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THE SON

BOURGET

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THE SON

(ANDRÉ CORNÉLIS)

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BY

PAUL BOURGET

AUTHOR OF "LOVE'S CRUEL ENIGMA," "THE DISCIPLE,"
"THE PROMISED LAND"

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THE SON

(ANDRÉ CORNÉLIS.)

I.

WHEN I was a child, I used to go to confession. How often since then have I wished that I were still the little lad who came at five o'clock in the evening into the chapel belonging to our school, the cold and empty chapel, with its whitewashed walls, its benches on which our places were all numbered, its feeble harmonium, its crude Holy Family, its blue ceiling dotted with stars. We were taken to this chapel by a master, in batches of ten. When it came to my turn to kneel in one of the two narrow spaces on either side of the central seat of the priest, my heart would beat violently, and a strange oppression would come upon me, produced by the gloom and silence of the chapel, and the indistinct murmur of the confessor's voice as he questioned the boy on the opposite side, to whom I was to succeed. These

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sensations, and the shame inspired by the sins which I was about to confess, made me start with a nervous dread when the sound of the sliding panel announced that the moment had come, and I could distinguish the priest's marked profile, and note the keenness of his glance, although his face was full and florid. What a moment of deadly pain to endure, and then what a blessed sense of relief! What a feeling of supreme liberty, alleviation, pardon—nay, effacement of my wrong-doing; what conviction that a fair spotless page was now offered to me, and it was mine to fill it with good deeds. I am too far removed now from the religious faith of my early years to imagine that there was a phenomenon of a supernatural order in all this. Whence then came the sense of deliverance that renewed the youth of my soul? Solely from the fact that I had told my sins, that I had thrown overboard the burden of conscience that oppresses us all. Confession was the lancet-stroke that empties the abscess. Alas! I have now no confessional at which to kneel, no prayer to murmur, no God in whom to hope! Nevertheless, I must get rid of these intolerable recollections. The tragedy of my life presses too heavily upon my memory, and I have not a friend to speak to, not an echo to take up my plaint.

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There are things which cannot be uttered, since they ought not to find a hearer—this I know; and so I have resolved, in order to cheat my pain, to make my confession here, to myself alone, on this fair white paper, as I might make it to a priest. I will write down all the details of my terrible history, bit by bit, as each comes to my remembrance, and when this confession is finished, I shall see whether I am to be rid of the anguish also. Ah! if it could even be diminished only! If it were but lessened, so that I might come and go, and have my share of youth and life! I have suffered so much, and for so long, and yet I love life, in spite of my sufferings. A full glass of the black drug, the laudanum that I always keep at hand in a bottle for nights when I cannot sleep, and the slow torture of my remorse would cease at once. But I cannot, I will not. The instinctive animal desire *to live on* stirs me more strongly than all the moral reasons which urge me to make an end. Live then, poor wretch, since Nature bids you tremble at the thought of death. Nature? And besides, I do not want to go down there, below—no, not yet—into that dark world where it may be we should meet. No, no, not that terror, not that! See now, I had promised myself that I would be self-possessed, and I am already losing

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control over my thoughts; but I will resume it. The following is my project:

On these sheets of paper I will draw a true picture of my destiny, for I can catch only troubled glimpses of it in the blurred mirror of my thoughts. And when the pages are covered with my scrawl I will burn them. But the thing will have taken form, and existed before my eyes, like a living being. I shall have thrown a steady light upon the chaos of horrible recollections which bewilder me. I shall know what my strength really is. Here, in this room where I came to the final resolution, it is only too easy for me to remember. To work, then! I pass my word to myself that I will set down the whole. Poor heart, let me number all thy wounds.

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II.

Let me remember? I have the sense of having trodden a Via Dolorosa during long years, but what was my first step in the blood-spotted pathway of pain? Where ought I to take up the tale of the slow martyrdom, whose last stage of torture I have reached to-day? I know not, for my feelings are like those lagoon-worn shores on which one cannot tell where the sea begins or ends; vague places, all sand and water, whose uncertain outline is constantly changing and being formed anew; regions without bounds or features. Nevertheless these places are drawn upon the map, and we may depict our feelings also by reflection, and after the manner of analysis. The reality is ever shifting about. How intangible it is, always escaping our eager grasp! The enigma of enigmas is the exact moment at which a wound gapes in the heart, one of those wounds which have never closed in mind. In order to simplify everything, and to keep myself from sinking into that painful torpor of reverie which steals over me like the influence of opium, I will divide my task into

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events, marking first the precise fact which was the primal and determining cause of all the rest —the tragic and mysterious death of my father. Let me endeavor to recall the sort of emotion by which I was overwhelmed at that time, without mixing up with it anything of what I have since understood and felt.

