladies, most of them young and beautiful, whose fancifully extravagant gowns testified to the inexhaustible and costly powers of invention of Worth. On their brown, golden, red, and even powdered hair, so abundant that even the least sarcastic could not help thinking art had been called in to beauty's aid, sparkled diamonds, waved feathers, dewy leaves showed green, natural or imaginary flowers bloomed, strings of sequins rustled, darts, daggers, pins with double balls gleamed bright, ornaments of scarabeus-wings glistened, golden bands were crossed, ribbons of red velvet wound in and out, stars of gems quivered on the end of springs, and in general there could be seen whatever may be piled upon the head of a fashionable woman, — to say nothing of the grapes, the currants, and the brightly coloured berries which Pomona loans to Flora to complete an evening head-dress.

Leaning against the door-post, Guy watched the satiny shoulders covered with rice powder, the necks on

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which curled stray threads of hair, the white bosoms occasionally betrayed by the too low epaulet of the bodice, small misfortunes to which a woman sure of her charms easily reconciles herself. Besides, the motion of drawing up the sleeve is uncommonly graceful, and the act of adjusting the opening of the dress on the bosom so that it shall have a satisfactory contour affords opportunities for attractive poses. My hero was indulging in this interesting study, which he preferred to wearisome conversation, for, in his opinion, it was the most profitable thing one could do at a ball or a reception. He glanced with careless eye at these living Books of Beauty, at these animated Keepsakes which society scatters in drawing rooms just as it places stereoscopes, albums, and papers on the tables for the benefit of shy people who do not know which way to turn. He enjoyed his pleasure in greater security because, the report of his approaching marriage with Mme. d'Ymbercourt having gone abroad, he was not obliged to be careful of his glances, formerly closely watched by mothers desirous of settling their daughters in life. Nothing was expected of him now. He had ceased to be a prey. He was settled and done for, and although more than one woman thought to herself

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that he might have done better, the fact was accepted. He might even, without running any risk, have spoken two or three phrases running to a young girl, for was he not already as good as married to Mme. d'Ymbercourt ?

At the same door where stood Guy de Malivert stood also a young gentleman whom he often met at his club, and whose somewhat eccentric Northern mode of thought he rather liked. It was the Baron de Feroë, a Swede, a fellow-countryman of Swedenborg's, bending like him over the abyss of mysticism, and as fully taken up with the other world as with this. He had a strange and characteristic head. His fair hair, falling almost straight, was fairer even than his skin, and his moustache was of so pale a gold that it looked like silver. His gray-blue eyes were filled with an indescribable expression, and his glance, usually half veiled by long pale lashes, flamed sharply out and seemed to reach beyond the ken of human vision. But the Baron de Feroë was too thorough a gentleman to affect the least eccentricity ; his manners, cold and even, were as correct as an Englishman's, and he did not pose in front of mirrors as a seer. That evening, as he was going to the Austrian ambassador's ball on

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leaving Mme. d'Ymbercourt's reception, he was in full dress, and on the breast of his coat, half concealed by the facing, shone, suspended from a fine golden chain, the stars of the Elephant and of the Dannebrog, the Prussian Order of Merit, the order of Saint Alexander Newsky, and other decorations from Northern sovereigns which testified to his diplomatic services.

He was really an extraordinary man, but the fact did not at once strike the beholder, so well was it concealed by diplomatic phlegm. He went out into society a great deal, and was to be met with at the club, and the Opera, but under his outward appearance of a fashionable man he lived in mysterious fashion. He had neither intimate friends nor companions. In his admirably kept house, no visitor had ever got beyond the outer drawing-room, and the door that led to the other apartments opened to no one. Like the Turks, he devoted to outer life but a single room which he plainly did not live in. Once his visitor was gone, he withdrew within his apartment. What did he busy himself with? No one knew. Occasionally he remained invisible for a considerable time, and those who noted his absence attributed it to a secret mission, or to a trip to Sweden, the home of his

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family ; but any one who had happened to pass, at a late hour, through the unfrequented street where lived the Baron, might have seen a light in his window or the Baron himself leaning on the balcony, his gaze lost amid the stars. No one, however, was interested in spying upon Baron de Feroë ; he rendered exactly to society what was society's, and the world asks no more of any man. With women, though scrupulously polite, he never trespassed beyond certain limits, even when he might safely have done so. In spite of his coldness he was considered rather attractive. The classical purity of his features recalled the Greco-Scandinavian work of Thorwaldsen. "He is a frozen Apollo," said of him the lovely Duchess of C., who, if gossip were to be believed, had tried to melt the frost.

Like Malivert, Baron de Feroë was looking at a beautiful snow-white neck and back, seen in a slightly bending attitude, that imparted an exquisite curve to the lines, and which occasionally shivered at the tickling of a spray of green leaves that had become partially detached from the head-dress.

"A lovely girl," said the Baron to Guy, whose glance he had followed. "What a pity she has no

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soul. The man who falls in love with her will share the fate of the student Nathaniel, in Hoffmann's tale; he will run the risk of pressing a lay-figure in his arms at the ball, and that is a deathly sort of dance for a man of feeling."

"You need not fear for me, my dear Baron," laughingly replied Guy de Malivert; "I do not feel the least desire to fall in love with the fair owner of these beautiful shoulders, though beautiful shoulders are in themselves nowise to be disdained. At the present time, to my shame be it spoken, I do not feel the faintest approach to love for any one whomsoever."

"What! Not even for Mme. d'Ymbercourt, whom people say you are going to marry?" replied the Baron with an air of ironical incredulity.

"There are people in this world," returned Malivert, quoting Molière, "who would marry the Grand Turk to the Republic of Venice; but for my part I hope I shall remain a bachelor."

"And you will do right," affirmed the Baron, in a tone that passed suddenly from friendly familiarity to mysterious solemnity. "Do not bind yourself with earthly ties. Remain free for the love that will perchance come to you. The spirits are watching over

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you, and in the next world you might have cause to regret eternally a mistake committed in this."

As the young Swedish baron uttered these strange words, his steel-blue eyes flashed singularly and his glance seemed to burn into Guy de Malivert's breast. Coming after the curious events of the evening, the advice was received by him with less incredulity than he would have felt the day before. He turned on the Swede a look full of wonder and questioning, as if to beg him to speak more clearly, but de Feroë, glancing at his watch, said, "I shall be late at the Embassy," pressed Malivert's hand earnestly, and made his way to the door without rumpling a single gown, treading upon a single train, damaging a single flounce, with a delicate skill that proved he was well used to society.

"Well, Guy, are you not coming for a cup of tea?" said Mme. d'Ymbercourt, who had at last discovered her supposed admirer leaning thoughtfully against the door of the smaller drawing-room. Malivert had to follow the mistress of the house to the table whereon smoked the tea in a silver urn surrounded with porcelain cups.

The Real was trying to win its prey back from the Ideal.

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III

THE singular words spoken by Baron de Feroë and his almost sudden disappearance after he had uttered them gave Guy food for thought as he returned to the Faubourg Saint-Germain, carried along at Grimalkin's fastest trot; for the horse, though a thorough-bred, did not need any urging to speed, the cold north wind making the return to his warm loose-box with its comfortable litter pleasant indeed.

"What can he have meant by his solemn riddles spoken in so mysterious a tone?" thought Guy de Malivert, as Jack assisted him to undress. "De Feroë has been brought up in the least romantic of civilisations; he is sharp, clean, and cutting like an English razor, and his manners, for all their perfect courtesy, are colder than the Arctic. I cannot suppose that he was trifling with me. People do not fail in that way to Guy de Malivert, even when they are as brave as the white-eyebrowed Swede. Besides, what would be the

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object of such a joke? He certainly did not stay to enjoy it, for he disappeared at once like a man who is determined to say no more. Well, let me dismiss all this nonsense from my mind. I shall see the Baron at the club to-morrow, and no doubt he will then be more explicit. Let me to bed and try to sleep, whether the spirits are watching me or no."

Guy did go to bed, but sleep did not come to his call, though he courted it by reading the most soporific pamphlets, perusing them with infinite mechanical attention. In spite of himself he was watching for those faint sounds which are perceptible even in the deepest silence. The rattle of the clock ere the hour or the half-hour struck, the crackling of the sparks in the embers, the creaking of the wainscotting under the influence of the heat of the room, the sound of the dropping oil in the lamp, the draft of air attracted by the hearth and moaning softly through the chinks of the door in spite of the weather-strips, the unexpected fall of a newspaper from his bed to the floor,—made him start, as at the sudden explosion of a firearm, so excited were his nerves. His hearing was so tense that he could hear the pulsations of his arteries and the beating of his heart. But amid all these confused murmurs he

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did not manage to distinguish anything resembling a sigh.

His eyes, that he closed from time to time in hopes of inducing sleep, would forthwith reopen and examine the recesses of the room with a curiosity not unmixed with apprehension. He strongly desired to see something, and yet dreaded to do so. Occasionally his dilated pupils seemed to perceive dim shapes in the corners, which the light of the lamp, covered with a green shade, left in partial darkness; the folds of the curtains assumed the aspect of feminine garments and appeared to move as though they clothed a living body, but it was all imagination. Blooms, luminous points, changing patterns, butterflies, waving vermiculated lines undulated, danced, swarmed, swelled, and sank before his weary eyes without his being able to make out anything definite.

More agitated than I can express, and feeling, though he neither saw nor heard anything, an unknown presence in his room, he rose, drew on a camel's-hair dressing-gown he had brought back from Cairo, threw two or three logs on the fire, and sat down by the chimney in a great arm-chair more comfortable for a sleepless man than the bed upset by his wakefulness.

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Near the arm-chair he saw lying on the carpet a crumpled paper. It was the note he had written to Mme. d'Ymbercourt under the spell of that mysterious impulse which he could not yet account for. He picked it up, smoothed it out, and noticed, on examining it carefully, that the writing was not quite like his own. It seemed to be the work of an impatient hand, incapable of controlling itself, attempting, in the production of a fac-simile, to copy the model exactly, but inserting, among the characters of the original, loops and strokes of its own. The aspect of the writing was more elegant, more slender, and more feminine than Guy's.

As he noted these details, Guy thought of Edgar Poe's "Golden Bug" and of the wonderful skill with which William Legrand manages to decipher the meaning of the cryptogram used by Captain Kidd to indicate enigmatically the exact spot where he had concealed his treasure. He longed to possess the deep intuition which can guess so boldly and so accurately, which fills up blanks and restores connections. But in this case not even Legrand himself, even assisted by Augustus Dupin, of "The Stolen Letter" and "The Murder in the Rue Morgue," could have managed to

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guess at the secret power that had controlled Malivert's hand.

Guy, however, at last fell into the heavy, troubled sleep which, on the approach of dawn, follows a night of insomnia. He woke when Jack entered to relight the fire and to assist his master to dress. Guy felt chilly and uncomfortable; he yawned, stretched his limbs, took a cold bath, and, refreshed by his tonic ablutions, was soon himself again. Gray-eyed morn, as Shakespeare hath it, walking, not o'er the dew of a high eastern hill, but down the slope of the snow-covered roofs, glided into the room, the shutters and curtains having been opened by Jack, and restored to every object its real aspect as it drove away the dreams of the night. There is nothing so reassuring as the sunlight, even if it be but the pale beams of a winter sun such as just then streamed in through the frost-flowers on the window-panes.

Having recovered the ordinary feelings of life, Guy felt amazed at his agitation of the past night, and said to himself, "I did not know I was so nervous;" then tore open the wrappers of the newspapers which had just been brought up, cast a glance at the articles they contained, read the news of the town, took up the copy

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of "Evangeline" he had been reading the previous evening, smoked a cigar, and having thus whiled away the time until eleven o'clock, dressed, and, by way of exercise, resolved to walk to the Café Bignon, where he proposed to breakfast. The frost of the early morning had hardened the snow fallen during the night, and as he traversed the Tuileries Malivert enjoyed looking at the mythological statues powdered with the white snow, and the great chestnut-trees covered with a silvery mantle. He breakfasted on choice and carefully selected dishes, like a man seeking to repair the fatigue due to a sleepless night, and chatted gaily with pleasant companions, the very flower of Parisian wits and sceptics, who had adopted as a motto the Greek maxim: "Do not forget not to believe." Yet, when the jokes became rather too free, Guy smiled somewhat constrainedly. He did not share unresistingly in the paradoxes of incredulity and the boastfulness of cynicism. The words of Baron de Feroë, "The spirits are watching you," involuntarily recurred to him, and he felt as though a mysterious witness stood close behind him. He rose, waved an adieu to his friends, and took a turn or two on that boulevard along which more wit travels in one day than in a whole year in

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the rest of the world, and finding it rather deserted on account of the cold and the early hour, he mechanically turned into the Rue de Chaussée-d'Antin. He was soon at the house of Mme. d'Ymbercourt. As he was about to ring he thought he felt a breath sweep by his ear and that he heard these words whispered very softly but very distinctly: "Do not go in." He turned round quickly, but saw no one.

"What is the matter with me?" said Malivert to himself. "Am I going mad? Am I suffering from hallucinations in broad daylight? Shall I or shall I not obey the injunction?"

But when turning abruptly he had let go the bell-handle; the bell had rung and the door opened. The porter, standing in front of his lodge, looked at Malivert, who hesitated about entering. He did so, however, although he did not feel much like it after the supernatural incident which had just occurred. Mme. d'Ymbercourt received him in the small drawing-room, decorated in buttercup yellow and blue ornaments, in which she received her morning callers. That particular shade of yellow was especially unpleasant to Guy. "Yellow is the favourite colour of brunettes," had replied the Countess to Malivert, who had more

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than once allowed himself to ask for the removal of the odious colour.

Mme. d'Ymbercourt wore a skirt of black taffeta with a jacket of brilliant colour braided and covered with more jet and embroidery than a *maja* going to a bull-fight or a *feria* ever put on her bodice. The Countess, although a woman of the world, was foolish enough to allow dressmakers to clothe her in costumes worn only by the rosy-cheeked and small-mouthed dolls of fashion-plates.

Contrary to her habit, Mme. d'Ymbercourt seemed to be serious; a shade of annoyance darkened her usually serene brow, while the corners of her mouth were drawn down. One of her kind friends had just left her and had asked her, with the feigned naturalness of women on such occasions, when her marriage to Guy de Malivert was to take place. The Countess had blushed, stammered, and replied evasively that it would soon come off, though Guy, whom every one destined to be her husband, had never asked for her hand or even formally declared himself, — a fact attributed by Mme. d'Ymbercourt to respectful timidity and partly perhaps to that feeling of uncertainty which every young man experiences when on the

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point of giving up bachelor life. But she felt quite sure that he would speak ere long, and she looked upon herself already as his bride; so much so that she had determined upon the changes which the entrance of a husband into her mansion would necessitate. More than once she had said to herself, as she looked at certain rooms: "This shall be Guy's room; this his study, and this his smoking-room."

Although he did not much care for her, Guy could not help acknowledging that Mme. d'Ymbercourt was endowed with regular beauty, enjoyed an umblemished character, and was possessed of a considerable fortune. He had let himself drift, without being particularly attracted, and like all people who are heart-whole, into frequenting this house where he was received more cordially than anywhere else, and he returned to it because, if he were absent for a few days, an engagingly amiable note compelled him to do so.

Besides, there was no reason why he should not return to it. Mme. d'Ymbercourt received the best of society and he occasionally met there friends whom it would not have been quite so convenient to seek out in the busy life of Paris.

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"You seem a little out of sorts," said Malivert to the Countess; "did your green tea give you a sleepless night?"

"No, indeed. I put so much cream into it that it loses all its strength. Besides I am the Mithridates of tea; it has ceased to affect me. The truth is, I am annoyed."

"Have I come at the wrong time, or have I upset some of your plans? In that case I hasten to withdraw, and we can take it that finding you were out I left my card at your lodge-gate."

"You are not the least in the way, and you know very well that it is always a pleasure to me to see you," answered the Countess. "Your visits, though I ought not to say it, even seem to me rather infrequent, though others are not of the same opinion."

"Yet you are unencumbered with troublesome relatives, talkative uncles, and chaperon aunts who embroider in the window recess. Kind nature has relieved you of the collection of disagreeable relatives who too often surround a pretty woman, and has left you their inheritances only. You may receive whom you please, for you are not dependent on any one."

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"That is true," replied Mme. d'Ymbercourt. "I do not depend on any one, yet I am responsible to every one. A woman is never wholly or really free, even when a widow and apparently mistress of her actions. A whole police force of interested people surrounds and watches her, and interferes in her affairs. So, my dear Guy, you compromise me."

"I?—compromise you?" exclaimed Malivert with sincere surprise, that betokened a modesty quite uncommon in young men not over twenty-eight years of age, who have their clothes made by Renouard and send to England for their trousers. "Why should I compromise you, rather than d'Aversac, Beaumont, Janowski, and de Feroë, each and all of whom are exceedingly attentive to you?"

"That is more than I can tell you," replied the Countess. "Perhaps without knowing it you are a dangerous man, or society has perceived in you some power of which you are yourself ignorant. None of the names you have mentioned have been connected with mine; people seem to think it quite natural that these gentlemen should call on me on my day at home, that they should call every now and then between five and six on their return from the Bois, and should drop

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in on me in my box at the Bouffes or the Opera. But these very actions, innocent in themselves, assume, it appears, when performed by you, a tremendous meaning."

"And yet I am the steadiest fellow in the world, and have never given cause for gossip. I do not wear a blue frock coat like Werther, nor a slashed doublet like Don Juan. No one has ever surprised me playing the guitar under a balcony; I never go to the races in a four-in-hand with questionable women in loud dresses, and never, at any evening party, do I discuss sentimental questions in the presence of pretty women for the purpose of drawing attention to the purity and delicacy of my feelings. I am never seen posing against a pillar, one hand in my vest, gazing in silence, with a sombre, woebegone look, at some fair girl with long ringlets, like Alfred de Vigny's Kitty Bell. Nor do I wear hair rings, or a sachet round my neck in which I preserve Parma violets given me by 'her.' My most secret drawers might be searched without a single portrait of a fair or a dark beauty being found in them; nor even a bundle of scented notes tied with ribbon or a rubber band; not even an embroidered slipper, a mask edged with lace, or any of

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the trifles which compose the secret collections of lovers. Frankly, do I look like a lady-killer?"

"You are very modest," replied Mme. d'Ymbercourt, "or else you are trying to make out that you are very artless. Unfortunately, everybody does not agree with you. Objection is raised to the attentions you pay me, although for my part I see nothing to object to in them."

"In that case," returned Malivert, "I shall call less frequently. I shall not come more than once a fortnight or once a month, and then I shall start on a trip. But positively I do not know where to go. I have been to Spain, Italy, Russia, Germany. Well, I might go to Greece, for it is considered sinful not to have seen Athens, the Acropolis and the Parthenon. I could go by way of Marseilles or board an Austrian Lloyds' steamer at Trieste. They call at Corfu, and on the way one sees Ithaca *soli occidenti bene objacentem*, basking in the setting sun now as in the days of Homer. They go to the head of the Gulf of Lepanto. Then you cross the Isthmus, and you can see the remains of Corinth, which not every one was allowed to enter. You get on board another steamer and in a few hours you reach the Piræus. Beaumont told me all about it.

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He started a fanatical Romanticist, but he got metope on the brain there and will not hear of cathedrals now. He has turned into a confirmed Classicist, and maintains that since the days of the Greeks humanity has gone back to barbarism and that our boasted civilisation is but a form of decadence."

Mme. d'Ymbercourt did not feel particularly flattered by this lyrical outburst of geographical knowledge, and thought Malivert was much too ready to avoid compromising her. She did not desire him to care for her reputation by running away.

"No one wants you to go to Greece," she said. And, with a faint blush and an imperceptible trembling of the voice, "Is there not a simpler way of putting an end to all this gossip than leaving your friends and venturing into a country that is by no means safe, if we are to believe Edmond About's 'King of the Mountains'?"

Fearing lest she had spoken too plainly, the Countess flushed more deeply than before. Her breath came quick and short, and made the jet ornaments on her bodice glitter and rustle; regaining her courage, she looked at Malivert with eyes that a touch of emotion made absolutely beautiful. She loved Guy, her

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silent admirer, as much as it was in her nature to love any one. She liked the neat yet careless way in which he tied his cravat, and with the deep logic of women, a logic the deductions of which are often unintelligible to the subtlest of philosophers, she had inferred from that tie that Malivert possessed all the qualities needed in an excellent husband. The trouble was that the intended husband was strolling very slowly indeed towards the altar and seemed in no hurry to light the hymeneal torches.