I was nine years old. It was in 1864, in the month of June, at the close of a warm, bright afternoon. I was at my studies in my room as usual, having come in from the Lycée Bonaparte, and the outer shutters were closed. We lived in the Rue Tronchet, near the Madeleine, in the seventh house on the left, coming from the church. Three highly-polished steps (how often have I slipped on them !) led to the little room, so prettily furnished, all in blue, within whose walls I passed the last completely happy days of my life. Everything comes back to me. I was seated at my table, dressed in a large black over-all, and engaged in writing out the tenses of a Latin verb on a ruled sheet divided into several compartments. All of a sudden I heard a loud cry, followed by a clamor of voices ; then rapid steps trod the corridor outside my room. Instinctively I rushed to the door and came up against a man-servant, who was deadly pale, and

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had a roll of linen in his hand. I understood the use of this afterwards. I had not to question this man, for at sight of me he exclaimed, as though involuntarily:

"Ah! M. André, what an awful misfortune!"

Then, regaining his presence of mind, he said:

"Go back into your room—go back at once!"

Before I could answer, he caught me up in his arms, rather threw than placed me on the upper step of my staircase, locked the door of the corridor, and walked rapidly away.

"No, no," I cried, flinging myself against the door, "tell me all; I will, I must know." No answer. I shook the lock, I struck the panel with my clenched fists, I dashed my shoulder against the door. Vain was my frenzy! Then, sitting upon the lowest step, I listened, in an agony of fear, to the coming and going of people outside, who knew of "the awful misfortune," but what was it they knew? Child as I was, I understood the terrible signification which the servant's exclamation bore under the actual circumstances. Two days previously, my father had gone out after breakfast, according to custom, to the place of business which he had occupied for over four years, in the Rue de la Victoire. He had been thoughtful during breakfast, indeed for some

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months past he had lost his accustomed cheerfulness. When he rose to go out, my mother, myself, and one of the habitual frequenters of our house, M. Jacques Termonde, a fellow student of my father's at the École de Droit, were at table. My father left his seat before breakfast was over, having looked at the clock, and inquired whether it was quite right.

"Are you in such a hurry, Cornélis?" asked Termonde.

"Yes," answered my father, "I have an appointment with a client who is ill—a foreigner—I have to call on him at his hotel to procure some important papers. He is an odd sort of man, and I shall not be sorry to see something of him at closer quarters. I have taken certain steps on his behalf, and I am almost tempted to regret them."

And since then, no news! In the evening of that day, when dinner, which had been put off for one quarter of an hour after another, was over, and my father, who was always so methodical, so punctual, had not come in, my mother began to betray increasing uneasiness, and could not conceal from me that his last words dwelt upon her mind. It was a rare occurrence for him to speak with misgiving of his undertakings! The night

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passed, then the next morning and afternoon, and once more it was evening. My mother and I were once more seated at the square table, where the cover laid for my father in front of his empty chair, gave, as it were, a form to our nameless dread. My mother had written to M. Jacques Termonde, and he came after dinner. I was sent away immediately, but not without my having had time to remark the extraordinary brightness of M. Termonde's eyes, which were blue, and usually shone coldly in his thin sharp face. He had fair hair and a beard best described as pale. Thus do children take note of small details, which are speedily effaced from their minds, but afterwards re-appear, at the contact of life, just as certain invisible marks come out upon paper when it is held to the fire. While begging to be allowed to remain, I was mechanically observing the hurried and agitated turning and re-turning of a light cane—I had long coveted it—held behind his back in his remarkably beautiful hands. If I had not admired the cane so much, and the fighting centaurs on its handle—a fine piece of Renaissance work—this symptom of extreme disturbance might have escaped me. But, how could M. Termonde fail to be disturbed by the disappearance of his best friend? Nevertheless, his

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voice, a soft voice which made all his phrases melodious, was quite calm.

"To-morrow," he said, "I will have every inquiry made, if Cornélis has not returned; but he will come back, and all will be explained. Depend on it, he went away somewhere on the business he told you of, and left a letter for you to be sent by a commissionaire who has not delivered it."

"Ah!" said my mother, "you think that is possible?"

How often, in my dark hours, have I recalled this dialogue, and the room in which it took place —a little salon, much liked by my mother, with hangings and furniture of some foreign stuff all striped in red and white, black and yellow, that my father had brought from Morocco; and how plainly have I seen my mother in my mind's eye, with her black hair, her brown eyes, her quivering lips. She was as white as the summer gown she wore that evening. M. Termonde was dressed with his usual correctness, and I remember well his slender and elegant figure. It makes me smile when people talk of presentiments. I went off perfectly satisfied with what he had said. I had a childish admiration for this man, and hitherto he had represented nothing to me but treats and

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indulgence. I attended the two classes at the Lycée, if not with a light, at least with a relieved heart. But, while I was sitting upon the lower step of my little staircase, all my uneasiness revived. I hammered at the door again, I called as loudly as I could; but no one answered me, until the good woman who had been my nurse came into my room.

"My father!" I cried, "where is my father?"

"Poor child, poor child," said nurse, and took me in her arms.

She had been sent to tell me the awful truth, but her strength failed her. I escaped from her, ran out into the corridor, and reached my father's bedroom before any one could stop me. Ah! upon the bed lay a rigid form covered by a white sheet, upon the pillow a bloodless, motionless face, with fixed, wide-open eyes, for the lids had not been closed; the chin was supported by a bandage, a napkin was bound around the forehead; at the bed's foot knelt a woman, still dressed in her white summer gown, crushed and helpless with grief. These were my father and my mother. I flung myself madly upon her, and she clasped me passionately, with the piercing cry, "My André, my André!" In that cry there was such intense grief, in that embrace there was such frenzied

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tenderness, her heart was then so big with tears, that it warms my own even now to think of it. The next moment she rose and carried me out of the room, that I might see the dreadful sight no more. She did this easily, her terrible excitement had doubled her strength. "God punishes me! God punishes me!" she said over and over again, taking no heed of her words. She had always been given, by fits and starts, to mystical piety. Then she covered my face, my neck, and my hair with kisses and tears. May all that we suffered, the dead and I, be forgiven you, poor mother, for the sincerity of those tears at that moment. In my darkest hours, and when the phantom was there, beckoning to me, your grief pleaded with me more strongly than his plaint. Because of the kisses of that moment I have always been able to believe in you, for those kisses and tears were not meant to conceal anything. Your whole heart revolted against the horrid deed that bereaved me of my father. I swear by the anguish which we shared in that moment, that you had no part in the hideous plot. Ah, forgive me, that I have felt the need even now of affirming this, of redoubling the evidence of it. If you only knew how one sometimes hungers and thirsts for certainty—ay, even to the point of agony.

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III.

WHEN I asked my mother, on the instant, to tell me all about the awful event, she said that my father had been seized with a fit in a hackney carriage, and that as no papers were found upon him, he had not been recognized for two days. Grown-up people are much too ready to think it is equally easy to tell lies to all children. Now, I was a child who pondered long in my thoughts over things that were said to me, and by dint of putting a number of small facts together, I came to the conviction that I did not know the whole truth. If my father's death had occurred in the manner stated to me, why should the man-servant have asked me, one day when he took me out to walk, what had been said to me about it? And when I answered him, why did he say no more, and, being a very talkative person, why had he kept silence ever since? Why, too, did I feel the same silence all around me, in the air, sitting on every lip, hidden in every look? Why was the subject of conversation constantly changed whenever I drew near? I guessed this by many trifling

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signs. Why was not a single newspaper left lying about, whereas, during my father's lifetime, the three journals to which we subscribed were always to be found on a table in the salon? Above all, why did both the masters and my schoolfellows look at me so curiously, when I went back to school early in October, four months after our great misfortune? Alas! it was their curiosity which revealed the full extent of the catastrophe to me. It was only a fortnight after the reopening of the school, when I happened to be playing one morning with two new boys; I remember their names, Rastonaix and Servoin, now, and I can see the big fat cheeks of Rastonaix and the ferret-like face of Servoin. Although we were outdoor pupils, we were allowed a quarter of an hour's recreation indoors, between the Latin and English lessons. The two boys had engaged me on the previous day for a game of ninepins, and when it was over, they came close to me, and looking at each other to keep up their courage, they put to me the following questions, point-blank:

"Is it true that the murderer of your father has been arrested?"

"And that he is to be guillotined?"

This occurred sixteen years ago, but I cannot now recall the beating of my heart at those words

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without horror. I must have turned frightfully pale, for the two boys, who had struck me this blow with the carelessness of their age—of our age—stood there disconcerted. A blind fury seized upon me, urging me to command them to be silent, and to hit them with my fists if they spoke again; but at the same time I felt a wild impulse of curiosity—what if this were the explanation of the silence by which I felt myself surrounded?—and also a pang of fear, the fear of the unknown. The blood rushed into my face, and I stammered out:

"I do not know."