Guy perfectly understood Mme. d'Ymbercourt's meaning, but he more than ever dreaded uttering imprudent words that might bind him, so he answered: "No doubt, no doubt; a trip breaks off matters completely, and when one returns it is easier to see what should be done."

On hearing this cold and indefinite reply the Countess allowed a gesture of annoyance to escape her, and bit her lips. Guy, very much embarrassed, kept silence, and the situation was becoming unbearable when the footman relieved the strain by announcing Baron de Feroë.

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IV

ON seeing the Swedish baron enter, Malivert uttered an irrepressible sigh of content, and cast a look of gratitude at M. de Feroë, for he had never been so glad to see any one. But for this opportune interruption Guy would have found himself in a very embarrassing position. He was bound to answer Mme. d'Ymbercourt plainly, and yet he hated nothing so much as formal explanations; he always preferred to act rather than promise, and even in matters of little moment he was very wary of pledging himself in any way. The glance which Mme. d'Ymbercourt cast upon the visitor was not as kindly as Malivert's, and did not good breeding teach dissimulation, reproach, impatience, and anger might easily have been read in her look. The Baron's unseasonable intrusion deprived her of an opportunity that would not soon recur and that her self-respect would scarcely allow her to bring about, for it was certain that Guy would not seek it, and, indeed would carefully

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avoid it. Although on most occasions Guy was a man of resolution and courage, he dreaded any step that might settle his life in any way. He was talented enough to succeed in any career, but he had deliberately avoided making any choice lest it should prove to be the wrong one. He was not known to entertain any attachment for any woman; though the habit he had got into of calling frequently on the Countess had led to the supposition that the pair were thinking of marriage. He mistrusted any kind of bond or obligation, and it seemed as though, urged by a secret instinct, he was trying to keep himself free for some future event.

After having exchanged a few preliminary commonplaces, chords forming a prelude to conversation, like those struck on the piano before beginning a piece, Baron de Feroë, by a transition of the kind that in a couple of sentences make you pass from the fall of Nineveh to the last win of "Gladiator," entered upon an esthetic and transcendental dissertation on Wagner's most abstruse operas,—"The Flying Dutchman," "Lohengrin," "Tristan and Isolde." Mme. d'Ymbercourt, although a remarkable pianist, did not understand music, and especially such deep, mysterious, complex music as Wagner's, whose "Tannhäuser"

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gave rise to such fierce discussions in France. While working at a strip of embroidery she had taken from a basket placed near the arm-chair she usually occupied, she replied from time to time to the enthusiastic analyses of the Baron, urging the commonplace objections always brought up against any new form of music, and which were once made to Rossini's compositions as well as to Wagner's, such as lack of rhythm and of melody, obscurity, excessive use of brass instruments, inextricably complicated orchestration, deafening noise, and finally the material impossibility of performing the compositions.

"Your discussion is too deep for me, who am simply an ignoramus in the matter of music. I am moved by what strikes me as beautiful; I admire Beethoven and even Verdi, though it is no longer fashionable to do so, now that one has to be a partisan, as in the days of the rivalry between Gluck and Piccini, when one had to elect to side with the King or with the Queen. So I shall leave you two to fight it out, for I cannot throw any light on the question, and at most I can put in a Hem! Hem! like the Minorite whom Molière and Chapelle chose for arbiter in a discussion on a point in philosophy."

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With these words Guy de Malivert rose to take leave and shook hands with Mme. d'Ymbercourt, whose glance said, as plainly as feminine reserve permitted, "Stay," and followed him to the door with a sadness that would no doubt have touched him had he seen it; but Guy's attention was engrossed by the quietly imperious expression of the Swede, which seemed to say: "Do not again expose yourself to the peril from which I have rescued you."

When he found himself in the street, he thought, with some feeling of dread, of the supernatural warning he had received as he was about to enter Mme. d'Ymbercourt's house, and of the call made by Baron de Feroë, a call which coincided in the most singular way with Guy's disregard of the mysterious warning. The Baron seemed to have been sent to his assistance by the occult powers of whose presence around him he was vaguely conscious. Although Guy de Malivert was not systematically incredulous or sceptical, he yet found it hard to bring himself to believe in spirit influences, and he had never indulged in the fantasies of table-turning and spirit-rapping. He felt indeed a sort of repulsion for experiments intended to exploit the marvellous, and he had refused to go to see the famous

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Home, whom all Paris went crazy over for a season. Until the previous evening he had led a careless bachelor life, fairly satisfied on the whole with being alive, and feeling that he was cutting by no means a bad figure in the world; thinking of material things only, and not troubling to ascertain whether or not the earth carried with it, in its daily circling round the sun, a world peopled with invisible and impalpable beings. But he was compelled to own to himself that a change had come over his life; that a new element, unsought by him, was seeking to enter into his hitherto peaceful existence, from which he had carefully excluded all possible disturbing causes. So far it was not much: a sigh as soft as the breathing of an Æolian harp, a thought substituted for his own in a letter written mechanically, a word or two whispered in his ear, his meeting with a solemn, mysterious-looking Swedenborgian Baron. It was plain, nevertheless, that a spirit was circling round him *quærens quem devoret*, as the eternal wisdom of the Bible has it.

While thus ruminating Guy de Malivert had reached the great open space in the Champs-Élysées without having in the least intended to go in that direction rather than in any other. His body had borne him thither,

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and he had allowed it to have its way. There were not many people there. A few of those obstinate persons who insist — for hygienic reasons — on exercising at all times of the year, and who cut holes in the ice in order to get their bath, were returning from the Bois de Boulogne, their noses blue and their cheeks purple with cold, riding horses with kneecaps. Two or three of them waved a greeting to Guy, and he even received, though he was on foot, a gracious smile from a lady in an open carriage, and wrapped in costly Russian furs.

"As I happen to be the whole of the public, my attention and admiration are worth having," thought Malivert. "In summer I should not have received such a bow. But what am I doing here? This is not the time of year to dine in an arbour with some lively girl, and besides I do not feel particularly gay. All the same the sun is setting behind the Arc de l'Étoile, and it is time to think of satisfying the inner man."

Malivert was right. The great arch of the Triumphal Gate framed in a mass of clouds heaped up in strange fashion, their edges brilliant with a foam of light. The evening breeze, as it set them in motion, imparted to them a sort of life, and it would have been easy to make out figures and groups in the dark mass

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of vapours through which flashed the sunbeams, just as in those drawings of Doré's where the fancies that fill the minds of the characters are reflected on the clouds, making the Wandering Jew see Christ toiling up Calvary, and Don Quixote behold knights tilting with enchanters. Malivert thought he saw angels with great wings of flame soaring over a swarming multitude of indistinct beings that moved to and fro on a bank of black clouds, like a sombre promontory jutting out into a phosphorescent sea. Occasionally one of the lower figures broke away from its companions and rose towards the lighted regions, traversing the red disk of the sun. On reaching the higher spheres, it flew for a moment by the side of one of the angels and then melted into the universal glow. No doubt fancy had much to do with the ever changing combinations, and of a cloud picture may be said, in the words of Hamlet to Polonius: "Do you see yonder cloud that's almost in shape of a camel? . . . Or like a whale?" And in either case one may answer affirmatively, without necessarily being an imbecile courtier.

Night coming on put an end to the vaporous fancifulness, and the gas lamps, as they were lighted, soon traced, from the Place de la Concorde to the Arc de

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l'Étoile, the two lines of fire, so magical in effect, which delight the wondering strangers who enter Paris at night by that triumphal avenue. Guy hailed a passing cab, on the look-out for a fare, and had himself driven to the rue de Choiseul, where his club was situated. Leaving his overcoat to the care of the liveried servants in the vestibule, he glanced over the book in which members put down their names for dinner, and noted with satisfaction that it contained Baron de Feroë's. He wrote his own below, traversed the billiard room, where the marker was sadly waiting until it should please some one to indulge in a game, and several other high-ceiled rooms, spacious and furnished with every modern comfort, — the temperature kept at an even warmth by a huge furnace, though great logs blazed on the monumental andirons within the vast fireplaces. Four or five members were idling on the divans, or leaning on the green reading-table and glancing through the papers and reviews, arranged methodically and continually being disarranged. Two or three were writing love letters or business notes on the club stationery.

It was near the dinner hour, and the guests were chatting together until the butler should announce that

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the meal was served. Guy began to fear that Baron de Feroë was not coming, but as he passed into the dining-room, the Baron arrived and sat down by him. The dinner, served with a wealth of glass ware and silver plate, was distinctly good, and each man washed it down with his own particular tipple, some with claret, others with champagne, others again with pale ale, according to individual habit or caprice. A few, of English tastes, called for a glass of sherry or port, which tall waiters in knee breeches brought ceremoniously upon silver salvers, marked with the club monogram. Every man drank to his liking, without troubling about his neighbour, for at the club every man is at home.

Contrary to his custom, Guy did not do honour to the dinner. He left the dishes scarcely tasted and the bottle of Château-Margaux in front of him was being very slowly emptied.

"The white angel could not say to you," remarked Baron de Feroë, "as he did one day to Swedenborg, 'You are eating too much,' for you are uncommonly abstemious to-night, and it might be thought that you are trying to attain to the spiritual state by fasting."

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"I do not know whether a few mouthfuls more or less would free my soul from its material envelope," answered Guy, "and tend to make more diaphanous the veils that separate the visible from the invisible, but whatever the reason, I do not feel much appetite. Certain circumstances you appear to be acquainted with have, I confess, astonished me somewhat since yesterday and caused me to be more absent-minded than is my wont. Normally I am not usually preoccupied at meals, but to-day other thoughts master me in spite of myself. Have you any engagements this evening, Baron? If you have nothing better to do, I propose that we smoke together after dinner in the music room, where we shall not be disturbed, unless the fancy strikes some of our fellow-members to pound on the piano, — which is not at all likely, for our musical friends are all away to-night at the dress rehearsal of the new opera."

Baron de Feroë courteously agreed to Malivert's suggestion, and politely replied that no better way could be devised of passing the time. So the two gentlemen settled themselves on the couch and started to puff clouds of smoke from excellent cigars of *la Vuelta de Abajo*, each of them mentally thinking of the

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curious conversation which could not be put off long. After a few remarks on the quality of the cigars they were smoking, and on the respective merits of strong and mild, the Swedish Baron himself opened the subject that Malivert was dying to enter upon.

"First," he said, "I must apologise for the liberty I took in warning you in mysterious fashion the other evening at Mme. d'Ymbercourt's, for as you had not confided in me it was in a way indiscreet in me to penetrate your thoughts before you had spoken. You may be sure I should not have done so — for it is not my habit to abandon my part as a man of the world and to take up that of wizard — had you not inspired me with a lively interest, and had I not been made aware, by signs perceptible to adepts alone, that you had recently been visited by a spirit, or at least that the invisible world was seeking to enter into relations with you."

Guy hastened to say that he had not been in the least offended by the Baron, and that, indeed, in the novel situation in which he found himself, he was only too glad to have found a guide apparently so well informed in matters supernatural, and whose seriousness of disposition was so well known to him.

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"You readily understand," said the Baron, with a slight bow by way of thanks, "that I do not easily break through my reserve, but you have perhaps seen enough no longer to believe that our senses suffice to inform us of everything, and I do not fear, therefore, that you will take me, if our conversation should turn upon such mysterious subjects, for a visionary or one of the *illuminati*. My position is a guarantee that I am not a charlatan and, besides, the world knows my outer life only. I do not ask you to tell me what has happened in your case, but I perceive that in the sphere beyond that of ordinary life an interest is being taken in you."

"Yes," answered Guy de Malivert, "there is something indefinable floating around me, and I do not think I am indiscreet, as far as the spirits, with which you appear to be on an excellent footing, are concerned, if I tell you in detail, what your superhuman intuition has enabled you to divine."

Thereupon Guy related to the Baron the extraordinary events which had marked the previous evening.

The Swedish nobleman, twisting his blond moustache the while, listened to him with extreme attention, but without manifesting the least surprise. He remained silent for a time and seemed buried in thought. Then,

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as if the words summed up a series of reflections, he suddenly said to Guy: —

"M. de Malivert, did a young girl ever break her heart on your account?"

"Neither girl nor woman ever did, so far as I am aware at least," replied Malivert. "I am not conceited enough to suppose myself capable of inspiring so great a passion. My love affairs, if a kiss carelessly given and carelessly received, may be dignified by such a name, have been of the most peaceful and least romantic character, and ended as easily as they began. Indeed, in order to avoid pathetic scenes, which I have a horror of, I have always so managed matters as to be betrayed and abandoned, my self-love being very ready to make that sacrifice to my repose of mind. So I fancy I have not left behind me in life many disconsolate Ariadnes; in our Parisian mythology, the arrival of Bacchus invariably precedes the departure of Theseus. Besides, even at the risk of giving you but a poor opinion of my power of loving, I must own that I have never felt for any one that mad, exclusive, all-absorbing passion of which everybody speaks without having experienced it perhaps. No woman has ever inspired me with the desire to

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attach her to myself by an indissoluble bond or made me dream of two lives blended into one, or wish to flee with her to that paradise of azure, light, and beauty which love, it is said, can create even in a hut or an attic."

"It does not follow, my dear Guy, that you are unable to feel passionate love. There are many varieties of love, and no doubt, in the place where the fate of souls is settled upon, you have been reserved to higher destinies. But you have still time, for spirits have no power over us save by our free consent. You are standing on the threshold of a boundless, deep, mysterious world, full of illusions and shadows, wherein contend influences for good or evil which a man must learn to distinguish. In that world are to be seen wonders and terrors fit to upset human reason. No one ever returns from its depths without bearing on his brow a pallor that time can never efface; the carnal eye cannot behold with impunity the things reserved for spiritual sight alone; these excursions beyond the material world are paid for by inexpressible fatigue and inspire at the same time desperate nostalgia. Stay your feet at that dread bourne; do not pass from this world into the other, and do not yield to the call

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that seeks to draw you beyond the bounds of material life. The enchanter is safe within the circle he traces around him and which the spirits cannot cross. Let reality be to you as that circle; do not overpass it, or you will lose your power. You see that, though I am a hierophant, I do not indulge in proselytism."

"Do you mean," said Malivert, "that I should run the risk of perilous adventures in that invisible world by which we are surrounded, and which reveals its existence to but a small number of privileged beings?"

"By no means," replied the Baron de Feroë. "Nothing that the eye of the flesh can note will happen to you, but your soul may remain for ever deeply troubled."

"Is the spirit, then, which does me the honour to concern itself with me of a dangerous character?"

"It is sympathetic, kindly, and loving. I have met it in the radiance of light. But heaven gives the vertigo as does the abyss. Remember the story of the shepherd that loved a star."

"Yet," replied Malivert, "what you said to me at Mme. d'Ymbercourt's seemed to be a warning against any terrestrial entanglement."

"I was bound to warn you," returned the Baron de

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Feroë, "in the event of your answering the manifestations of that spirit, but since you have not as yet done so, you are still your own master. Perhaps it would be best for you to remain in that condition and to lead your old life."

"And marry Mme. d'Ymbercourt," put in Guy de Malivert with an ironical smile.

"Why not?" said the Baron de Feroë. "She is young, beautiful, and loves you; I read in her glance the genuine grief your veiled refusal caused her. She might possibly acquire a soul."

"That is a risk I do not choose to run. Pray do not endeavour, dear Baron, through a kindly feeling which I quite understand, to tie me down to material life. I am more detached from it than may appear at first sight. The fact that I have ordered my days in pleasant and convenient fashion does not involve sensuality on my part. At bottom, comfort is a matter of indifference to me. If I have thought it best to appear careless and joyous rather than to affect a romantic melancholy, which is in very bad taste, it does not follow that the world as I find it delights and satisfies me. It is quite true that I do not maunder, in drawing-rooms, and in presence of an assembly of

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pretentious women, about my heart, or the ideal, or the passion of love, but I have kept my soul true and unstained, unspotted by any vulgar love, in the expectation of the coming of the unknown deity."

While Malivert spoke thus, with more earnestness than men of the world usually display, the eyes of Baron de Feroë lighted up and his face assumed an expression of enthusiasm which he generally concealed under a mask of icy indifference.

He was pleased to see that Guy resisted prosaic temptation and maintained his spiritual will.

"Since you have made up your mind, my dear Guy, return home, and you will no doubt receive some new communications. I have to stay; I won a hundred louis yesterday from d'Aversac, and I am going to give him his revenge."

"The rehearsal must be over, for I hear our friends returning and humming, very much out of tune, the airs they have failed to catch."

"Away with you, then; the discord would throw your soul out of harmony."

Guy shook hands with the Baron, and entered his carriage, which was waiting for him at the door of the club-house.

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V

GUY DE MALIVERT returned home, his mind made up to run the venture. Though he did not appear to be romantic, nevertheless he was so, but his proud, shy reserve led him to conceal his feelings, and he did not expect of others more than he was willing to give himself. His relations with society were pleasantly indifferent and in no way binding upon him; they were bonds that he could easily cast off at any moment, but it can be readily understood that he dreamed of a happiness which until now he had never experienced.

Acting upon what Baron de Feroë had told him at the club about the need of exercising his will in order to summon the spirits from the vasty deep to the confinès of our own world, Malivert concentrated all his powers within himself and mentally formulated his desire to enter into more direct communication with the mysterious spirit that he felt around him and that would not, in all likelihood, prove very restive,

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since it had of its own accord attempted to manifest itself.

Having done this, Malivert, who was in the room, half studio, half drawing-room, in which he was sitting at the beginning of this story, applied himself to listen and watch with the utmost attention. At first he neither saw nor heard anything, though the furniture, the statuettes, the pictures, the old carved dressers, the exotic curiosities, the trophies of weapons, struck him as having an unusual and extraordinary aspect, and a sort of fantastic lifelike appearance due to the lights and shadows cast upon them by the lamp. A Chinese grotesque of jade stone seemed to grin to the ears like an old man in his dotage, and a copy of the Venus of Milo, her pointed breasts standing out strongly in the light that fell on them against a dark background, assumed a disdainful look as she swelled her nostrils and drew down the corners of her mouth. Both the Chinese god and the Greek goddess disapproved of Malivert's undertaking, or at least the expression on the two lighted faces might have led him to believe this. Unconsciously Malivert's eyes, as if urged by a mental impulse, turned towards a Venetian mirror suspended on the Cordova leather tapestry.

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It was an eighteenth-century mirror, like those commonly seen in Loughi's "Lady at her Toilet" and "Leaving for the Ball," subjects often painted by that decadent Watteau, and like those to be found in the shops of second-hand dealers in the Ghetto. The glass itself was bevelled; the frame was composed of ornaments in cut glass, surmounted by a mass of scrolls and flowers in the same material, which, against the uniform tint of the background, sometimes resembled mat silver, sometimes flashed prismatic rays from their facets. Amid this sparkling and blazing, the glass itself, of small size like all Venetian mirrors, showed of a deep bluish-black, and resembled an opening into a void full of ideal darkness.

Curiously enough, none of the objects opposite the mirror were reflected in it, and it looked like one of the stage mirrors which the scene painter washes over with faint neutral tints to avoid the reflection of the auditorium.

A vague instinct led Malivert to feel that if any revelation was to be made to him, the mirror would prove to be the medium employed. He was fascinated by it, although as a rule he never looked at it, and it attracted his glance irresistibly. Yet, though he gazed

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at it intently, he could make out nothing but the black colour, made more intensely mysterious by the cut-glass framework. At last he thought he perceived on its surface a faint, milky whiteness, like a distant trembling light that appeared to be drawing nearer. He turned round to see what article in the room caused this reflection, but saw nothing. Brave though Malivert was, and he had proved his courage on more than one occasion, he felt the hair of his flesh stand up and the fear and trembling of which Job speaks. This time he was about to cross, knowingly and of his own free will, the dread threshold. He was about to step outside the circle which Nature has traced around man. Henceforth he might be thrown out of his orbit and revolve around some unknown point. Unbelievers may laugh at it, yet never was a step fraught with more serious consequences, and Guy fully realised its importance. An irresistible attraction impelled him on, however, and he continued to stare into the Venetian mirror. What was he about to see? Under what form would the spirit present itself so as to become appreciable to his human perception? Would it be a sweet or a terrible figure? Would it cause joy or terror? Although the

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luminousness within the glass had not yet assumed any definite form, Guy was convinced that it would prove to be a feminine spirit. It could not be otherwise, he thought, as he recollected the sigh of the evening before that still sounded softly in his heart. Had that spirit belonged to this earth, or had it come from a distant planet or a higher region? That he could not tell. However, judging by what Baron de Feroë had said, he judged that it must be a soul that had lived on earth, and which, drawn by reasons he would probably learn later, was returning to its former abode.