The drum-tap, summoning us back to the schoolroom, separated us. What a day I passed, bewildered by my trouble, turning the two terrible sentences over and over again.

It would have been natural for me to question my mother; but the truth is, I felt quite unable to repeat to her what my unconscious tormenters had said. It was strange but true, that thenceforth my mother, whom nevertheless I loved with all my heart, exercised a paralyzing influence over me. She was so beautiful in her pallor, so royally beautiful and proud. No, I should never have ventured to reveal to her that an irresistible doubt of the story she had told me was implanted in my

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mind merely by the two questions of my school-fellows; but, as I could not keep silence entirely and live, I resolved to have recourse to Julie, my former nurse. She was a little woman, fifty years of age, an old maid too, with a flat wrinkled face, like an over-ripe apple; but her eyes were full of kindness, and indeed so was her whole face, although her lips were drawn in by the loss of her front teeth, and this gave her a witch-like mouth. She had deeply mourned my father in my company, for she had been in his service before his marriage. Julie was retained especially on my account, and in addition to her the household consisted of the cook, the man-servant, and the *femme de chambre.* Julie put me to bed and tucked me in, heard me say my prayers, and listened to my little troubles. "Oh! the wretches!" she exclaimed, when I opened my heart to her and repeated the words that had agitated me so terribly. "And yet it could not have been hidden from you for ever." Then it was that she told me all the truth, there in my little room, speaking very low and bending over me, while I lay sobbing in my narrow bed. She suffered in the telling of that truth as much as I in the hearing of it, and the touch of her dry old hand, with fingers scarred

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by the needle, fell softly on my curly head as she stroked it.

That ghastly story, which bore down my youth with the weight of an impenetrable mystery, I have found written in the newspapers of the day, but not more clearly than it was narrated by my dear old Julie. Here it is, plainly set forth, as I have turned and re-turned it over and over again in my thoughts, day after day, with the vain hope of penetrating it.

My father, who was a distinguished advocate, had resigned his practice in court some years previously, and set up as a financial agent, hoping by that means to make a fortune more rapidly than by the law. His good official connection, his scrupulous probity, his extensive knowledge of the most important questions, and his great capacity for work, had speedily secured him an exceptional position. He employed ten secretaries, and the million and a half francs which my mother and I inherited formed only the beginnings of the wealth to which he aspired, partly for his own sake, much more for his son's, but, above all, for his wife's—he was passionately attached to her. Notes and letters found among his papers proved that at the time of his death, he had been for a month previously in corres-

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pondence with a certain person named, or calling himself, William Henry Rochdale, who was commissioned by the firm of Crawford, in San Francisco, to obtain a railway concession in Cochin China, then recently conquered, from the French Government. It was with Rochdale that my father had the appointment of which he spoke before he left my mother, M. Termonde, and myself, after breakfast, on the last fatal morning. The *Instruction* had no difficulty in establishing this fact. The appointed place of meeting was the Imperial Hotel, a large building, with a long façade, in the Rue de Rivoli, not far from the Ministère de la Marine. The entire block of houses was destroyed by fire in the Commune; but during my childhood I frequently begged Julie to take me to the spot, that I might gaze, with an aching heart, upon the handsome courtyard adorned with green shrubs, the wide, carpeted staircarse, and the slab of black marble, encrusted with gold, that marked the entrance to the place whither my father wended his way, while my mother was talking with M. Termonde, and I was playing in the room with them. My father had left us at a quarter-past twelve, and he must have taken a quarter of an hour to walk to the Imperial Hotel, for the concierge, having seen the corpse, recognized it,

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and remembered that it was just about half-past twelve when my father inquired of him what was the number of Mr. Rochdale's rooms. This gentleman, a foreigner, had arrived on the previous day, and had fixed, after some hesitation, upon an apartment situated on the second floor, and composed of a salon and a bed-room, with a small ante-room, which separated the apartment from the landing outside. From that moment he had not gone out, and he dined the same evening and breakfasted the next morning in his salon. The concierge also remembered that Rochdale came down alone, at about two o'clock on the second day; but he was too much accustomed to the continual coming and going to notice whether the visitor who arrived at half-past twelve had or had not gone away again. Rochdale handed the key of his apartment to the concierge, with directions that anybody who came, wanting to see him, should be asked to wait in his salon. After this he walked away in a leisurely manner, with a business-like portfolio under his arm, smoking a cigar, and he did not reappear.