The luminousness in the mirror began to assume a more distinct form and faint colours, immaterial, so to speak, which would have dulled the pigments on the brightest of palettes. It was rather a suggestion of colour than colour itself; a vapour flushed with light and of such delicate tints that human words are incapable of rendering it. Guy stared on, a prey to nervous, intense emotion. The image became plainer and plainer, without, nevertheless, acquiring the hard precision of reality, and Guy de Malivert at last discerned, enclosed within the border of the mirror as within a frame, the head of a young woman, or of a

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young girl rather, by the side of whose loveliness earthly beauty was but as a shadow.

A faint, rosy flush gave colour to the head, on which light and shade were scarcely noticeable, and which did not need, as do earthly faces, the contrast of chiaroscuro to bring out the modelling, for it was lighted by another light than ours. The hair, halo-like, softly outlined the brow like a golden vapour. The eyes, half cast down, were of a dark blue, infinitely sweet, recalling the spaces of heaven that at sunset are flushed with violet tints. The fine, small nose was ideally delicate; a smile like that Leonardo da Vinci gives to his female faces, but more tender and less ironical, curved the lips adorably; the willowy neck, bending somewhat under the weight of the head, was bowed forward and blended into a silvery half-tint that might have served for light to another figure.

This slight sketch, necessarily written with words intended to describe earthly things, can give but a most imperfect idea of the apparition that Guy de Malivert beheld in the Venetian mirror. And was it with the eye of the flesh or the eye of the soul that he beheld it? Did the image really exist, and could it have been seen by any one not under the same nervous influence as

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Guy? That is a difficult question to answer. This much may be said, that what he saw, though it was *like* the face of a beautiful woman, in no respect *resembled* what, on this earth, is called a beautiful female face. The features were similar, but they were purer, transfigured, idealised, and rendered perceptible by an immaterial substance, so to speak, only just dense enough to be visible in the gross earthly atmosphere by eyes not yet freed from the veils that covered them. No doubt the spirit or the soul that was entering into communication with Guy de Malivert had borrowed the form of its former perishable body, but such as it must have become in a more subtile, more ethereal region where the ghosts of things alone and not things themselves can exist. The vision was an ineffable delight to Guy; the feeling of fear which he had experienced at first had vanished, and he gave himself up unreservedly to the strangeness of the situation, discussing nothing, admitting everything and resolved to think the supernatural natural. He drew nearer the mirror, in the hope of noting the features more clearly; the image remained as it had at first appeared to him, very close and yet very distant, resembling the projection, upon the inner surface of a crystal, of a figure placed at a

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distance beyond the power of man to measure. The reality of what he saw, if the expression may be allowed in this connection, was evidently elsewhere, in deep, distant, mysterious regions inaccessible to mortals, on the outskirts of which even the boldest thinker scarce dares venture. In vain did Guy try to connect the face with some of his earthly memories; it was wholly new to him, and yet he seemed to recognise it. Where had he seen it? Assuredly not in this sublunar, terraqueous world.

This, then, was the form under which *Spirite* desired to show herself. Malivert seeking for a name by which to call to himself the apparition he had beheld in the mirror, had given her this appellation until he could ascertain what name would suit her better. Presently it seemed to him that the image was growing fainter and vanishing within the depths of the mirror. It now showed only as the light vapour of a breath, and even that vapour disappeared in its turn. The passing of the vision was marked by the sudden reflection of a gilded frame suspended on the wall opposite the mirror, which had regained its usual power of reflection.

When he could no longer doubt that the apparition would not return, on that evening at least, Guy threw

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himself into an arm-chair, and although the clock had just struck two in the morning, its silvery sound advising him to retire, he could not make up his mind to go to bed. He felt fatigued, it is true; the novel emotions, the first step into an unknown world had brought on the wakeful fatigue that prevents sleep. Besides, he feared to miss another manifestation of Spirite if he should fall asleep.

His feet stretched out on the fender before the fire that had burned up again of itself, Guy thought over the events that had just taken place and the very possibility of which he would have denied a couple of days before. He thought of the lovely head recalling, as if to cause them to be forgotten like vain shadows, the beauties revealed in dreams by the imagination of poets or the genius of painters. He discovered in it infinite, inexpressible suavity, innumerable charms that neither nature nor art could unite in one and the same face and he augured well, from the sample he had beheld, of the looks of the inhabitants of the world beyond. Then he asked himself by what strange sympathy, by what mysterious and hitherto unconfessed affinity that angel, that sylph, that soul, that spirit, of the nature of which he was as yet ignorant,

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and which he was unable to connect with any immaterial order, could have been drawn towards him from the infinite depths. He dared not flatter himself with having inspired love in a being of a higher nature, for conceit was no trait of Malivert, yet he could not help owning that Spirite seemed to experience for him, Guy de Malivert, a mere mortal, a sentiment entirely feminine in its character and that in this world would have been called jealousy. The sigh she had uttered, the letter of which she had changed the wording, the warning whispered at Mme. d'Ymbercourt's door, and the remark suggested by her, no doubt, to the Swedish baron proved it. What Guy did understand quite plainly and at once was that he himself was madly, desperately, hopelessly in love ; a prey all of a sudden to a passion that eternity itself could not satiate.

From that moment every woman he had ever known was totally forgotten by him. On the appearance of Spirite, he had forgotten earthly loves, just as Romeo forgot Rosalind when he beheld Juliet. Had he been Don Juan in person, the three thousand lovely names would have vanished of themselves from his book. He did experience a sense of terror on feeling himself a prey to that sudden flame that swept away

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thought, will, and resistance and left nothing alive in his soul but passion. It was too late, however, and he no longer belonged to himself. Baron de Feroë was right, and Guy had found how dangerous it is for a mortal man to overstep the bounds of life and to venture, in material form, among the spirits if he bears not the golden branch to which all spirits bow.

A fearful thought occurred to Malivert. How was he to bring Spirite back if she did not choose to reappear? If there were no means of doing so, how would he be able to bear with the darkness of the sun after having contemplated real light for a moment? He was filled with a sense of utter misfortune and sank into deep despondency; he passed through an instant, as long as eternity itself, of hideous despair. The mere possibility, unconfirmed by any indication of its truth, brought the tears to his eyes, and try as he might to restrain them, ashamed as he felt at the exhibition of such weakness, they overflowed and slowly rolled down his cheeks. As he wept, he felt, with delight and surprise, a veil more tenuous than the finest of stuffs, like woven air, being passed over his face, absorbing, drying in its caress the bitter drops he had shed. The touch of a butterfly's wing could not

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have been softer, yet it was no illusion, for he thrice felt it, and when his tears had been dried, Malivert thought he perceived a diaphanous white flake vanishing in the shadows, like a cloudlet in the heavens.

This attentive and tender sympathy convinced Malivert that Spirite, who seemed to be ever fluttering around him, would answer his call and find, thanks to her higher intelligence as a superior being, the means of communicating easily with him. Spirite could enter the world in which he lived, to the extent, at least, that a soul can mingle with the living, while he, a mortal, was prevented from following her within the ideal region in which she moved, by the obstacle of his carnal body. It will surprise no one that Malivert passed from the deepest despair to the truest joy. If a mere mortal woman can ten times in the course of one day plunge you into the lowest depths or transport you to the highest heavens, inspire you with the desire of blowing your brains out or of purchasing on the shores of Lake Como a villa in which to shelter your loves forever, it may easily be understood that the feelings awakened by a spirit are infinitely deeper.

Guy's love for Spirite may, it is true, appear rather sudden, but it should be remembered that love is often

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called out by a single glance, and that a woman seen through a pair of opera glasses at the theatre does not differ very greatly from the reflection of a soul seen in a mirror; that many serious cases of passionate love have begun in a manner precisely similar, and that besides, though he himself was not aware of the fact, Guy's love was far less sudden than it seemed to be. Spirite had for a long time been haunting him, preparing his unconscious soul for supernatural communications, suggesting to him, in the midst of his worldly frivolity, thoughts deeper than vain appearances, inspiring him with the nostalgia of the ideal by vague remembrances of higher spheres, drawing him away from idle loves, and making him foresee a happiness that earth could not give. She it was who had broken the threads spun around Guy; who had torn away the webs in which he was to be caught; who had shown him the ridiculous side or the perfidy of a mistress of a day, and until now had kept him free from any lasting tie. She had stopped him on the very brink of the irrevocable, for, though nothing had happened to Guy that was appreciably significant from the human point of view, he had come to a crucial point in his life; his fate was hanging in the mysterious scales:

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this it was that had made Spirite resolve to issue from the shadow in which her occult protection of him was concealed, and to reveal herself to him, since he could no longer be directed by secret influences alone. Why did she interest herself thus in him? Did she yield to an impulse of her own, or did she obey an order emanating from that radiant sphere where, as Dante says, one *can* what one *wills?* She alone could tell, and the time was perhaps near when she would do so.

Malivert at last went to bed and soon fell asleep. His slumbers were light, bright, and full of a wondrous brilliancy that resembled visions rather than dreams. Vast azure spaces, in which the long trails of light formed endless perspectives of silvern and golden vales, opened before his closed eyes; then the picture would vanish, leaving visible in even greater depths streams of blinding phosphoresence, like unto a cascade of molten suns falling from eternity into the infinite; in its turn the cascade disappeared, and in its place was outspread a heaven of that intense, luminous whiteness that of yore clothed the three transfigured figures on Mount Tabor. From its depths, that seemed the very paroxysm of splendour, flashed here and there bursts of stars, brighter gleams, still more

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vivid scintillations. There was in that light, against which the most brilliant stars would have shown black, something like the swelling and surging of an incessant *becoming*. From time to time, as pass birds across the sun's disk, sped across that vast irradiation spirits visible, not through the shadow they cast, but through a different kind of light. Among them Guy thought he recognised Spirite; nor was he mistaken, though she seemed to be but a brilliant point in space, but a globule in the incandescent brightness. Spirite had desired to show herself to her lover, by means of the dream she evoked, in her real home. The soul, freed during the hours of sleep from the bonds of the flesh, lent itself to the vision, and for a few moments Guy was enabled to see with the inner sight, not the outer world itself, the contemplation of which is permitted only to souls wholly freed, but a ray filtering under the imperfectly closed door of the unknown, as from a darkened street one sees under the door of a palace lighted within a beam of brilliant light that suggests the splendour of the feast.

Spirite, not wishing to fatigue Guy's yet too human organ, dispelled the visions, and wafted him from ecstasy into ordinary sleep. He felt, as he fell back into

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the night of common dreams, that he was being caught, as though he were a shell-fish, in a matrix of black marble, in a darkness of deepest intensity. Then all passed away, even that sensation, and for two hours Guy rested in the non-existence whence life arises more youthful and refreshed.

He slept until ten in the morning, and Jack, who had been awaiting his awakening, seeing that his eyes were fully opened, pushed open the door that he had held ajar, entered the room, drew back the window curtains, and directing his steps towards Malivert's bed, handed him on a silver salver two letters that had just been delivered. The one was from Mme. d'Ymbercourt, the other from Baron de Feroë. It was the latter that Guy opened first.

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SPIRITE

VI

THE Baron's note contained these words merely: "Has Cæsar crossed the Rubicon?" Mme. d'Ymbercourt's, much less brief, insinuated, in cleverly turned phrases, that indefinite gossip should not be taken seriously, and that to break off suddenly visits that had become habitual would perhaps be more compromising than to make them more frequent. The note closed with a remark about Adelina Patti, the purpose of which appeared to be that a seat would be kept for him in box 22 at the Opera. Guy certainly admired the young diva greatly, but in his present state of mind he preferred to hear her some other evening, and determined he would find a way to avoid the appointment.

The human mind has a tendency to doubt that extraordinary events have taken place when the environment in which these have occurred has resumed its normal appearance. So Malivert, on looking into the Venetian mirror by daylight, asked himself, as he

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gazed at its silvery surface framed in by the cut-glass border, and as he saw in it the reflection of his own face only, whether it was true that that piece of polished glass had actually shown him, only a few hours since, the loveliest face the eye of man had ever beheld. In vain did his reason attempt to explain the celestial vision as the effect of a dream, of a vain fancy, — his heart gave his reason the lie. Difficult as it is to appreciate the reality of the supernatural, he felt that it was all true and that behind the outwardly calm appearances surged a whole world of mystery. Yet nothing was changed in the apartment, and a visitor would not have noticed anything peculiar in it; as far as Guy was concerned, however, the door of every dresser, of every cupboard, might prove to be one opening into the infinite. The least noises, which he took for warnings, made him start.

In order to get rid of his nervous condition of excitement, he resolved to take a long drive. He had a fancy that Spirite would appear at night only; besides, if she wished to communicate with him, her fantastic ubiquity enabled her to find him and to manifest herself to him wherever he might be. In this affair, if such vague, frail, aerial, impalpable relations may be called

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an affair, Malivert's rôle was necessarily passive. His ideal mistress could enter his world at any time she chose, but he was unable to follow her in the mysterious spaces wherein she dwelt.

It had been snowing two nights before, and, a rare thing in Paris, the white carpet had not melted, under the influence of a soft wind, into that cold slush worse even than the black slush of the old pavements or the yellow mud of the new asphalt. It had been hardened by a sharp frost and crunched under the foot like crushed glass under carriage wheels. Grimalkin was a capital trotter, and Malivert had brought back from Saint Petersburg a sleigh and a complete set of Russian harness. Opportunities of enjoying sleighing are infrequent in our temperate climate, and sportsmen seize on them with avidity. Guy was very proud of his sleigh, unquestionably the best turned-out in Paris, and which might have figured advantageously in the races on the Neva Place. He rather enjoyed the idea of a rapid drive in the bracing icy air. He had learned, during the winter he had spent in Russia, to enjoy the arctic delights of snow and cold; he loved to glide over the white carpet scarce rayed by the steel of the skates, driving a fast horse with both hands, like an izvostchick.

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He had the sleigh brought round, and soon reached the Place de la Concorde and the Champs-Élysées. The road had not been cared for and improved as on the Neva Place, but the snow was deep enough to allow the sleigh to glide along without bumping too much. A Parisian winter cannot be expected to be as perfect as a Russian one. At the Bois de Boulogne he might have thought he was in the Islands, so even and white did the snow lie, especially in the side drives where fewer horsemen and carriages are met with. Guy de Malivert turned down a road leading through a wood of firs, the dark limbs of which, laden with snow that the wind had not shaken off, recalled to him his drives in Russia. He had plenty of furs, and the northern blast seemed to him but a zephyr by comparison with the cold gales he had faced in that country.

The approaches to the lake were crowded, and the number of carriages as large as on fine days in autumn or spring, when all sorts and conditions of men are attracted to Longchamp by the races in which figure celebrities of the turf. In carriages hung on easy springs were to be seen ladies belonging to the great world, warmly covered with huge bear-skin robes edged with scarlet, and pressing against their fur-

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lined satin cloaks warm zibeline sable muffs. On the box-seats, covered with heavily embroidered hammer-cloths, coachmen of great houses, seated majestically, their shoulders protected by fur capes, looked as disdainfully as did their mistresses, at the women not in society who were driving themselves in extravagant and pretentious vehicles drawn by ponies. There were also numerous closed carriages, for the idea of driving in an open carriage with the thermometer only twelve or thirteen degrees above zero, strikes Parisians as far too arctic. A certain number of sleighs were to be seen among the many wheeled carriages, for the snow had evidently not been anticipated; Malivert's sleigh, however, easily surpassed all others. Some Russian noblemen, idling around, as happy as reindeer in snow, condescended to approve of the elegant curves of the *douga* and of the correct way in which the harness straps were fastened to it.

It was about three o'clock; the lower portion of the sky was veiled by a soft haze, and against the delicate gray background stood out the slender twigs of the leafless trees which, with their slender branches stripped of foliage, looked like skeleton leaves. A rayless sun, resembling a great red seal, was sinking

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through the haze. The lake was covered with skaters, three or four days of frost having made the ice thick enough to bear the weight of the crowd. The snow, swept off the surface and heaped up on the edges of the shore, showed the dark, polished surface rayed in every direction by the blades of the skates, like the mirrors in restaurants on which lovers scratch their names with a diamond. On the banks stood people hiring skates to *bourgeois* amateurs, whose tumbles formed the comic intermedes of the winter festival, like the ballet in the *Prophète* on a large scale. In the centre of the lake the more famous skaters, dressed in neat costumes, indulged in fancy feats. They flew like the wind, swung abruptly around, avoided collisions, stopped short by digging in the heel of their skates, cut curves, grapevines, figures of eight, letters, like Arab horsemen who, with the rowels of their spurs, write the name of Allah on the flanks of their steeds. Others pushed around, in light hand-sledges quaintly ornamented, handsome ladies wrapped in furs, who leaned back and smiled at them, excited by the speed and the cold air. Some guided by the hand elegant young women, wearing Russian or Hungarian fur caps, jackets frogged and braided, and trimmed

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with blue fox, bright-coloured skirts, looped up with clasps, and pretty patent-leather boots, crossed, like cothurns, by the straps of the skates. Others again, racing each other, flew along on one foot, heading forward like the Hippomenes and the Atalanta under the chestnut trees in one of the parterres of the Tuileries. The best way to win the race, now as formerly, might well have been to drop in front of these Atalantas dressed by Worth a golden apple or two; but there were those among them of such rank that even a diamond brooch would not have stopped them for an instant. The constant passing and repassing of so many people dressed with such strange elegance and rich originality, making a sort of fancy-dress ball on the ice, formed a graceful, charming, animated spectacle worthy of the brush of Watteau, Lancret, or Baron. Some of the groups recalled the paintings placed above the doors in old châteaux representing the Four Seasons, and in which Winter is personified by gallants pushing, in swan-necked sledges, marchionesses wearing velvet masks, who turn their fur muffs into receptacles for love letters. In the present case, it is true, the pretty faces, made rosier by the cold, lacked the masks, but the veils embroidered with steel

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beads or fringed with jet made a fair substitute for them.

Malivert pulled up by the lake shore, and watched the entertaining and picturesque scene, the chief performers in which he was acquainted with. He was enough of a society man to follow the loves, intrigues, and flirtations that agitated the select few whom one soon learns to distinguish from the vulgar herd, the troop of supernumeraries that surrounds, without understanding it, every performance, and whose use is to prevent the action from standing out too clearly and too bare. But he looked on without any interest in the scene, and he even saw pass by a very charming lady, who had formerly favoured him, and who was now leaning in loving, familiar fashion upon the arm of a handsome skater, without feeling the least trace of jealousy.

Grimalkin was impatiently pawing the snow-covered ground, and presently Guy gave him his head, turned in the direction of the city and drove along the Lake Avenue, up and down which carriages were constantly coming and going, to the great delight of the foot passengers who appeared to enjoy seeing for the tenth or twelfth time in the course of an hour the

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same yellow-bodied coach with a solemn dowager in it, and the same little dark-green coupé, with a Havana poodle at the window, and inside a light o' love with her hair dressed like a poodle's coat.

Guy, as he drove homewards, checked the speed of his horse, to avoid running over any one in the crowded road; and besides, it is not good form to drive fast on that fashionable thoroughfare. He saw advancing in his direction a carriage he would rather not have met. Mme. d'Ymbercourt was a chilly person, and Guy had not supposed that she would come out in such cold weather, which merely went to show how little he knew women; for no known cold would keep a woman from going to a fashionable drive and showing herself where she should do so. Now, in that particular winter, the correct thing was to go to the Bois de Boulogne, and to take a turn on the frozen lake, the meeting-place, between three and five in the afternoon, of all the celebrities, in one way or another, that *tout Paris* can manage to collect in one spot. A woman of any standing would never forgive herself did her name fail to appear among those of the beauties of the day in the columns of some well-informed newspaper. Now Mme. d'Ymbercourt was beautiful

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enough, rich enough, and fashionable enough, to consider herself bound to conform to the requirements of fashion, and therefore, though shivering a little under the furs in which she was wrapped up, she was performing her pilgrimage to the lake. Malivert was tempted to let Grimalkin, who would not have objected, swing into his fastest trot, but Mme. d'Ymbercourt had caught sight of him and he was forced to drive alongside her carriage.

He chatted on various indifferent subjects, in an uninterested way, putting forward as a pretext for not accepting her invitation to the Opera that he had to go to a dinner, when a sleigh passed so close as almost to touch his own. This sleigh was drawn by a superb horse of the Orloff breed; it was iron gray, with a white mane and a tail every hair in which gleamed like silver. Held in by a Russian coachman with a long beard, green cloth caftan and fur-bordered velvet cap, the horse champed its bit and stepped along throwing up its head and occasionally touching his knees with it. The beauty of the equipage, the correct get-up of the coachman, the handsome horse attracted Guy's attention, but great was his amazement when in the lady seated in the sleigh, and whom he had at first assumed

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to be one of those Russian princesses that come to Paris for a season or two to dazzle the capital by their eccentric display of wealth — supposing that Paris can be dazzled by anything — he recognised, or thought he recognised, a likeness to a face he had had but a glimpse of, but which was now forever ineffaceably imprinted on his memory, though he certainly did not expect to meet with it in the Bois de Boulogne, after having seen it appear, as Helen to Faust, in a sort of magic mirror. At the sight of her he started so suddenly that Grimalkin, feeling the nervous thrill, plunged forward. Guy, casting a word of apology to Mme. d'Ymbercourt to the effect that he could not hold in his horse, followed the sleigh, which increased its pace.

As if surprised at being followed, the lady looked half round to see who was so bold as to do so, and although she showed only a small portion of her profile, Guy made out under the black net-veiling wavy golden hair, deep blue eyes, and an ideal complexion, such as the snow on lofty mountain-tops, flushed by the beams of the setting sun, can alone give any idea of. She wore turquoise earrings, and on the part of the neck showing between the collar of her fur pelisse and her hat, curled a stray lock of hair, light as down and fine

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as a child's hair. It was, indeed, the face that had appeared to him the night before, with the added reality needed by a phantom in broad daylight and close to the lake in the Bois de Boulogne. How did Spirite happen to be there in so charmingly human a form, visible, no doubt, to others as well as to himself? for it was difficult to admit that, even were the apparition itself impalpable, the coachman, the horse, and the sleigh were likewise unsubstantial shadows. Guy did not waste his time trying to solve the problem, for, in order to make sure that he had not been deceived by a likeness of the sort that disappears when it is examined closely, he endeavoured to pass the sleigh so as to have a good look at the mysterious face. He allowed Grimalkin to step out at his best gait, whereat the good horse went off like an arrow, his breath, for a few moments, steaming upon the back of the sleigh Guy was pursuing. Nevertheless, although Grimalkin was a very fast horse, he was no match for the Russian stepper, perhaps the finest of his breed that Malivert had ever seen. The caftan-clad coachman clicked his tongue, and the iron gray in a few bounds put space sufficient between the two sleighs to reassure his mistress, if she happened to be disturbed by the proximity of Guy.

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No doubt the object of the lady who bore such a startling resemblance to Spirite was not to discourage Malivert's pursuit, for her sleigh was again driven at a more moderate pace. The race had taken the pair into the Fir Avenue, at this moment empty of carriages, and the chase settled down in earnest. Yet Grimalkin did not once manage to get alongside of the Orloff stepper; the best he could do was to prevent the distance between the sleighs from increasing. The hoofs of the horses sent lumps of white snow flying against the dash-boards, where they broke into frosty dust, and the two noble animals were enveloped in clouds of steam as in classic clouds. For one moment, at the end of the drive, barred by the file of carriages driving down the main avenue, the two sleighs were side by side, and Guy was enabled to see for a second or two the face of the supposed Russian lady, whose veil was blown aside by the wind. A celestially arch smile played upon her lips, the curve of which recalled that of Mona Lisa's. Her eyes were starry and blue like sapphires, and a rosier flush warmed her velvety cheeks. Spirite, for it was she, drew down her veil, the coachman urged on his horse, and the animal dashed forward furiously. A cry of terror escaped

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Guy, for at that very instant a carriage was crossing the drive, and, forgetting that Spirite, as a disembodied spirit, was safe from all earthly accidents, he looked for a dreadful collision; but the horse, the coachman, and the sleigh passed through the carriage as through a mist, and were speedily out of Malivert's sight. Grimalkin seemed terrified; nervous shudders ran all over his limbs, usually so firm, as if he were puzzled by the disappearance of the sleigh. Animals have wonderfully deep instinct, and often see what escapes man's careless glance. Many of them seem endowed with a sense of the supernatural. But Grimalkin soon calmed down on joining the procession of undoubted carriages along the lake shore.

As he drove down the Avenue de l'Impératrice, Guy met Baron de Feroë who was also returning from the Bois in a light drojky. After asking Malivert for a light for his cigar, the Baron said to him, half mysteriously, half quizzically: "Mme. d'Ymbercourt will not be very well pleased, and you will be scolded in rare fashion at the Opera to-night, if you are imprudent enough to go. I fancy that sleigh-race can scarcely have been to her taste. Meanwhile you had better tell Jack to throw a blanket over

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Grimalkin, if you do not want him to catch his death of cold."

Guy was past being amazed at strange things. It had not appeared to him at all out of the way that a sleigh should pass through a carriage. This facility in traversing obstacles against which terrestrial vehicles would have been smashed showed that it was indeed a mysterious equipage come from the spheres of the impossible, and which could contain Spirite only. Unquestionably Spirite was jealous, or at least — for all her actions proved it — she desired to keep Malivert and Mme. d'Ymbercourt apart; and evidently she had gone about doing so in the right way, for as he turned into the open space of the Arc de l'Étoile, Guy saw the Countess in her carriage appearing to listen very attentively to the doubtless gallant conversation of M. d'Aversac, who was bending elegantly over his horse's withers as he walked it by her side.

"That is to pay me for the sleigh," said Malivert to himself; "but I am not the kind of fellow to be egged on in that way. D'Aversac is a sham clever fellow, just as Mme. d'Ymbercourt is a sham beauty. They are an excellent match for each other. I can judge them in the most disinterested fashion, since

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affairs of this sort have ceased to concern me. They will be a well assorted pair, as the song says."

Such was the net result of Mme. d'Ymbercourt's manœuvres. On perceiving Guy she had bent forward, perhaps a little more than was proper, to reply to the sweet sayings of M. d'Aversac. The poor woman thought she might recall her lukewarm adorer by touching his self-love. She had had a glimpse of Spirite, and she had guessed that she had a formidable rival in her. The eagerness displayed by Guy, usually so cool, in pursuing the mysterious sleigh and the woman whom no one had ever met at the Bois, had stung her to the quick, for she had easily seen through the excuse so hurriedly given, and did not believe that Grimalkin had run away. D'Aversac, who was swelling with satisfaction, for he was not in the habit of being so well treated, modestly attributed to his own merit what he would have been wiser to ascribe to feminine annoyance. He even magnanimously pitied poor Malivert, who had reckoned too surely on possessing Mme. d'Ymbercourt's affections. All the projects which the gentleman's conceit, helped by appearances, immediately proceeded to build up on this slight event, may easily be imagined.

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On that day Guy was engaged to dinner to people with whom it would be difficult to fail in keeping an appointment made long before. Fortunately there were many guests, and his absentmindedness was not noticed. The dinner over, he exchanged a few words with the mistress of the house, and having thus sufficiently made plain that he had come, he performed a masterly retreat towards the second drawing-room, where he shook hands with men of distinction with whom he was acquainted and who had withdrawn there to talk more freely of important or secret matters; then he vanished and went to his club, where he expected to meet Baron de Feroë. He did find him seated in front of a small card-table, playing écarté with the radiant d'Aversac, of whom it is only just to say that he endeavoured to repress his joy in order to avoid humiliating Malivert. Contrary to the proverb, "Fortunate at cards unfortunate in love," d'Aversac was winning, and if he had been at all superstitious he might have felt some doubt as to the soundness of his hopes. The game having come to an end, the Baron, as he was the loser, could rise, pretexting fatigue, and simply refuse the revenge offered by his adversary. Feroë and Guy de Malivert

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went out together, and walked up and down the Boulevard near the club.

"What will the frequenters of that drawing-room called the Bois," said Guy to the Baron, "think of the lady and the sleigh, the horse and the coachman, all so very striking and yet unknown to every one?"

"The vision manifested itself but to you, to the Countess, on whom Spirite desired to act, and to me who, as one of the initiated, can see what is invisible to other men. You may be sure that if Mme. d'Ymbercourt speaks of the handsome Russian princess and the splendid stepper, nobody will know what she is talking about."

"Do you think," asked Malivert of the Baron, "that I shall soon see Spirite again?"

"You may expect an early visit," replied de Feroë. "The communications I receive from the other world inform me that much interest is taken in you there."

"Shall it be to-night or to-morrow?—in my rooms or in a place where I do not expect to see her, as happened to-day?" cried Malivert, as impatient as a passionate lover or a neophyte eager to penetrate a mystery.

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"I cannot quite tell you that," replied the Swedish Baron. "The spirits, for whom time does not exist or has ceased to exist, do not reckon hours, since they live in eternity. As far as Spirite is concerned, if she saw you to-night or in a thousand years, it would be exactly the same thing. But spirits that deign to enter into communication with us poor mortals, remember the brevity of our life, the imperfection and the fragility of our organs; they know that between one apparition and another, if measured by the eternal dial, the perishable envelope of man has time to dissolve into dust a hundred times over; it is probable, therefore, that Spirite will not keep you waiting. She has descended to our sphere, and appears to have made up her mind to go back to her own only after carrying out her project."

"What is that project?" said Malivert. "You, to whom nothing is closed in that supernatural world, must know the motive which directs this pure spirit towards a being yet subjected to material conditions."

"On that point, my dear Guy," replied Baron de Feroë, "my lips are sealed. I may not repeat the secrets of the spirits. I was warned to put you on

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your guard against any terrestrial entanglement, and to prevent your entering into bonds which might perhaps chain your soul to a place in which it would suffer from the eternal regret of having lost its freedom. My mission does not go beyond that."

Thus chatting, Malivert and the Baron, followed by their carriages which were being driven along the pavement, reached the Madeleine, the Greek columns of which, silvered by the pale beams of a winter moon, looked at the end of the broad Rue Royale something like the Parthenon, a resemblance which disappears with daylight. On arriving there the two friends separated and got into their respective coupés.

On reaching home, Malivert threw himself into his arm-chair and, his elbow leaning on the table, began to think. Spirite's apparition in the mirror had inspired him with the immaterial desire, the winged volition to which the sight of an angel gives birth, but her presence on the lake shore, under a more real feminine form, had lighted in his heart the fire of human love. He felt himself suffused with burning effluvia, and possessed by that absolute love which even eternal possession does not satisfy. As he was thinking, his

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hand outstretched on the table covered with papers, he saw against the dark background of the Turkish table-cover the outlines of another hand, slender, of a perfection unequalled by art and that nature would in vain attempt to reach; a tenuous hand with long fingers, polished onyx-like nails; on the back of the hand showed a few veins of azure like the polished reflections which colour the milky opal, and it was lighted by a light which was certainly not that of the lamp. The rosy freshness of the tone and the ideal delicacy of the form proved conclusively that it could be Spirite's hand only. The small, clean, well-turned, high-bred wrist ended in a mist of soft lace. As if to plainly mark that the hand was there but as a sign, the arm and the body were wanting. While Guy gazed at it with eyes no longer amazed at anything extraordinary, the fingers of the hand stretched out on one of the sheets of writing-paper thrown confusedly on the table and began to simulate the movements of one writing. They seemed to trace lines, and when they had gone over the whole page with the rapidity of an actor writing a letter in a play, Guy caught hold of the paper, expecting to find on it written sentences, known or unknown signs. The paper was perfectly white.

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Guy looked at the sheet with considerable disappointment. He put it nearer the lamp, examined it in every way, made the light fall upon it in every possible manner without discovering the least trace of writing, and yet the hand was continuing upon another sheet the same imaginary work, apparently producing no result.

"What means this?" asked Malivert of himself. "Can Spirite have written with sympathetic ink that one must heat in order to bring out the letters? But her mysterious fingers hold neither pen nor shadow of a pen. What does it mean? Am I to serve myself as secretary to this spirit, to be my own medium — to use the consecrated term? The spirits, it is said, which can produce illusions and appearances and call up in the brain of those whom they haunt fearful or superb spectacles, are incapable of acting upon material reality and of displacing even a straw."

He remembered the impulse which had led him to write the note to Mme. d'Ymbercourt, and it occurred to him that by nervous influence Spirite might, perhaps, succeed in dictating to him inwardly what she wished to say to him. All he had to do was to let his hand go and to still his own thoughts as much as he could,

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so that they should not mingle with those of the spirit. Collecting himself and abstracting himself from the external world, Guy calmed his over-excited brain, turned up a little the wick of the lamp, took the pen, dipped it in the ink, placed his hand on the paper, and, his heart beating with timid hope, waited.

Very soon he experienced a curious sensation. It seemed to him that he was losing the sense of his own personality, that his individual remembrances were vanishing like those of a confused dream, that his thoughts were disappearing like birds in the heavens. Although his body was still near the table, preserving the same attitude, Guy was inwardly absent; he had vanished, disappeared. Another soul, or at least another mind had taken the place of his own and was directing those servants who, to act, were awaiting the unknown master. The nerves of his fingers trembled and began to execute movements of which he was unconscious, the pen began to move on the paper, tracing rapid signs in Guy's handwriting, slightly modified by the external impulse. This is what Spirite dictated to her medium. This confession of the outer world was found among Malivert's papers, and I have been permitted to transcribe it.

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SPIRITE'S DICTATION

"First, you must know the being, undefinable by you, who has entered into your life. However penetrating you may be, you cannot succeed in making out its true nature, and as in a badly written tragedy, in which the hero states his names, titles, and references, I am obliged to explain myself; but I have this excuse, — that no one else can do it for me. Your intrepid heart, which did not hesitate to confront at my call the mysterious terrors of the unknown, does not need to be reassured. Besides, even did danger exist, it would not prevent your pursuing the adventure. The invisible world, of which this world is but the veil, has its pitfalls and abysses, but you shall not fall into any of them. Spirits of falsehood and evil traverse it; there are angels of darkness as there are angels of light, revolted powers and submissive powers, beneficent and harmful forces. The lower portion of the mystic ladder, the summit of which is lost in eternal light, is shrouded in darkness. I hope that, with my help, you will ascend the luminous rounds. I am neither angel nor demon, nor one of the intermediary spirits who bear through space the Divine Will as

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the nervous fluid communicates to the limbs of the body the human will. I am merely a soul still awaiting judgment and allowed by divine goodness to anticipate a favourable sentence. I, too, have dwelt on your earth, and I could repeat the melancholy epitaph of the shepherd in Poussin's picture, '*Et in Arcadia ego.*' Do not, because I quote Latin, mistake me for the soul of a literary woman. In the place where I am everything is known intuitively, and the various languages spoken by humankind before and after the confusion of tongues are equally familiar to us. Words are but the shadows of ideas and we possess the idea itself in its essential state. If age could exist in a place where time is not, I should be very young in my new country. It is only a few days since, freed by death, I left the atmosphere which you breathe and to which I am recalled by a feeling that the passage from one world to another has not effaced. My terrestrial life, or rather, my last apparition on your planet, was very short, but it was sufficient to give me time to learn how deeply a loving soul may suffer. When Baron de Feroë sought to ascertain the nature of the spirit the vague manifestations of which troubled you, and when he asked you if ever a woman or a girl

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had died of a broken heart on your account, he was nearer the truth than he believed, and although you can recall nothing of the kind, since you were unaware of it, the remark deeply troubled you and your confusion was ill concealed under a playfully sceptical denial.

"You never knew it, yet my life touched yours. Your eyes looked elsewhere, and as far as you were concerned, I was lost in the shadow.

"The first time I saw you was in the parlour of the Convent of the Birds, where you went to visit your sister, who was boarding there as I was. She was in a more advanced class, for I was then only thirteen or fourteen at most, and I seemed younger, for I was very frail, dainty, and fair. You paid no attention then to the little chit, to the child who, while busy eating the chocolate creams which her mother had brought her, glanced timidly at you. You were then about twenty or twenty-two. In my childish simplicity I thought you very handsome. The air of kindness and affection with which you spoke to your sister touched and attracted me, and I wished I had a brother like you. My childish imagination went no farther. As Mlle. de Malivert had finished her education, she

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left the convent, and you not did come again. But your image was never effaced from my remembrance; it remained on the white parchment of my soul like those light outlines traced in pencil by a skilled hand which are found again long afterwards, almost invisible but persisting, the only traces at times of a vanished hand. The idea that so great a personage could ever notice me, who was still in the youngest class and treated somewhat disdainfully by the older boarders, would have been much too ambitious, and did not even occur to me, at least at that time. But I very often thought of you, and in those chaste romances woven by the most innocent imaginations, you it was who always played the part of Prince Charming, who delivered me from fancied perils, who carried me off through underground ways, who put to flight corsairs and brigands and brought me back to the King my father. For such a hero as you were must have at least an Infanta or a Princess, and I modestly assumed that rank. At other times the romance changed into a pastoral; you were a shepherd and I was a shepherdess, and our flocks mingled in tender green meadows. Without suspecting it, you formed a very considerable part of my life, and you

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orded over it. It was to you that I ascribed all my little successes at school, and I worked with all my strength to deserve your approbation. I said: 'He does not know that I have won a prize, but he will know it and he will be pleased;' and although naturally idle, I set to work again with renewed energy. Was it not curious that my child's soul should have given itself to you secretly and acknowledged itself the vassal of a lord of its own choice who did not even suspect this homage? Is it not stranger still that that first impression should never have been effaced? — for it lasted all my life, alas! a very short one, and is prolonged even beyond it. At sight of you, something indefinable and mysterious moved in me of which I understood the meaning only when my eyes, as they closed, were opened forever. My condition as an impalpable being, as a pure spirit, permits me now to tell you those things which a daughter of earth no doubt would hide; but the immaculate innocence of a soul cannot blush; celestial modesty may confess love.

"Two years thus went by. I had grown out of childhood into maidenhood, and my dreams began to become less puerile, while still remaining innocent.

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There was rather less rose and azure in them and they did not always end in the blaze of an apotheosis. I often went to the end of the garden, sat down on a bench far from my companions busy with their games or whispered conversations, and I murmured like a litany the syllables of your name. Sometimes even I was bold enough to think that that name might become my own in consequence of chances or adventures as entangled as those of a comedy of cloak and sword, the plot of which I arranged to suit my own fancy.

"I belonged to a family the peer of your own, and my parents enjoyed a fortune and a rank which made the distant project of marriage which I formed almost timidly, in the most secret corner of my heart, seem anything but a chimera or a foolish vision. It would have been most natural that we should meet some day in the society in which we both moved. But would I take your fancy? would you think me pretty? That was a question which my small boarding-school mirror did not answer in the negative, as you may now judge by the reflection which I sent to your Venetian mirror, and by my appearance in the Bois de Boulogne. Supposing, however, you were

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to pay as little attention to the young lady as to the child in the convent? When I thought of that, I was filled with the deepest discouragement. But youth never despairs very long, and I would soon indulge in brighter fancies. It seemed impossible to me that when you saw me you should not recognise that I was yours, that my soul was marked with your seal, that I had adored you from childhood,—in a word, that I was the one woman created purposely for you. I did not say these things to myself so plainly, for I did not then understand the emotions of my heart as I do now, when I can see the two sides of life, but it was the deep instinct of blind faith and irresistible feeling. In spite of my virginal ignorance and a candour that has perhaps never been surpassed, my soul was filled with a passion which was to destroy me, and which to-day has been revealed for the first time. I had no bosom friend at the convent, and I lived alone with my thoughts of you. Jealous of my secret, I dreaded confidences, and every friendship that would have drawn me away from my one idea was repellent to me. I was called serious, and the teachers used to propose me as a model. I awaited the time when I was to leave the convent

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with less impatience than might be supposed. It was a moment of respite between thought and action. As long as I was shut up within the convent walls, I had the right to lose myself indolently in my dream without any self-reproach, but once I should have flown forth from the cage, I should have to direct my own flight, to tend to my aim, to ascend towards my star; and customs, manners, conventionalities, infinite modesty, the numerous veils with which civilisation surrounds her, forbid a young girl to take the initiative in a matter of love. She cannot take any step to reveal herself to her own ideal; a proper pride is opposed to her offering what must be priceless. Her eyes must be cast down, her lips closed, her bosom motionless; no flush, no pallor must betray her when she finds herself in the presence of the man she secretly loves, and who often goes away believing her disdainful or indifferent. How many souls created one for the other have, for lack of a word, a glance, a smile, gone different ways that separated them more and more and made their meeting forever impossible. How many lives deplorably wrecked owe their misfortune to such a cause unperceived by all, and at times unknown even to themselves. I had often

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thought over these things, and they recurred more strongly to my mind at the moment when I was about to leave the convent to enter into the world. Yet I held to my resolution. The time of my departure came, my mother sent for me, and I bade farewell to my companions with but slight marks of feeling. I left no friendship and no remembrance within those walls, where several years of my life had been spent. The thought of you alone formed my treasure.

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VIII

IT was with a lively feeling of pleasure that I entered the room, or rather the small apartment which my mother had prepared for me on my leaving the convent. It consisted of a bedroom, a large dressing-room and a sitting-room, the windows of which looked out on a garden prolonged by a view over the neighbouring gardens. A low wall covered with a thick mantle of ivy formed the boundary-line, but the stone showed nowhere, and nothing was visible but a procession of gigantic old chestnut trees, which gave the gardens the appearance of a vast park. Scarcely at the very extremity did the glance rest, between the more distant masses of foliage, upon the corner of a roof or the elbow of a chimney-pot, a signature which Paris places upon every one of its horizons. It was a rare satisfaction, possible only to wealth, to have before me, in the very centre of the great city, a broad, free, empty place with air, sky, sunshine, and verdure. Is it not disagreeable to feel too close to one's self other

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lives, passions, vices, misfortunes, and is not the delicate modesty of the soul somewhat depressed by such close vicinage? I therefore felt genuine joy as I gazed out of my windows upon that oasis of coolness, silence, and solitude. It was August, for I had finished my last school year in the convent, and the foliage was still intensely green, but with the warmer tone which the passing of summer imparts to vegetation. In the centre of the flower garden under my windows a bed of geraniums in full bloom dazzled the eyes with its scarlet blaze. The sward surrounding this flower-bed, a carpet of green velvet of English rye grass, brought out by its emerald tint that red more ardent than fire. On the finely sanded walk marked like a ribbon by the teeth of the rakes, the birds were hopping about trustfully and seemed perfectly at home. I promised myself that I should share their excursions without making them fly away.

"My room was hung with white cashmere trimmed with blue silk cords. This was also the colour of the furniture and the window curtains. In my small sitting-room, decorated in the same way, a magnificent Érard piano offered its keyboard to my hands, and I at once tried its soft sonority. A bookcase of rosewood

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placed opposite the piano contained the pure books, the chaste poets which a maiden may read, and the lower shelves contained the scores of the great composers; Bach elbowed Haydn, Mozart was side by side with Beethoven, like Raphael and Michael Angelo, and Meyerbeer leaned upon Weber. My mother had brought together the masters I admired, those who were my favourites. An elegant jardinière full of sweet-scented flowers bloomed in the centre of the room like a great nosegay. I was being treated like a spoiled child. I was the only daughter, and the whole affection of my parents was naturally concentrated upon me.

"I was to make my entrance into society at the beginning of the season, — that is, two or three months later, at the time which puts an end to country life, to travel, to sojourns in watering-places and gambling-places, to country-house parties, to hunting, racing, and all that society invents to pass the time which it is not proper for well-bred people to spend in Paris, where my parents had been detained by business. I greatly preferred remaining in town to staying in the old and rather gloomy château in the very depths of Brittany to which I had gone regularly for every vacation.

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Besides, I fancied I should have a chance of meeting you, of hearing you spoken of, or of coming across people acquainted with you; but I learned indirectly that you had been gone for some time on a trip to Spain which would last a few months longer. Your friends, to whom you rarely wrote, did not expect you back before winter. It was said that your fancy had been caught by a mantilla-wearing Spanish girl. That troubled me little, for in spite of my modesty, I was conceited enough to think that my golden hair could rival the jet tresses of Andalusia. I learned also that you wrote in reviews under the Latinised pseudonym of one of your given names, known only to your intimate friends, and that the well-bred gentleman in you concealed a distinguished writer. With a curiosity you can easily understand, I sought in the files of newspapers all the articles marked by that sign. To read a writer is to place yourself in communication with his mind, for is not a book confidences addressed to an ideal friend, a conversation from which the interlocutor is absent? One must not always take literally what the author says; one must allow for philosophical or literary systems, for fashionable affectations of the day, for necessary reticence, for the style which imposes

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itself on him, for admiring imitations, and whatever may modify the exterior form of a writer; but under all these disguises the true attitude of the soul at last reveals itself to the real reader, the genuine thought is often to be seen between the lines, and the poet's secret, which he does not choose to tell to the crowd, is at least to be guessed. One after another the veils fall and the answers to the riddles are learned. In order to get an idea of you, I studied with great attention your accounts of travel, your articles on philosophy and criticism, your tales and the pieces of verse scattered here and there at rather long intervals, and which marked the various phases of your mind. It is less difficult to learn to know a subjective author than an objective. The former expresses his own feelings, exposes his ideas, and judges society and creation in virtue of an ideal. The second presents objects such as they are in nature; he proceeds by images, by description; he brings things under the reader's eyes; he draws, dresses up, colours his personages accurately, puts in their mouths what they ought to have said, and keeps his own opinion to himself. That is your way of doing. At first sight you might have been accused of a certain disdainful impartiality which did not see much differ-

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ence between a lizard and a man, between the glow of a sunset and the glow of a conflagration; but by reading more closely and judging by certain sudden outbreaks, swift rushes at once checked, I could divine that you were possessed of deep feeling maintained by a haughty reserve, which did not care to allow your emotions to be seen.

"This judgment of you as a writer harmonised with the instinctive judgment of my heart, and now that nothing is concealed from me I know how true it was. All sentimental trifling and hypocritically virtuous magniloquence, you had in horror, and in your opinion the worst of crimes was to deceive the soul. That made you excessively shy of expressing tender or passionate feelings; you preferred silence to falsehood or exaggeration in such sacred matters, even though fools considered you insensible, hard, and even cruel. I at once perceived this, and not for a moment did I doubt that you were kind-hearted. As to the nobility of your mind, there could be not the least uncertainty. Your proud disdain of vulgarity, of commonplaceness, enviousness, and all moral ugliness amply proved it. By dint of reading you, I learned to know you, whom I had seen but once, as well as if I had met you inti-

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mately every day. I penetrated the intimate recesses of your thought and knew your starting-point, your motives, sympathies, antipathies, what you desired, what you disliked, — in a word, your whole mental being, — and from it I deduced what your character must be. Sometimes when reading, struck by a passage which was a revelation to me, I would rise and go to the piano, and play, as a comment on your sentences, motives analogous in colour and sentiment which prolonged the passage in sonorous or melancholy vibrations. I enjoyed hearing in another way the echo of your thought. Perhaps these relations were imaginary and could have been seized by none but myself, but unquestionably some of them were real. I know it now that I dwell in the eternal source of inspiration, and that I see it fall like luminous sparks upon the head of genius.

"While reading those of your works which I could procure, — for the range of action of a young girl is so narrow that the smallest step is difficult for her, — the season was advancing, the trees were turning yellow with the golden tints of late autumn, the leaves, one after another, fell from the branches, and the gardener, in spite of his care, could not prevent the sward and

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the gravel from being thickly covered with them. Sometimes, when I wandered in the garden under the chestnut trees, the fall of a chestnut falling on my head like a ball or rolling at my feet out of its broken husk, interrupted my reverie and made me involuntarily start. The delicate plants and shrubs were being taken into the hot-house, the birds had the uneasy look which they have at the approach of winter, and at evening I could hear them quarrelling on the bare branches. The season was about to begin; society was returning to Paris from every point of the horizon. On the Champs Élysées were again to be seen carriages with coats of arms on the panels driven slowly up towards the Arc de l'Étoile to enjoy the last rays of the sun; the Théâtre-Italien published its list of singers and its repertoire, and announced the forthcoming opening. I rejoiced at the thought that this general movement of return would bring you back from Spain and that, weary of the gloomy sierras, you would enjoy coming to receptions, parties, and balls, where I hoped I might meet you.

"Once, while driving in the Bois de Boulogne with my mother, I saw you ride by our carriage, but so swiftly that I had scarcely time to recognise you. It

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was the first time that I had seen you since your visit to the convent. My blood rushed to my heart and I felt a sort of electric shock. Under pretext of feeling the cold, I lowered my veil to conceal the change in my face, and I sank silently back into the corner of the carriage. My mother pulled up the window and said: 'It is not warm. A mist is coming up and we had better return, unless you wish to drive on.' I nodded assent. I had learned what I wished to learn; I knew that you were in Paris.

"We used to go to the Opera once a week. It was a great treat to me to hear the singers of whom I had heard so much, but whom I did not know. Another hope also stirred my heart; I need not tell you what it was. Our day came. Patti was to sing 'La Sonnambula.' My mother had had made for me a pretty, simple, dress suited to my age: an underskirt of white taffeta with an overskirt of tarlatan, and bows of blue velvet and pearls. My hair was dressed with a band of velvet of the same colour, with pearls twisted around it and the ends falling down on my shoulders. As I looked in my mirror while my maid was putting on the last touches, I asked myself, 'Is he fond of blue?'

In Alfred de Musset's 'Caprice,' Mme. de Léry says

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it is a stupid colour. And yet I could not help thinking that the blue ribbon looked very well with my golden hair. If you had seen me, I think you would have loved me. Clotilde, my maid, as she arranged the folds of the dress and the bows on my bodice, said that I was very pretty that evening.

"The carriage deposited my mother and myself in front of the peristyle, — my father was to join us later, — and we began slowly to ascend the great, red-carpeted staircase. The warm atmosphere was perfumed with cuscus and patchouli; ladies in full dress, their gowns still concealed by the mantles, pelisses, burnouses, scarfs, and opera cloaks which they were presently to hand to their lackeys, were ascending the stairs, their long trains of watered silk, satin, and velvet trailing behind them, and resting their hands on the arm of grave men in white neckties, whose black coats had in the button-hole strings of orders, which meant that they intended, after the opera, to proceed to some official or diplomatic reception. Tall, slender young fellows, their hair parted in the middle, most correctly and elegantly dressed, followed close behind, drawn to a group by a smile.

"All this is no novelty to you, and you would paint the picture better than I, but the sight was new to a

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little boarding-school girl making her entrance into society. Life is always the same. It is like a play in which the spectators alone change; but one who has not seen the performance is interested in it as if it were made purposely for him and were being given for the first time. I was happy. I felt I was beautiful; approving glances had been cast upon me; some women had looked around after having examined me with a rapid glance, and found nothing to blame either in my dress or my coiffure.

"I had a secret presentiment that I should see you that evening. This hope imparted a slight animation to my features and flushed my cheeks more brilliantly than usual. We sat down in our box, and soon glasses were turned upon me. Mine was a new face, and new faces are quickly noted at the Opera, which is like a great drawing-room where everybody knows everybody else. My mother's presence told people who I was, and I understood from the way they bent towards each other that I was being talked about in several boxes, favourably no doubt, for kindly smiles followed the whispered sentences. I felt somewhat awkward at being the observed of all observers; wearing a low-necked dress for the first time, I felt my shoulders

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shiver under the gauze which covered them with its semi-transparency. The rise of the curtain — for the overture had been little listened to — made every one look towards the stage and put an end to my embarrassment. Undoubtedly the aspect of that beautiful hall starred with diamonds and bouquets, with its gilding, its footlights, its white caryatids, awoke in me both surprise and admiration, and Bellini's music performed by artists of the first rank carried me away into a world of enchantment; yet the real interest of the evening did not lie there so far as I was concerned. While my ears listened to the suave melodies of the Sicilian composer, my eyes were timidly examining every box, roaming over the balcony, and examining the orchestra stalls in order to discover you. The first act was nearly ended before you came, and when the curtain was rung down, you turned half round towards the auditorium, looking rather bored and gazing at the boxes indifferently without letting your glance rest on any one in particular. Your complexion was browned by six months' travel in Spain, and there was on your face a certain expression of nostalgia, as if you regretted the country you had left. My heart beat loudly while you were making this rapid inspec-

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tion, and for a moment I thought your glance had noted me, but I was mistaken. I saw you leave your seat and reappear shortly afterwards in a box opposite our own. It was occupied by a pretty woman very splendidly dressed, whose black hair shone like satin. Her pale rose-coloured dress was almost undistinguishable from the flesh tones of her bosom; diamonds sparkled in her hair, in her ears, on her neck and her arms. On the velvet-covered rail by the side of her opera-glasses bloomed a great bouquet of Parma violets and camellias. At the back, in the shadow, I could make out an old, bald-headed, obese person, the lappel of whose coat half-concealed the star of some foreign order. The lady spoke to you with unmistakable pleasure and you replied to her in a careless, easy way, without seeming to be particularly taken with her more than friendly manner. My disappointment at not having been noticed by you was compensated for by the joy of feeling that you did not love that bold-eyed woman with the alluring smile and the dazzling toilet.

"A few minutes later, as the musicians began to tune up for the second act, you took leave of the lady with the diamonds and the old gentleman with the foreign

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order, and returned to your seat. The performance ended without your turning your head once, and in my soul I felt annoyed with you. I wondered that you could not guess that a young girl in a white dress with blue bows wanted very much to be looked at by the man she had secretly chosen. I had so long wished to find myself in the same place as you; my wish was granted, and you did not even suspect that I was present. You ought to have felt, it seemed to me, a sympathetic thrill; you ought to have turned around and looked slowly through the hall impelled by a secret emotion; your glance should have stopped on the box I was in, and you should have put your hand to your heart and fallen into an ecstasy. The hero of a novel would not have failed to do so. But you were not the hero of a novel.

"My father, who had had to go to a state dinner, came in the middle of the second act only, and seeing you in the orchestra stalls, he said, 'Why! there is Guy de Malivert! I did not know that he had returned from Spain. His trip means for us endless bull-fights in the Review, for Guy is a bit of a barbarian.' I delighted in hearing your name spoken by my father's lips. You were not unknown to my

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family; we might therefore meet. It would be easy indeed to do so. I was thus somewhat consoled for the lack of success I had met with that evening. The performance closed without any other incident than showers of bouquets, recalls, and ovations to Patti. While waiting in the vestibule until our footman announced our carriage, I saw you pass with a friend and draw a cigar from a case of fine Manila esparto. The desire to smoke made you careless, I am bound to say, of the exhibition of beauties and ugly women, who were ranged upon the lower steps of the staircase. You made your way through the mass of dresses, caring little whether or not you rumpled them, and you soon reached the door with your friend following in your wake.

"On returning home, happy and dissatisfied, I went to bed after having tried with no great success some of the melodies of 'La Sonnambula,' as if to prolong the vibrations of the evening; and then I went to sleep, thinking of you.

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SPIRITE

IX

ONE often finds when, after a certain time the remembrance and the image are compared, that imagination has worked like a painter, who goes on with a portrait in the absence of his model, softening the surfaces, graduating the tints, making the contours melt one into another, and bringing back, in spite of himself, the portrait to his own particular ideal. I had not seen you for more than three years, but my heart had accurately preserved the memory of your face. Only, you had changed somewhat; your features had become firmer and more accentuated, and the sunburn of travel had imparted to your complexion a warmer and more vigorous colour. The man showed more in the young man, and you had that air of tranquil authority and assured force which takes women perhaps more than beauty. None the less I preserved carefully within my soul the first drawing, the slight sketch of the being who was to have so much influence over me, just as one preserves

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a miniature of the youth by the side of the portrait of later days. My dreams had not harmed you, and I was not obliged, when I saw you again, to strip you of a mantle of fancied perfections. I thought of all this, curled up in my bed and watching the gleam of the night-light trembling on the blue roses of the carpet, while awaiting sleep that did not come, but which towards morning closed my eyes, mingling vague harmonies with disconnected dreams.

"A few weeks later we received an invitation to a great ball given by the Duchess de C——. For a young girl her first ball is an event. This one was the more interesting to me that it was likely you would be at it, the Duchess being a great friend of yours. Balls are our battles which we win or lose. It is there that the young girl, issuing from the shadows of the gynæceum, shines in all her splendour. Custom grants her during this short space of time, under the pretext of dancing, a sort of relative freedom, and the ball is to her like the foyer of the Opera where dominoes walk with uncovered faces. She may be approached with an invitation to dance a quadrille or a mazurka, and during the figures of a country-dance she may even be spoken to; but very often the long

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list on her engagement card does not contain the one name that she really has longed for.

"I had to think of my dress, for a ball dress is a poem, and that of a young girl is a very difficult thing to make up. It has to be both simple and rich; that is to say, it must possess contrary characteristics. A light dress entirely white would not have been the thing, so I made up my mind, after a good deal of hesitation, to have a skirt and overskirt of gauze worked with silver, caught up with bouquets of forget-me-nots, the blue of which matched admirably the turquoise set which my father had purchased for me. Clusters of turquoises, imitating the flowers scattered over my dress, formed my head-dress. Thus attired, I fancied myself capable of showing not too disadvantageously among the splendid toilets and the famous beauties. Indeed, for a mere child of earth, I looked rather well.

"The Duchess de C—— inhabited one of those vast mansions in the Faubourg Saint-Germain built for the splendid lives of other days, mansions which modern life finds it difficult to fill. It takes the crowd and splendour of a feast to animate them as of yore. From the outside no one would have suspected the

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extent of this princely mansion. A high wall between two houses with a monumental carriage-gate, over which, in gilt letters upon a tablet of green marble, was written, ‘ Hôtel de C——,’ was all that could be seen from the street. A long avenue of old lime-trees, trimmed in the shape of an arch after the old French fashion and which winter had stripped of their leaves, led to a vast court at the back of which rose the mansion, built in the pure Louis XIV style, with high windows, columns half engaged and mansard attics, like the architecture of Versailles. A red and white awning, supported by carved uprights, projected over the red-carpeted steps. I had time to examine all these details by the light given out by the clusters of lamps, for the guests, though select, were numerous, and we had to fall in line just as at a great reception. The carriage drew up before the steps, and we handed our pelisses to our footman. By a glass door, the leaves of which he opened and shut, stood a gigantic porter with splendid broad shoulders. In the vestibule we passed between two lines of footmen in full livery and powdered; every one of them tall, motionless, and perfectly serious. They looked like domestic caryatids, and seemed to feel that it was an honour to

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be lackeys in such a house. The whole of the staircase, in which a small palace of to-day could easily have been put, was lined with huge camellias. At every landing great mirrors allowed the ladies to repair, as they went up, the slight disorder caused in a ball toilet by mantles, light as they may be, and which was shown by the brilliant blaze of a chandelier that hung, sustained by a golden cord, from a cupola where in azure and clouds the brush of some pupil of Lebrun or Mignard had painted a boldly foreshortened mythological allegory in the taste of his day.

"Between the windows were landscapes, oblong in shape, severe in style, and dark in colour, which might have been attributed to Poussin, or at least to Gaspard Dughet; so, at least, thought a famous painter who was going up the stairs by our side, and who had put his glass to his eye to examine them more closely. At the turn of the stairs, upon the steps of the balustrade, which was a marvel of iron work, were statues of marble by Lepautre and Théodon, bearing candelabra the brilliancy of which equalled that of the chandelier, so that the feast, thanks to the splendour of the light, began even on the staircase. At the door of the antechamber, hung with Gobelins tapestries after cartoons by Oudry,

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and wainscotted in old oak, stood an usher dressed in black with a silver chain around his neck, who in a voice more or less loud according to the importance of the title, called out into the first drawing-room the names of the guests.

"The Duke, tall, thin, made up of long lines like a thorough-bred greyhound, had a distinguished, aristocratic air, and in spite of his age, preserved traces of his former elegance. Even in the street, no one could have mistaken his rank. Standing a short distance from the door, he received the invited guests with a gracious word, a hand-shake, a bow, a nod, a smile, with a sure appreciation of what was due to each, and with such perfect grace that every one was satisfied and believed himself specially favoured. He bowed to my mother in a respectful, friendly way, and as it was the first time he had seen me, he spoke in a few words a semi-paternal, semi-gallant madrigal that smacked of the old Court. Near the mantel-piece stood the Duchess, rouged with utter carelessness of illusion, plainly wearing a wig and exhibiting historical diamonds upon her thin bosom intrepidly low-necked. She was an uncommonly witty woman, and under her broad brown eyelids her eyes still shone with extraordi-

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nary brilliancy. She wore a dress of dark-garnet velvet with great flounces of English point-lace, and a row of diamonds at her bodice. With a careless hand she fanned herself with a large fan painted by Watteau, while she spoke to the persons who came to pay their respects. She looked uncommonly aristocratic. She exchanged a few words with my mother who presented me to her, and as I bowed, she touched my brow with her cold lips and said, 'Go, dear, and be sure not to miss a single dance.'

"This ceremony over, we entered the next drawing-room, which led to the ball-room. On the red damask hangings, in magnificent frames contemporary with the paintings themselves, hung family portraits that were not put there through aristocratic pride, but simply as masterpieces of art. They were by Clouet, Porbus, Van Dyck, Philippe de Champagne and de Largillière, and every one was worthy of being placed in the Tribune of a museum. What I enjoyed about the luxury in this house was that nothing was recent. The paintings, the gilding, the damasks, the brocades, though not faded, were dulled and did not annoy the eye by the loud brilliancy of newness. One felt that the wealth was of long standing, and that things had always been so.

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The ball-room was of a size now scarcely met with save in palaces. Numerous standing-lamps and bracket-lamps placed in the bays between the windows formed with their thousands of tapers a sort of luminous conflagration through which the azure paintings of the ceiling with their wreaths of nymphs and cupids showed as through a rosy vapour. In spite of the brilliant light the room was so large that there was no lack of air and one breathed comfortably. The orchestra was placed in a sort of gallery at the end of the room in a grove of rare plants. On velvet benches arranged in semicircles were rows of ladies dazzlingly dressed if not dazzlingly beautiful, though there were some very pretty ones. The sight was superb. We happened to come in exactly between two dances and, seated near my mother on the end of a bench which happened to be free, I gazed on this spectacle, new to me, with astonishment and curiosity. The gentlemen, having taken their partners back to their seats, were walking about in the centre of the room looking to right and left, as if reviewing the women before making their choice. It was the youthful time of the ball, for somewhat mature men do not now dance. There were young attachés of embassies, and secretaries of

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legations, auditors of the Council of State in expectation, beardless masters of requests, officers who had gone through their first campaign, clubmen diplomatically serious, youthful sportsmen thinking of keeping a stud, dandies whose whiskers were not much more than down, and eldest sons with the precocious authority of a great name and of a great fortune. Among these young people were a few serious personages covered with orders, whose polished heads shone like ivory in the light of the lustres, or were concealed under wigs either too dark or too fair. As they passed by, they addressed polite remarks to the dowagers contemporary with their own youth, then turning aside, they would examine like experts and disinterested connoisseurs the feminine harem outspread before their eyes and their glasses. The first strains of the orchestra made them retrograde as quickly as their gouty feet allowed towards quieter drawing-rooms, where at tables lighted by tapers covered with green shades they played at bouillotte or écarté.

"You will readily believe that I did not lack dancers. A young Hungarian in his magnate's dress, braided, embroidered, studded with buttons of precious stones, bowed gracefully to me and asked me for a mazurka.

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His features were regular, romantically pale, with great, black, somewhat shy eyes, and mustaches as sharp as needles. An Englishman of twenty-two or twenty-three who resembled Lord Byron except that he was not lame, the attaché of a Northern court, and some others wrote their names at once on my card. Although the old dancing master at the convent used to boast of me as being one of his best and most graceful pupils, and praised my lightness and my feeling for time, I was not, I confess, entirely at my ease; I felt, as the papers say, the emotions inseparable from a début. It seemed to me, as shy people always fancy, that all eyes were fixed upon me. Fortunately my Hungarian partner was an excellent dancer who helped out my first attempts, and soon, carried away by the music, intoxicated by the motion, I regained assurance and allowed myself to be spun into the whirlpool of floating skirts with a sort of pleasurable excitement. Yet I never forgot my usual thought and my object in coming to the ball. As I passed by the dancers, with a rapid glance I tried to see if you were in the other rooms. I at last caught sight of you in the recess of a window, talking with a dark-faced, long-nosed, black-bearded man wearing a red fez, in the uniform of the

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Nizam, with the Medjidieh order on his breast, no doubt either a bey or a pacha. When the whirl of the dance brought me back, there you were still speaking with animation to your orientally placid Turk, not deigning to cast a glance at the pretty faces that passed before you, flushed by the dance, in the shimmer of light.

"Nevertheless I did not lose hope, and for the time I was satisfied to know that you were there. Besides, the evening was not over, and some fortunate chance might bring us together. My partner took me back to my seat, and again the men began to walk up and down the space circumscribed by the benches. You took a turn with your Turk through the moving multitude, looking at the ladies and the toilets, but with no more interest than you might have looked at pictures or statues. From time to time you made a remark to your friend the pacha, who smiled gravely. I could see you doing all this through my fan, which I closed, I confess, when you approached the place where we were seated. My heart beat high and I felt myself blush to the shoulders. It was impossible this time that I should escape your notice, for you walked as close to the benches as the dazzling fringe of gauze, lace, and flounces which overflowed, allowed you to do; but

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unfortunately two or three friends of my mother's stopped before us and paid her compliments, some of which were addressed tó me. This screen of black coats masked me entirely. You had to go around the group and I remained invisible, though I did bend my head somewhat in the hope that you might see me. But you could not guess that those black coats, respectfully inclined, concealed from you a rather pretty girl who thought of no one but you and who had come to the ball on your account alone. I saw you leave the room by the other end, the Turk's red cap being the mark by which I followed you in the maze of dark coats which answer for a festival as well as for mourning. My enjoyment vanished and I seemed dreadfully discouraged. Ironical Fate seemed to enjoy teasing me and taking you away from me. I danced the dances I was engaged for, and pretending to be somewhat tired, I refused other invitations. The play had lost its charm for me, the dresses seemed faded, and the lights turning dim. My father, who was playing cards in another room and who had lost some hundred louis to an old gentleman, came in to take us around the apartments, and show us the hot-house into which the last room led, which was reputed to be marvellous; in-

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deed, nothing could be more magnificent. It was like a virgin forest, so vigorously did the banana trees, the shaddocks, the palms, and other tropical plants grow in the warm atmosphere saturated with exquisite perfumes. At the end of the hot-house a white marble naiad poured out the waters of her urn into a gigantic shell of the Southern Seas surrounded by a mass of waterplants. There I caught sight of you again. You had your sister on your arm, but you were ahead of us and we could not meet you, for we followed in the same direction the narrow path, covered with yellow sand and bordered with verdure, that wound around the clumps of shrubs, flowers, and plants.

"We walked two or three times through the drawing-rooms, where the crowd had somewhat diminished, for the dancers had gone to restore their strength at the buffet, served with elegant profusion in a gallery wainscotted with ebony and gilding and adorned with paintings by Desportes, representing flowers, fruits, and game, of splendid colouring, which time had simply made richer. All these details which I glanced at carelessly remained in my memory, and I recall them even in this world where life seems only the dream of a shadow. They are connected for me with feelings

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so deep that they compel me to return to earth. I returned to my home as sad as I had left it joyous, and attributed my mournful look to a slight headache. As I exchanged for a night wrapper the ball toilet which had been useless to me, since I desired to be beautiful for you alone, I said with a sigh, 'Why did n't he ask me to dance, as the Hungarian, the Englishman, and the other men did, although I cared nothing for them? It was a very easy matter. It was the most natural thing at a ball. But everybody looked at me except the one being whose attention I desired to attract. There is no doubt that my unfortunate love is very unlucky.' I went to bed, and a few tears rolled from my eyelids to my pillow."

Here stopped Spirite's dictation. The lamp had long since gone out for lack of oil, and Malivert, like somnambulists who need no exterior light, was still writing. Page followed page without Guy being conscious of it. Suddenly the impulse that guided his hand stopped, and his own thought, suspended by that of Spirite, returned to him. The faint light of dawn was filtering through the curtains of his room. He pulled them aside, and the pallid light of a winter

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morning showed him on the table many pages covered with feverish, rapid writing, the work of the night. Although he had written them with his own hand, he did not know their contents. With ardent curiosity, with deep emotion, he read the artless and chaste confidences of the lovely soul, of the adorable being, whose executioner he had been; innocently, it is needless to add. This tardy confession of love coming from the other world, breathed by a shadow, inspired him with desperate regret and powerless rage against himself. How could he have been stupid enough, blind enough to pass thus by the side of happiness without perceiving it. But he grew calm at last. Happening to look up at the Venetian mirror, he saw the reflection of Spirite smiling upon him.

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X

A STRANGE experience it is, to receive a revelation of retrospective happiness which has passed close to you without being perceived, and which you have lost through your own fault. Never can regret for the irreparable be more bitter. One would like to live over again one's past days. Wonderful plans are made, and after the event one indulges in the most amazing perspicacity; but life cannot be turned over like an hourglass; the grain of sand once fallen will never ascend again. Guy de Malivert reproached himself in vain for not having found out the charming creature, who was neither buried in a Constantinople harem nor hidden behind the gratings of an Italian or Spanish convent, nor guarded like Rosina by a jealous guardian, but who had been of his own world, whom he could have seen every day, and from whom no insuperable obstacle separated him. She loved him; he could have asked her in marriage, he would have obtained her hand, and

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he would have enjoyed the supreme and rare felicity of being united even in this life to the soul destined to his soul. From the way in which he adored her shadow he understood what a passion the girl herself would have inspired in him. But soon his thoughts took another course; he ceased to reproach himself, and regretted his commonplace grief. What had he lost, since, after all, Spirite had preserved her love beyond the tomb and had come from the depths of the Infinite to descend to the sphere which he inhabited? Was not the passion he felt nobler, more poetic, more ethereal, more like eternal love, since it was thus rid of terrestrial contingencies, and had for its object a being idealised by death? Has not the most perfect human union its weariness, its satiety, its lassitude? The most dazzled eyes see, after a few years, the charms they first adored turn pale; the soul is less visible through the worn flesh and love seeks in amazement its vanished ideal.

These reflections and the ordinary course of life with its exigencies, which even the most enthusiastic dreamers cannot escape, led on Malivert until the evening, which he so impatiently awaited. When he had shut himself up in his room and seated himself by

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the table as the night before, prepared to write, the little white, slender, blue-veined hand reappeared, signing to Malivert to take the pen. He obeyed and his fingers began to move of themselves without his brain dictating anything. Spirite's thought had taken the place of his own.

SPIRITE'S DICTATION

"I do not intend to weary you in posthumous fashion by telling you of all my disappointments. One day, however, I did feel a lively joy, and I thought that imperious fate, which seemed to enjoy concealing me from your glance, was about to cease troubling me. We were to dine the following Saturday at Mme. de L——'s. That alone would have been very indifferent to me, had I not learned during the week through Baron de Feroë, who sometimes came to see us, that you were to be one of the guests at this half worldly, half literary feast, for M. de L—— enjoyed entertaining artists and writers. He was a man of taste, a connoisseur of books and paintings, and possessed a library and a very fine collection of paintings. You occasionally went to his receptions, as did also several famous authors, and others who were

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becoming famous. M. de L—— piqued himself on his ability to discover talent, and he was not of those who believe in settled reputations only. I said to myself, in my childish exultation, 'At last I have got hold of that fugitive, of that unapproachable man. This time he cannot escape me. When we shall be seated at the same table, perhaps side by side, lighted by fifty tapers, careless though he may be, he will have to see me, unless, however, there happens to be between us a mass of flowers or a centre-piece which may conceal me.' The days which still separated me from the happy Saturday seemed dreadfully long, as long as study hours at the convent. They went by, however, and the three of us, my father, my mother, and myself, reached M. de L——'s some thirty minutes before the dinner hour. The guests, grouped about the drawing-room, were chatting with each other, coming and going, looking at the pictures, glancing at the pamphlets on the tables, or telling stage news to some ladies seated on a divan near the mistress of the house. Among them were two or three illustrious writers whose names my father told me, but whose faces did not seem to me in harmony with their works. You had not yet arrived. The guests were all there,

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and M. de L—— was beginning to complain of your lack of punctuality, when a tall footman entered, bringing on a silver salver, on which was a pencil to sign and to mark the hour of delivery, a telegram from you, sent from Chantilly and containing these words only, in telegraphic style: 'Missed my train. Don't wait. Awfully sorry.'

"Cruel was my disappointment. The whole week I had caressed this hope, which vanished at the moment it was about to be fulfilled. I was filled with a sadness which I had great difficulty in concealing, and the flush which animation had imparted to my cheeks vanished. Fortunately the doors of the dining-room were opened, and the butler announced dinner. The movement which took place among the guests prevented my emotion being noticed. When everybody was seated, a chair remained empty on my right. It was yours; I could not be mistaken, for your name was written in fine writing upon a card with pretty coloured arabesques placed near your glasses. So the irony of fate was complete. But for this commonplace railway difficulty I should have had you near me during the whole meal, touching my dress, your hand touching mine when paying those innumerable little attentions

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that at table the least gallant man feels himself bound to render to a woman. A few commonplace words to begin with, like every overture to a dialogue, would have been exchanged between us, then, the ice having been broken, our conversation would have become more intimate, and your soul, your mind would soon have understood my heart. Perchance I might not have displeased you, and although fresh from Spain, you might have forgiven the rosy fairness of my complexion, the pale gold of my hair. If you had come to that dinner, your life and mine would unquestionably have moved in another direction; you would no longer be a bachelor, and I should be alive and not reduced to tell you my love from the other world. The love which you feel for my shadow leads me to believe, without being too conceited, that you would not have been insensible to my terrestrial charms. But it was not to be. The unoccupied chair which isolated me from the other guests seemed to me a symbol of my fate, — it betokened vain expectation and solitude in the midst of the crowd. The sinister omen has been too well fulfilled. My neighbour on the left was, as I learned later, a very amiable and very learned academician. He tried several times

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to make me talk, but I answered in monosyllables only, and even these were so ill fitted to the questions that my neighbour naturally took me for a little idiot, left me to myself, and chatted with his other partner.

"I scarcely touched the food; my heart was so heavy that I could not eat. At last the dinner ended and we went to the drawing-room, where the guests formed groups according to their preferences. In one, rather close to the arm-chair in which I was seated, so that I could hear what was being said, your name, spoken by M. d'Aversac, excited my curiosity. 'That chap Malivert,' said d'Aversac, 'is cracked about his pacha. On the other hand, the pacha is crazy about Malivert. They are never apart. Mohammed or Mustapha, I do not remember which is his name, wants to take Guy to Egypt and talks of giving him a steamer to take him to the first cataract, but Guy, who is as barbaric as the Turk is civilised, would prefer a dahabheah. He rather likes the plan, for he thinks it is very cold in Paris. He has a fancy for spending the winter in Cairo and continuing the study of Arab architecture which he commenced in the Alhambra; but if he does go, I am afraid we shall never see him

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again, and that he will turn Moslem like Hassan, the hero of "Namouna."'

"'He is quite capable of it,' answered a young fellow who was in the group; 'he has never greatly liked Western civilisation.'

"'Nonsense!' replied another. 'Once he has worn a few genuine costumes, taken a dozen vapour baths, purchased from the Djellabs one or two slaves whom he will sell at a discount, gazed on the Pyramids, sketched the broken-nosed profile of the Sphinx, he will calmly come back to tramp the asphalt of the Boulevard des Italiens, which is, after all, the only inhabitable place in the world.'

"This conversation filled me with deep anxiety. You were about to leave and for how long nobody knew. Would I have the chance of meeting you before your departure and leaving you at least my image to carry away with you? That was a piece of happiness I dared no longer believe in after so many disappointments.

"On returning home, after having reassured my mother, who fancied I must be ill, so pale was I, for she could not suspect what was going on in my heart, I thought deeply over my position. I asked myself

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whether the obstinacy of circumstances to separate us was not a secret warning of Fate which it would be dangerous to disobey. Perhaps you would be fatal to me, and it was wrong to insist on throwing myself in your way. My reason alone spoke, for my heart repelled the idea and meant to incur to the very last the risk of its love. I felt myself irresistibly drawn to you, and the bond, frail though it seemed, was more solid than a diamond chain. Unfortunately I was the only one bound. 'How painful is the fate of woman!' I said to myself, 'doomed to expectation, to inaction, to solitude, she cannot without failing in modesty, manifest her feelings. She must yield to the love she inspires, but she must not declare that which she feels. From the moment my heart awoke, one sentiment alone filled it, — a pure, absolute, eternal sentiment, — and the being who is the object of it will never know it perhaps. How can I let him know that a young girl whom he no doubt would love if he could suspect such a secret, lives and breathes for him alone?'

"For a moment I thought of writing you one of those letters such as authors, I am told, receive at times, in which, under the veil of admiration crop out feelings

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of another sort, and which solicit a rendezvous, in no wise compromising, at the theatre or at the promenade; but my feminine modesty revolted at the employment of such means, and I feared lest you should take me for a bluestocking seeking your assistance to have a novel accepted by the *Revue des Deux Mondes*.

"D'Aversac had spoken the truth: the next week you had started for Cairo with your pacha. Your departure, which postponed my hopes to an uncertain time, filled me with a melancholy which I found it difficult to conceal. I had lost interest in life. I cared nothing for dress; when I went into society, I let my maid select my toilets. What was the use of being beautiful since you were not there? And yet I was still beautiful enough to be surrounded like Penelope with a whole crowd of suitors. Little by little our drawing-room, frequented by my father's friends, serious and somewhat mature men, was filled with younger men, who came very assiduously to our Fridays. In the recesses of the doors I could see handsome dark fellows, correctly curled, whose cravats had cost them much meditation before they tied them, and who cast on me passionate and fascinating glances; others, during the figures of a quadrille, when we danced to the accom-

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paniment of the piano, uttered sighs which, without being the least touched, I attributed to their being breathless; others, bolder, risked a few moral and poetic phrases about the happiness of a suitable marriage, and claimed to be created purposely for legitimate happiness. They were all brave, irreproachable, well-dressed, ideally delicate; the scent on their hair came from Houbigant, their clothes were made by Renard. What more could an exacting, romantic imagination ask for? Therefore those handsome young fellows seemed somewhat surprised at the slight impression they produced on me; those who were most annoyed even suspected me, I believe, of being poetical. I had some serious offers; my hand was more than once asked of my parents, but on my being consulted I always replied in the negative, managing to find excellent objections. My parents did not insist. I was so young that there was no need of hurrying and later repenting a precipitate choice. Believing that I had some secret preference, my mother questioned me, and I was on the point of revealing the truth to her, but an invincible modesty kept me back. The love which I alone felt and which you were ignorant of, seemed to be a secret which I

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had no right to tell without your consent. It did not belong to me alone, you had a share in it; so I kept silence; and besides, I could never confess, even to the most indulgent of mothers, my mad passion,—for thus it might well seem,—born from an impression of childhood in the convent parlour, obstinately maintained in my soul, and justified by nothing from a human point of view. Had I spoken, my mother, seeing that my choice was in no wise blameworthy, or impossible of realisation, would no doubt have sought to bring us together, and used, to make you declare yourself, some of those subterfuges which, on similar occasions, the most honest and virtuous women manage to invent. But this was repugnant to my virginal probity. I would have no intermediary between you and me. You alone were to notice me and find me out. In that way alone could I be happy and forgive myself for having been the first to love you. My maidenly modesty needed this consolation and this excuse. It was neither pride nor coquetry, but a genuine feeling of feminine dignity.

"Time passed and you returned from Egypt. I began to hear of your attentions to Mme. d'Ymbercourt, with whom you were said to be very much in love.

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My heart took fright and I wished to see my rival. She was shown to me in her box at the opera. I tried to judge her impartially, and I thought her handsome, but without charm and without refinement. She was like a copy of a classical statue made by a mediocre sculptor. She united in herself everything that goes to make up the ideal of dolts, and I wondered that you could have the least fancy for such an idol. Mme. d'Ymbercourt's face, so regular at first sight, lacked distinguishing traits, original grace, unexpected charms. Such as she appeared to me on that evening, such she must always be. In spite of what I heard, I was conceited enough not to be jealous of her. Yet the reports of your marriage became more and more numerous, and as ill news always reaches those whom it interests, I was informed of everything that went on between you and Mme. d'Ymbercourt. At one time I was told that the banns had been called; at another the exact day of the wedding was named. I had no means of ascertaining the accuracy or falseness of these reports. The whole thing appeared to every one settled and most delightful in every respect, and so I had to believe it; yet the secret voice of my heart assured me that you did not love Mme. d'Ym-

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bercourt. But very often people marry without love, to have an establishment, a settled position in society, or because they feel the need of repose after the heat and excitement of youth. I was filled with deep despair and saw my life drawing to a close. My chaste dream, caressed so long, vanished forever. I dared not even think of you in the most mysterious recesses of my soul, for as you now belonged to another before God and men, my thoughts of you, hitherto innocent, became culpable. In my passion as a girl nothing had occurred to make my guardian angel blush. Once I met you in the Bois de Boulogne, riding by Mme. d'Ymbercourt's carriage, and I threw myself back in my own, taking as much care to conceal myself as formerly I would have taken to be seen by you. That rapid glimpse was the last I had of you.

"I was scarcely seventeen. What was going to become of me? What would be the end of a life secretly destroyed at its very beginning? Should I accept one of the suitors approved by my parents in their wisdom? That is what, on such occasions, have done many young girls separated as I was from their ideal by some obscure fatality. But my sense of loyalty revolted from such a course, for I believed that,

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my first and only thought of love having been for you, I could belong to no one but you in this world; any other union would have struck me as almost adulterous. My heart held but a single page; you had written your name on it unwittingly, and no other was to take its place. Your own marriage would not free me from being faithful to you. Unconscious of my love, you were free, but I was bound. The idea of being the wife of another man filled me with insurmountable horror, and after having refused several suitors, knowing well how difficult a position in society is that of an old maid, I made up my mind to leave the world and become a nun. God alone could shelter my grief and perhaps console me.

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XI

I ENTERED as a novice the convent of the Sisters of Mercy in spite of my parents' remonstrances, which moved me, but did not shake my courage. Firm though one's resolve may be, the moment of the final separation is terrible. At the end of a long passage a grating marks the limit between the world and the cloister. The family may accompany to that threshold, not to be crossed by the profane, the maiden who gives herself to God. After the last embrace, the end of which is awaited by gloomy, veiled figures with an impassible air, the grating opens just wide enough to allow the passage of the novice, whom shadowy arms seem to carry away, and it closes with a rattle of iron that echoes down the long corridors like distant thunder. The sound of the closing of a coffin is not more lugubrious, and does not strike the heart more painfully. I felt myself grow pale and an icy chill seized me. I had taken my first step out of earthly life, henceforth closed to me; I was penetrating into

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that cold region where passions die, where remembrance vanishes, and which the rumours of the world no longer reach. There naught exists but the thought of God. It suffices to fill the frightful void and the silence which weighs on this place, a silence as deep as that of the tomb. I may tell you all this, now I am dead.

"My piety, though tender and fervent, did not go to the length of mystical exaltation; it was a human motive rather than an imperious vocation that had caused me to seek peace in the solitary cloister. I was a shipwrecked soul, cast upon an unknown reef, and my dream, invisible to all, had ended tragically. At the beginning, therefore, I suffered what in the devout life is called dryness of heart, weariness, longing for the world, vague despair, — the last temptations of the spirit of the day, trying to seize his prey; but soon the tumult was appeased, the habit of prayer and of religious practices the regularity of the offices and the monotony of a rule intended to overcome the rebellion of the soul and of the body, turned towards heaven thoughts that yet too often recalled the earth. Your image still lived in my heart, but I succeeded in loving you only in and through God. The Convent of the

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Sisters of Mercy is not one of those romantic cloisters such as worldly people imagine might shelter a despairing life. There were no Gothic arcades, no columns festooned with ivy, no moonbeams entering through the trefoil of a broken rose window and casting their light upon the inscription of a tomb; no chapel, with stained-glass windows, slender pillars, and traceried vaultings, forming excellent motives for a decoration or a panorama. The religious feeling which seeks to understand Christianity by its picturesque and poetic side would find in it no theme for descriptions after the manner of Chateaubriand. The building is modern and has not the smallest obscure corner in which to lodge a legend. Nothing satisfies the eyes, no ornaments, no fancy of art, no paintings, no sculptures; everywhere bare, straight lines. A white light illumines like a winter's day the pallor of the long corridors and the walls, cut by the symmetrical doors of the cells, and glazes with rippling beams the shining floors: everywhere gloomy severity, heedless of beauty, and careless of clothing the idea with a form. This dull architecture has the advantage of not distracting souls which must lose themselves in the contemplation of God. The windows are placed very high and are grated; between the

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black bars one can get but a glimpse of the blue or gray sky outside. It is like a fortress built as a defence against the ambushes of the world. Solidity is sufficient; beauty would be superfluous. The chapel itself is but half opened to the devotions of the faithful outside. A huge screen rising from the ground to the vaulting and provided with thick green curtains, interposes like the portcullis of a fortress between the nave and the choir reserved for the nuns. Wooden stalls with sober mouldings polished by wear, run on either side; at the back, in the centre, are placed three seats for the Mother Superior and her two assistants. There the nuns come to hear divine service, their veils down, their long black dresses on which shows a broad strip of white stuff like the cross of a pall from which the arms have been cut, trailing behind them. From the trellised gallery of the novices I watched the nuns bow to the Mother Superior and to the altar, kneel down, prostrate themselves, and vanish into their stalls changed into prie-Dieu. At the elevation of the Host, the centre of the curtain opens somewhat and allows a glimpse of the priest performing the Holy Sacrifice at the altar, placed opposite the choir.. The fervour of the worship edified me and confirmed my resolution to

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break with the world to which I could not have returned. In this atmosphere of ecstasy and incense, in the trembling light of the tapers casting pale gleams upon these prostrate brows, my heart felt it was becoming winged, and tended more and more to rise to ethereal regions. The ceiling of the chapel turned azure and gold and in an opening of the heaven I seemed to see in a luminous cloud, the smiling angels bending towards me and signing to me to come to them. I saw no longer the ugly tint of the whitewash, the mediocre taste of the chandelier, and the meanness of the black-framed paintings.

"The time for the taking of my vows approaching, I was overwhelmed with the flattering encouragement, the delicate attentions, the mystic caresses, the hopes of perfect felicity lavished in convents upon young novices about to consummate their sacrifice and to give themselves forever to God. I did not need these helps; I could walk to the altar with a firm step. Forced — or at least, I thought so — to give you up, I regretted nothing in the world, save the affection of my parents, and my resolve never to re-enter it was unchangeable.

"I had passed the tests and the solemn day arrived. The convent, usually so peaceful, was filled with an

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agitation which the severe monastic discipline repressed. The sisters came and went in the corridors, sometimes forgetting the phantom-like walk ordered by the rule; for the coming in of a new sister is a great event, and the entrance of a new lamb into the flock throws the whole fold into commotion. The worldly dress which the novice puts on for the last time is a subject of curiosity, joy, and astonishment; the satin, lace, pearls, and gems intended to represent the pomps of Satan are admired somewhat fearfully. Thus adorned, I was led to the choir. The Mother Superior and her assistants were in their places, and in the stalls the nuns were praying on bended knee. I spoke the sacred words which separated me forever from the living, and as the ritual of the ceremony requires it, I pushed aside with my foot the rich velvet carpet on which I had to kneel at certain moments. I took off my necklace and bracelets and undid my ornaments in token of my renunciation of vanity and luxury. I abjured the coquetry of women, which was not a difficult thing for me to do, since I had not had the joy to please you and to be beautiful in your eyes.

"Then came the most lugubrious and the most dreaded scene of the religious drama, — the moment

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when the new nun's hair is cut off as a vanity henceforth useless. It recalls the dressing of the condemned; only, the victim is innocent, or at least purified by repentance. Although I had sincerely and from my heart given up all human bonds, I became pale as death when the scissors began cutting my long, fair hair, held up by one of the sisters. The golden curls fell in thick quantities upon the flags of the sacristy into which I had been led, and I gazed at them with dry eyes as they fell around me. I was terrified and felt a secret horror; the cold of the scissors, as they touched my neck, made me start nervously as if I felt the touch of the axe; my teeth chattered, and the prayer I strove to utter could not pass my lips. Ice-cold sweat, as that of one in agony, bathed my temples; my sight grew dim, and the lamp suspended before the altar of the Virgin semed to be vanishing in a mist; my knees sank under me, and I had only time to say, as I stretched out my arms as if clinging to emptiness, 'I am dying.'

"They made me breathe salts, and when I had regained my senses, amazed, like one emerging from the tomb, at the brightness of the day, I found myself in the arms of the sisters, who supported me placidly, accustomed as they were to such scenes.

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"'It does not amount to anything,' said the youngest of the nuns with an air of sympathy. 'The most trying part is over. Recommend yourself to the Blessed Virgin, and all will be well. The same thing happened to me when I took the vows. It is the last effort of Satan.'

"Two sisters put on me the black dress of the order and the white stole, took me back to the choir, and cast over my head the veil, the symbolical shroud which made me dead to the world, and left me visible to God alone. A pious legend which I had heard stated that if one asked of Heaven a favour when under the folds of the funereal veil, it would be granted. When the veil was cast over me, I implored of the Divine goodness to allow me to reveal my love to you. It seemed to me, as I felt a sudden inward joy, that my prayer was granted, and I was greatly relieved; for that was my secret pain, that was the dagger in my heart, the thorn in my flesh which made me suffer night and day. I had given you up in this world, but my soul could not consent to keep its secret forever.

"Shall I tell you of my life in the convent? There day follows day exactly alike, every hour with its

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devotion, its task; life moves on with equal step towards eternity, glad to approach the end. Yet the apparent calm often conceals much languor, sadness, and depression. Thoughts, although tamed by prayer and meditation, will wander off in reverie; the nostalgia of the world seizes upon you; you regret your liberty, your family, and nature; you dream of the great horizons filled with light, of the meadows diapered with flowers, of the swelling, wooded hills, of the blue smoke that rises in the evening over the fields, of the road traversed by carriages, of the river with its boats, of life, of motion, of joyous sounds, of incessant variety of objects. You would like to go out, to run, to fly; you wish you had wings like a bird; you turn in your tomb; in imagination you cross the high walls of the convent, and your thoughts return to the pleasant places, to the scenes of your childhood and your youth, which live again with magical vivacity of detail. You form useless plans for happiness, forgetting that the bolts of the irrevocable have been drawn upon you. The most religious souls are exposed to these temptations, remembrances, mirages, which the will represses, which prayer tries to dispel, but which nevertheless rise again in the silence and solitude of the cell with its

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four white walls, whose sole decoration is a black wooden crucifix. The thought of you, put away at first in my early fervour, returned, more frequent and more tender; the regret of lost happiness oppressed me painfully, and often silent tears streamed down my pale cheeks. At night I would weep in my dreams, and in the morning find my coarse pillow wetted with bitter tears. In happier visions I found myself on the steps of a villa, after a drive, walking with you up a wide staircase on which the great neighbouring trees cast bluish shadows. I was your wife, and your caressing and protecting glance rested on me. Every obstacle that had come between us had disappeared. My soul did not consent to these fair imaginings, which it strove against as if they were sinful. I confessed them, I did penance for them. I sat up in prayer and I struggled against sleep to avoid these guilty illusions, but they ever returned. The struggle impaired my strength, which soon began to abandon me. Without being sickly, I was delicate; the harsh life of the cloister, its fasts, its abstinences, its macerations, the fatigue of the night services, the sepulchral chill of the church, the rigours of the long winter, against which I was ill protected by the thin

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serge dress, and above all, the struggle in my soul, the alternate exaltation and despair, doubt and fervour, the fear of delivering to my Divine spouse a heart distracted by human attachments, and of suffering celestial vengeance — for God is jealous; and perhaps also the jealousy inspired in me by Mme. d'Ymbercourt — all these causes acted disastrously upon me. My complexion had become of a mat, waxy tint; my eyes, showing larger in my wasted face, shone with the light of fever in their dark orbits; the veins of my temples stood out in a network of darker azure; my lips had lost their fresh, rosy colour; my hands had become slender and transparent like the hands of a shadow. Death is not dreaded in the convent as it is in the world. In the convent it is joyfully welcomed, for it is the deliverer of the soul, the door opening into heaven, the end of the trials, and the beginning of beatitude. God withdraws to Himself earlier than others those He prefers, those He loves, and shortens their passage through the vale of sorrow and tears. Prayers full of hope in their funereal psalmody surround the deathbed of the dying nun, whom the sacraments purify of every terrestrial stain and on whom beams the splendour of the other world.

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She is to her sisters an object of envy, and not of terror.

"I saw the fatal day approaching without fear. I hoped that God would forgive me my only love, so chaste, so pure, and so involuntary, and which I had endeavoured to forget as soon as it had appeared culpable in my own eyes. I hoped that He would receive me in His grace. Soon I became so weak that I would swoon away at prayers, and remain as if dead under my veil, with my face to the ground. My immobility was respected, for it was mistaken for ecstasy. Then, when it was seen that I did not rise, two sisters, bending towards me, would make me sit up like an inert body, and, their hands under my arms, would lead me, or rather carry me back to my cell, which before long I was unable to leave. I would remain for long hours on my bed, dressed, counting my beads with my thin fingers, lost in some vague meditation, and asking myself if my hope would be fulfilled after death. My strength was visibly ebbing, and the remedies proposed for my illness diminished my sufferings, but did not cure me. Nor did I wish to be cured, for beyond this life I had a hope long caressed, the possible realisation of which inspired

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me with a sort of curiosity to enter the other world. My passage from this world to the other was most gentle. All the bonds between mind and matter had been broken except one, more tenuous a thousand times than the light cobwebs that float in the air of a fine autumn day; it alone held back my soul ready to open its wings in the breath of the Infinite. Alternations of light and shade, like the intermittent light of a night-light before it goes out, palpitated before my already dim eyes; the prayers murmured near me by the kneeling sisters, and which I tried to join in mentally, reached me only as a confused buzzing, as a vague, distant rumour. My deadened senses had ceased to perceive anything earthly; my thoughts, abandoning my brain, fluttered uncertain in a strange dream half-way between the material and the immaterial world, no longer belonging to the one and not yet pertaining to the other, while mechanically my fingers, pale as ivory, were rumpling and drawing up the folds of the sheet.

"At last my agony began, and I was stretched on the ground, a bag of ashes under my head, to die in the humble attitude which becomes a poor servant of God, giving back her dust to the dust. Breathing became

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more and more difficult; I stifled; a feeling of fearful anguish racked my breast; it was the instinct of nature in me still fighting against destruction. But soon the useless struggle ceased, and with a faint sigh my soul was exhaled from my lips.

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XII

HUMAN words cannot render the sensation of a soul which, freed from its earthly bonds, passes from this life into the next, from time into eternity, from the finite into infinity. My motionless body, already white with a mat whiteness, the livery of death, lay upon the funeral couch surrounded by the nuns in prayer; but I was as thoroughly freed from it as the butterfly is from its chrysalis, an empty shell, a shapeless form, which it abandons to open its young wings to the unknown light suddenly revealed to it. An interval of deepest darkness had been followed by dazzling splendour, by the broadening of the horizon, by the disappearance of every limit and every obstacle, and by the intoxication of inexpressible joy. The sudden accession of new sensations made me understand mysteries closed to terrestrial thought and organs. Freed from the frame of clay, no longer subject to the law of gravity, which but a moment before still fettered me, I sprang with

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delighted eagerness into the unfathomable ether. Distance had ceased to exist for me, and my mere wish enabled me to be wherever I wished to be. More swiftly than light I soared in great circles through the illimitable azure of space, as if to take possession of immensity; crossing and recrossing on my way swarms of souls and spirits.

"The atmosphere was formed of an ever-burning light shining like diamond-dust, and I soon perceived that every grain of the dazzling powder was a soul. It was full of currents, eddies, billows, shimmerings like the fine dust that is spread over a sounding-board in order to study sonorous vibrations, and all these movements caused increased brilliancy in the splendour. The numbers which mathematics can furnish to calculators who venture into the depths of the infinite, cannot, with their millions of zeros adding their tremendous power to the initial number, give even an approximate idea of the tremendous multitude of souls which compose this effulgence, differing from the material light as much as day differs from night.

"To the souls that since the creation of our world and of other spheres, had already passed through the trials of life, were joined expectant or virgin souls,

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awaiting their turn to be incarnated in a body on a planet belonging to some one system or another. There were enough of them to people for thousands and thousands of years all these worlds, the breath of God, which He will re-absorb by drawing back to Himself His own breath when He becomes weary of His work. These souls, though differing in essence and aspect according to the globe they were to inhabit, recalled, every one of them, in spite of the infinite variety of their types, the Divine type, and were made in the image of their Maker. Their constituent monad was the celestial spark. Some were white as the diamond; others were of the colour of rubies, emeralds, sapphires, topazes, and amethysts. For lack of terms intelligible to you, I make use of these names of gems, mere pebbles, opaque crystals black as ink, the most brilliant of which make but a dark spot against that background of living splendour.

"Sometimes there swept by a great angel, bearing an order of God to the very ends of the infinite, and making the universe oscillate by the beating of its vast wings. The Milky Way was poured out over the heavens in a great stream of glowing suns. The stars, which I beheld in their real form and size, so enormous that the

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imagination of man cannot possibly conceive it, flamed with vast, terrific fulguration. Behind these and between them, at depths more and more vertiginous, I saw others and still others, so that nowhere was the end of the firmament visible, and I might well have believed myself enclosed in the centre of a prodigious sphere constellated internally with stars. Their light, white, yellow, blue, green, red, was of such intensity and brightness as to make the light of our own sun seem black, but the eyes of my soul stood it without the least difficulty. I came and went, ascended and descended, traversed in a second millions of leagues through the light of rainbow-like reflections, golden and silver irradiations, diamond-like phosphorescence, stellar outbursts, amid all the magnificence, all the beatitudes, all the ravishments of the divine life.

"I heard the music of the spheres, the echo of which struck the ear of Pythagoras; a mysterious harmony, the pivot of the universe, marked the rhythm. With a harmonious sound, as tremendous as thunder and as soft as the flute, our own world, borne away by its central sun, moved slowly through space, and with one glance I beheld the planets, from Mercury to Neptune, describing their ellipses, accompanied by

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their satellites. A rapid intuition revealed to me the names by which they are known in heaven, acquainted me with their structure, with the thought and purpose of their creation; no secret of that prodigious life was concealed from me. I read as in an open book the poem of God, the lines of which were formed of suns. Would it were permissible for me to explain some of its pages to you! But you are still living in inferior darkness, and your eyes would be blinded by the dazzling effulgence.

"In spite of the ineffable beauty of this wondrous spectacle, I had not, however, forgotten earth, the poor habitation I had just left. My love, triumphant over death, followed me beyond the tomb, and I saw with divine voluptuousness, with radiant felicity, that you loved no one, that your soul was free, and that you might be mine forever. Then I knew what I had dimly felt before. We were predestined one for the other; our souls formed one of those celestial pairs which, when they unite, form an angel. But these two halves of the supreme whole, in order to meet in immortality, must have sought each other in life, divined each other under the veil of the flesh, through trials, obstacles, and distractions. I alone had felt the presence of my sister

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soul and had hastened towards it, urged on by an unerring instinct. In you, perception, not so clear, had merely put you on your guard against vulgar bonds and loves. You had understood that none of the souls around you were intended for you, and passionate, though apparently cold, you had reserved yourself for a higher ideal. Thanks to the favour shown me, I could make you know the love which you had ignored during my life, and I hoped to inspire you with the desire to follow me within the sphere in which I dwell. I felt no regret, for what could the best of human ties be, compared with the happiness of two souls in the eternal kiss of divine love? Until the supreme moment arrived, my task consisted in preventing the world from engaging you in its ways, and separating you from me forever. Marriage binds in this world and the next, but you did not love Madame d'Ymbercourt. As a spirit I could read within your heart, and I had nothing to fear on this account; yet, not meeting the ideal you dreamed of, you might have become tired, and through fatigue, indolence, discouragement, or the need of changing your state of life, you might have allowed yourself to be drawn into that commonplace union.

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"Leaving the fount of light, I flew earthward, where I saw your globe rolling beneath me in its foggy atmosphere, and its strata of clouds. I found you easily, and I watched over your life, an invisible witness, reading your thoughts and influencing them without your being conscious of it. Through my presence, which you did not even suspect, I drove away the ideas and caprices which might have turned you from the aim towards which I directed you. Little by little I detached your soul from every earthly bond; to keep you more safely, I cast over your home a mysterious spell which made you love it. When there, you felt around you a sort of faint, impalpable caress, and experienced inexpressible comfort. It seemed to you, though you could not account for it, that your happiness lay within the walls which I filled with life. The lover who, on a stormy night, reads his favourite poet, by a bright fire, while his sleeping mistress lies, her head on her arm, in the deep alcove, lost in pleasant dreams, feels just such deep happiness in the solitude of love. Nothing could induce him to leave; for his whole world is contained within that room. I had to prepare you gradually to behold me, and mysteriously establish relations with you. Between a spirit and an

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uninitiated living being communications are difficult. A deep gulf separates this world from the other. I had crossed it, but it was not enough; I still had to make myself visible to your eyes, that were yet covered with a bandage and unable to perceive the immaterial through the opacity of matter.

"Mme. d'Ymbercourt, bent upon marrying you, attracted you to her home, and wearied you with her eagerness. Substituting my will for your sleeping thought, I made you write that reply to the lady's note in which your secret sentiments betrayed themselves and which caused you so much surprise. The idea of the supernatural awoke in you, and having become more attentive, you understood that a mysterious power had entered into your life. The sigh which I uttered when, in spite of my warning, you made up your mind to go out, faint and soft though it was, like the vibration of an æolian harp, troubled you deeply, and awoke hidden sympathy in your soul. You had recognised in it the note of feminine suffering. I could not then manifest myself to you in plainer fashion, for you were not sufficiently free from the bonds of matter. I therefore appeared to the Baron de Feroë, a disciple of Swedenborg and a

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seer, to beg him to speak to you the mysterious words which put you on your guard against the peril you were running, and inspired you with the desire to penetrate into the world of spirits to which my love called you. You know the rest. Now am I to return to the regions above, or am I to remain here below, and will the shadow be happier than was the woman?"

Here the impulse that had driven Malivert's pen over the paper stopped, and Guy's power of thought, suspended for a time by the influence of Spirite, resumed possession of his brain. He read what he had just unconsciously written, and was strengthened in the resolve to love till death the charming soul which had suffered for him during her short stay upon earth.

"But what shall our relations be?" he said to himself. "Will Spirite take me away with her into the regions where she dwells, or will she hover around me, visible to me alone? Will she answer me if I speak to her? and how, in that case, shall I understand her?" These questions were not easy to answer, so Malivert, after having turned them over in his mind, gave up the effort and remained plunged in a deep reverie, from which Jack roused him by announcing the Baron de Feroë.

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The two friends shook hands heartily, and the Swede with the pale golden moustache threw himself into an arm-chair.

"Guy, I have come very unceremoniously to breakfast with you," he said, stretching out his feet on the fender. "I went out early this morning, and on passing your house, I was seized with a fancy to pay you a visit almost as early as if I were an officer of the law."

"You were right,—it was a happy thought on your part," replied Malivert, ringing for Jack, to whom he gave orders to serve breakfast.

"My dear Guy, you look as if you had not gone to bed," said the Baron, as he saw the tapers that had burned down to their paper frills, and the sheets of writing spread out on the table. "You have been working during the night. Is it a novel or a poem? Shall you publish it soon?"

"It may be called a poem," replied Malivert, "but it is not of my own composition. I simply held the pen, led by an inspiration superior to my own."

"I understand," went on the Baron; "Apollo dictated and Homer wrote. Such verses are the best."

"The poem, if it be one, is not in verse, and it was no mythological god who dictated it to me."

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"I beg your pardon. I forgot that you are a Romanticist, and that with you Apollo and the Muses must be left to Chompré's Dictionary or the 'Letters to Emily'!"

"Since you have been in some sort my mystagogue and my initiator into things supernatural, dear Baron, there is no reason why I should conceal from you that the writing which you take for 'copy,' to use the printer's expression, was dictated to me last night and the preceding night by the spirit who is interested in me and who appears to have known you on earth, for you are named in the story."

"You served as your own medium because relations are not yet well established between you and the spirit that visits you," replied Baron de Feroë; "but very soon you will be able to dispense with these slow and coarse means of communication. Your souls will know each other by thought and desire, without any external sign."

Jack now announced that breakfast was served. Malivert, quite upset by his strange adventure, by his love affair from beyond the tomb, that Don Juan would have envied, scarcely ate the food placed before him; Baron de Feroë did eat, but with Swedenborgian

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sobriety, for whoever desires to live in communion with spirits must make the share of matter as small as possible.

"That is excellent tea you have, Guy," said the Baron. "It is the white-tipped, green-leafed tea plucked after the first spring rains, which Mandarins drink without sugar, steeping it in cups set in filigree holders to avoid burning their fingers. It is the drink, *par excellence*, of dreamers, for the intoxication it produces is purely intellectual. Nothing more quickly dispels human grossness and better predisposes to the vision of things hidden from the vulgar herd. Since you are now going to live in an immaterial sphere, I recommend you to drink this tea. But you are not listening to me, and I can easily understand your inattention. So novel a situation must strike you as very strange."

"Yes, I confess it," replied Malivert, "I am somewhat dazed, and constantly asking myself whether I am not a prey to hallucinations."

"Drive away these thoughts, for they would cause the spirit to fly forever. Do not seek to explain the inexplicable, but yield with absolute faith and submission to your guiding influence. The least doubt would

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cause a break and entail eternal regret on your part. By special favour, but rarely accorded, souls that have not met in life may meet in heaven. Profit by the chance given you and show yourself worthy of such happiness."

"I shall indeed, and I shall not again inflict on Spirite the pain of which I was the innocent cause while she still dwelt in this world. But now that I think of it, in the story she dictated to me, that adorable soul has not told me the name which she bore upon earth."

"Would you like to know it? Go to Père-Lachaise, climb the hill, and near the chapel you will see a white marble tomb on which is carved a cross laid flat; at the intersection of the arms of the cross there is a wreath of roses with delicate marble leaves, a masterpiece by a famous sculptor. In the medallion formed by the wreath a brief inscription will tell you what I am not formally authorised to impart to you. The mute language of the tomb shall speak in my place, although, in my opinion, your curiosity is vain. What matters a terrestrial name when an eternal love is at stake? But you are not yet quite detached from human ideas, and I can understand it, for it is not so

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long since you stepped outside the circle that bounds ordinary life."

Baron de Feroë took leave. Guy dressed, had his carriage brought round, and hastened to the shops of the most famous florists to purchase a quantity of white lilac. As it was winter, he found it difficult to obtain, but in Paris there is no such thing as impossibility when a man is willing to pay; so he bought his white lilac and ascended the hill with a beating heart and eyes full of tears.

A few flakes of snow, still unmelted, shone like silver tears upon the dark leaves of the yew-trees, the cypresses, the firs, and the ivy, and brought out with white touches the mouldings of the tombs, the tops and the arms of the funereal crosses. The sky was lowering, of a yellowish gray, heavy as lead, the right kind of a sky to hang over a cemetery, and the sharp wind moaned as it swept through the lines of monuments, made for the dead and exactly proportionate to human nothingness. Malivert soon reached the chapel, and not far off, within a border of Irish ivy, he saw a white tomb made whiter still by the light layer of snow. He bent over the railing and read the inscription engraved within the wreath of roses: "Lavinia d'Aufi-

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deni, in religion Sister Philomena, died at the age of eighteen."

He stretched his arm over the railing, threw the lilacs over the inscription, and, although sure of having been forgiven, remained for a few moments by the tomb in a dreamy contemplation, his heart big with remorse; for was he not the murderer of that fair dove, that had so soon returned to heaven? While he was thus leaning on the railing of the monument, letting fall his hot tears upon the cold snow, that formed the second shroud of the virginal tomb, there was a break in the thick curtain of gray clouds. Like light shining through successive thicknesses of gauze which are gradually removed, the orb of the sun appeared less indistinct, of a pale white, more like the moon than the orb of day, the right sort of sun to light the dead. Little by little the opening grew larger and from it streamed a long sunbeam; it showed against the dark background of cloud, and lighted up and caused to sparkle under the mica of the snow, as under a winter dew, the mass of white lilacs and the marble wreath of roses.

In the luminous tremulousness of the sunbeam in which played icy dust, Malivert thought he made out,

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like a vapour from a silver perfume-burner, a slender white form rising from the tomb, enveloped in the floating folds of a gauze shroud like the robes of an angel. The form made a friendly gesture to him with its hand, a cloud passed across the sun, and the vision disappeared.

Guy de Malivert withdrew whispering the name of Lavinia d'Aufideni to himself, re-entered his carriage, and drove back into Paris, which is filled everywhere with the living who do not even suspect that they are dead, for they lack the inner life.

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XIII

FROM that day Malivert's life was divided into two distinct portions, the one real, the other spiritual. There was apparently no change in him. He went to the club and into society, he appeared in the Bois de Boulogne and on the Boulevard. If any interesting performance took place, he was present at it, and to see him dressed in good taste, with neat shoes and well fitting gloves, walking about through human life, no one would have suspected that the young man was in constant communication with spirits, or that, when he left the Opera, he gazed into the mysterious depths of the invisible universe. Yet on examining him more closely, it would have been noticed that he was more serious, paler, thinner, and spiritualised as it were. The expression of his face was no longer the same; unless he was drawn out of himself by others, it exhibited a sort of disdainful beatitude. Fortunately society never observes unless its interest requires it to do so, and Malivert's secret was not suspected.

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The evening after his first visit to the cemetery where he had learned Spirite's terrestrial name, and while waiting for a manifestation which he desired with all the strength of his will, he heard, like drops of water falling within a silver basin, the sound of the notes of the piano. There was no one in the room; but prodigies no longer astonished Malivert. A few chords were struck in such a way as to command attention and awaken his curiosity. Guy looked towards the piano, and little by little there appeared in a luminous mist the lovely form of a young girl. At first the image was so transparent that objects behind it were visible through its contours, just as the bottom of a lake is visible through its limpid waters. Without becoming in the least material, it gradually condensed sufficiently to look like a living figure, but filled with such light, impalpable, aerial life that it resembled rather the reflection of a body in a mirror than the body itself. Certain sketches of Prud'hon, scarcely rubbed in with thin, vague contours, bathed in chiaro-scuro and surrounded, as it were, with violet vapour, the white draperies seeming to be made of moonbeams, may give a faint idea of the graceful apparition then seated before Malivert's piano. The pale fingers,

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faintly flushed, glided over the ivory keys like white butterflies, merely touching the keys but bringing out the sound, although the gentle contact would not have bowed the feather of a pen. The notes, without having to be struck, flashed out of themselves when the luminous hands fluttered above them. A long white dress of an ideal muslin infinitely finer than the Indian tissues which can be drawn through a ring, fell in abundant folds around her and foamed over her feet like snow. Her head, bent slightly forward as if a score were open upon the piano, enabled the neck to be seen with its curling, golden, shimmering, fine hair, as well as the upper portion of pearly, opaline shoulders, the whiteness of which melted into the whiteness of the dress. Between the bandeaux that rose and fell as if lifted by the wind, shone a narrow starry band, the ends of which were fastened on the chignon. From where Malivert sat, one ear and a portion of the cheek showed, blooming, rosy, velvety, of a tone that would have made the colour of a peach look earthy. It was Lavinia, or Spirite, to call her by the name she has borne hitherto in this story. She looked around rapidly, to make sure that Guy was attentive and that she might begin. Her blue eyes shone with a tender

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light that penetrated his soul; there was still something of the maiden in that angelic look.

The piece that she played was the work of a great master, one of those inspirations in which human genius seems to foresee the infinite, and which now express so powerfully the secret desires of the soul, and again recall the remembrance of the heavens and the paradise from which it has been driven. It was full of ineffable melancholy, of ardent prayer, of low murmurs, last revolts of pride dashed from light into darkness. Spirite interpreted all these feelings with a *maestria* that made one forget Chopin, Liszt, Thalberg, those wizards of the piano. Guy seemed to be hearing music for the first time. A new art was being revealed to him. Innumerable new thoughts awoke within his soul; the notes stirred in him such deep, divine, interior vibrations that he felt he must have heard them in a former life that he had since forgotten. Spirite not only rendered all the intentions of the master, she expressed the ideal he had dreamed of, but which human infirmity had not allowed him to attain. She fulfilled his genius, she made perfection perfect, she added to the absolute.

Guy had unconsciously arisen and walked to the

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piano like a somnambulist. He remained standing, leaning his elbow upon the corner of the instrument, his eyes gazing ardently at those of Spirite.

Her expression was truly sublime. Her head, uplifted and somewhat thrown back, showed her face illumined by the splendours of ecstasy. Inspiration and love shone with supernatural brilliancy in her eyes, the azure of which almost disappeared under the upper eyelid; her half-opened lips gleamed like pearls, and her neck, bathed in bluish transparencies like those of the heads in Guido's ceilings, swelled like the neck of a mystic dove. The woman was diminishing in her, the angel augmenting; and the intensity of light which she shed around her was so brilliant that Malivert was constrained to turn away his eyes.

Spirite noticed this, and in a voice more harmonious and sweeter than the music she was playing, she whispered, "Poor friend! I forgot that you are still confined within your terrestrial prison and that your eyes cannot bear the faintest ray of true light. Later I shall show myself to you such as I am, in the sphere whither you will follow me. Meanwhile the shadow of my mortal form suffices to manifest my presence to you, and you can contemplate me thus without peril."

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By invisible gradations she returned from supernatural beauty to natural beauty; the wings of Psyche that had for a moment fluttered on her shoulders, disappeared again; her material appearance became somewhat more condensed, and a milky cloud spread about her suave contours, bringing them out more plainly, as water in which a drop of essence is thrown shows more clearly the lines of the crystal that contains it. Lavinia was reappearing through Spirite, somewhat vaporous, no doubt, but sufficiently real to cause an illusion.

She had ceased to play, and was looking at Malivert, who stood before her, — a faint smile playing on her lips, a smile of celestial irony, of divine archness, which mocked human debility while consoling it, while her eyes, purposely dimmed, still expressed the tenderest love, but such love as a chaste maiden might allow to be seen on earth by the man to whom she was engaged. Malivert might indulge in the belief that he was with the Lavinia who had sought him so earnestly while alive, and from whom he had always been separated by ironical fate. Carried away, fascinated, palpitating with love, forgetting that he had before him but a shadow, he advanced, and by an in-

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stinctive motion sought to take one of Spirite's hands, still resting on the piano, and bear it to his lips; but his fingers closed on hers without touching anything, as if they had passed through a mist. Although she had nothing to fear, Spirite withdrew with a gesture of offended maidenliness; soon, however her angelic smile reappeared, and she raised to Guy's lips, who felt a soft freshness and a faint, delicious perfume, her hand made of transparent, rosy light.

"I forgot," she said, in a voice which was not formulated into words, but which Guy heard within his heart, "that I am no longer a girl, but a soul, a shadow, an impalpable vapour with nothing of human sense; so what Lavinia might perhaps have refused, Spirite grants, not as a pleasure, but as a sign of pure love and eternal union." And she left for a few seconds her hand under the imaginary kiss of Guy.

Soon she returned to the piano, and played an air of incomparable power and sweetness, in which Guy recognised one of his poems, — his favourite one, — transposed from the language of verse into the language of music. It was an inspiration in which, disdaining vulgar joys, he soared eagerly towards the higher spheres in which the poet's desire is at last to be satisfied.

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Spirite, with marvellous intuition, rendered the unuttered words, the unphrased human speech, the unsaid in the best written verse, the mysteriousness, the depth, the secrecy of things, the unavowed aspirations, the indescribable, the inexpressible, the *desideratum* of thought incapable of greater effort, — all the softness, the grace, the suavity which overflow the too dry contours of words. To the fluttering wings that rose in air with such desperate rush, she opened the paradise of realised dreams, of fulfilled hopes. She stood on the luminous threshold, in a scintillation before which the suns turn pale, divinely beautiful and yet humanly tender, opening her arms to the soul thirsting for the ideal, which is the end and the recompense, the starry crown and the cup of love, — a Beatrix revealed beyond the tomb. In a phrase filled with purest passion she told, with divine reticence, and celestial modesty, that she herself, in the leisure of eternity and the splendour of the infinite, would satisfy all his unsatisfied desires. She promised to his genius happiness and love such as the imagination of man, even when in communion with a spirit, cannot conceive of.

While playing the finale, she had risen, her hands no longer even pretending to touch the keys; yet the

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melodies escaped from the piano in visible coloured vibrations, spreading through the atmosphere of the room in luminous undulations like those which vary the flamboyant radiance of the aurora borealis. Lavinia had disappeared and Spirite reappeared, but taller, more majestic, enshrined in a brilliant light. Long wings fluttered on her shoulders; she had already, though plainly she desired to remain, left the floor of the room; the folds of her dress floated in space; an all-compelling breath bore her away, and Malivert found himself alone in a state of agitation easy to understand. But little by little he grew calm, and delightful languor followed upon the feverish excitement. He felt the satisfaction so rarely experienced by poets and, it is said, by philosophers, at having been understood in the most delicate and the deepest parts of his imagination. How brilliantly and radiantly Spirite had commented on that poem, the meaning and force of which he had never yet so well understood! How thoroughly her soul identified itself with his own, and her thought penetrated his!

The next day he made up his mind to work. His inspiration, which had abandoned him for a long time, was returning, ideas crowded in his brain, unlimited

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horizons, endless perspectives opened before his eyes, a world of new sensations surged within his breast, and to express them he asked of speech more than it is able to do. The old forms, the worn-out moulds burst asunder, and sometimes the molten phrase broke forth and overflowed in splendid splashes like rays of broken stars. Never had he risen to such heights, and the greatest poets would willingly have signed what he wrote on that day.

As, having finished a stanza, he was thinking of the next, he allowed his glance to roam around the room and saw Spirite half lying on the divan, her chin resting on her hand, her elbow sunk in the pillow, her slender fingers playing in the golden waves of her hair. She was watching him with a loving, contemplative look. She seemed to have been there a long time, but had not cared to reveal her presence lest she should break in upon his work. As Malivert rose from his arm-chair to draw nearer to her, she signed to him not to move, and in a voice softer than any music, she repeated, stanza by stanza, line by line, the poem he had been writing. By a mysterious sympathy she felt her lover's thought, followed it in its flight, and even outstripped it, for not only did she see,

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but she foresaw, and she said in full the unfinished stanza the end of which he was still seeking.

The poem, as will be readily understood, was addressed to Spirite. On what other subject could Malivert have written? Carried away by his love for her, he scarcely remembered earth, and plunged into the heavens as high and as far as wings attached to human shoulders could bear him.

"That is beautiful," said Spirite, whose voice Malivert heard within his breast, for it did not reach his ear like ordinary sounds. "It is beautiful, even for a spirit. Genius is truly divine, it invents the ideal. It sees higher beauty and eternal light. Whither can it not ascend when it has the wings of faith and love? But descend again, come back to the regions the air of which may be breathed by mortal lungs. Your nerves are trembling still like the cords of a lyre, your brow smokes like a censer, a feverish light burns in your eyes. Beware of madness, for ecstasy is akin to it. Calm yourself, and if you love me, live still your human life, for it is my wish."

In order to obey her, Malivert went out, and although men seemed to him only like distant shadows, like phantoms with whom he had nothing in common,

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