The day passed on, and toward night two housemaids entered the apartment of the foreign gentleman to prepare his bed. They passed through the salon without observing anything

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unusual. The traveler's luggage, composed of a large and much-used trunk and a quite new dressing-bag, were there. His dressing-things were arranged on the top of a cabinet. The next day, toward noon, the same housemaids entered the apartment, and finding that the traveler had slept out, they merely replaced the day-covering upon the bed, and paid no attention to the salon. Precisely the same thing occurred in the evening; but on the following day, one of the women having come into the apartment early, and again finding everything intact, began to wonder what this meant. She searched about, and speedily discovered a body, lying at full length underneath the sofa, with the head wrapped in towels. She uttered a scream which brought other servants to the spot, and the corpse of my father—alas! it was he—was removed from the hiding-place in which the assassin had cunningly concealed it. It was not difficult to reconstruct the scene of the murder. A wound in the back of the neck indicated that the unfortunate man had been shot from behind, while seated at the table examining papers, by a person standing close beside him. The report had not been heard, on account of the proximity of the weapon, and also because of the constant noise in the street, and

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the position of the salon at the back of the anteroom. Besides, the precautions taken by the murderer rendered it reasonable to believe that he had carefully chosen a weapon which would produce but little sound. The ball had penetrated the spinal marrow and death had been instantaneous. The assassin had placed new unmarked towels in readiness, and in these he wrapped up the head and neck of his victim, so that there were no traces of blood. He had dried his hands on a similar towel, after rinsing them with water taken from the carafe; this water he had poured back into the same bottle, which was found concealed behind the drapery of the mantelpiece. Was the robbery real or pretended? My father's watch was gone, and neither his letter-case nor any paper by which his identity could be proved was found upon his body. An accidental indication led, however, to his immediate recognition. Inside the pocket of his waistcoat was a little band of tape, bearing the address of the tailor's establishment. Inquiry was made there, in the afternoon the sad discovery ensued, and after the necessary legal formalities, the body was brought home.

And the murderer? The only data on which the police could proceed were soon exhausted.

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The trunk left by the mysterious stranger, whose name was certainly not Rochdale, was opened. It was full of things bought haphazard, like the trunk itself, from a bric-à-brac seller who was found, but who gave a totally different description of the purchaser from that which had been obtained from the concierge of the Imperial Hotel. The latter declared that Rochdale was a dark, sunburnt man with a long thick beard; the former described him as of fair complexion and beardless. The cab on which the trunk had been placed immediately after the purchase, was traced, and the deposition of the driver coincided exactly with that of the bric-à-brac seller. The assassin had been taken in the cab, first to a shop, where he bought a dressing-bag, next to a linen-draper's, where he bought the towels, thence to the Lyons railway station, and there he had deposited the trunk and the dressing-bag at the parcels office. Then the other cab which had taken him, three weeks afterwards, to the Imperial Hotel, was traced, and the description given by the second driver agreed with the deposition of the concierge. From this it was concluded that in the interval formed by these three weeks, the assassin had dyed his skin and his hair, for all the depositions were in agreement

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with respect to the stature, figure, bearing, and tone of voice of the individual. This hypothesis was confirmed by one Jullien, a hairdresser, who came forward of his own accord to make the following statement:

On a day in the preceding month, a man who answered to the description of Rochdale given by the first driver and the bric-à-brac seller, being fair-haired, pale, tall, and broad-shouldered, came to his shop to order a wig and a beard; these were to be so well constructed that no one could recognize him, and were intended, he said, to be worn at a fancy ball. The unknown person was accordingly furnished with a black wig and a black beard, and he provided himself with all the necessary ingredients for disguising himself as a native of South America, purchasing coal for blackening his eyebrows, and a composition of Sienna earth and amber for coloring his complexion. He applied these so skilfully, that when he returned to the hairdresser's shop, Jullien did not recognize him. The unusualness of a fancy ball given in the middle of summer, and the perfection to which his customer carried the art of disguise, astonished the hairdresser so much that his attention was immediately attracted by the newspaper articles upon "The

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Mystery of the Imperial Hotel," as the affair was called. At my father's house two letters were found; both bore the signature of Rochdale, and were dated from London, but without envelopes, and were written in a reversed hand, pronounced by experts to be disguised. He would have had to forward a certain document on receipt of these letters; probably that document was in the letter-case which the assassin carried off after his crime. The firm of Crawford had a real existence at San Francisco, but had never formed the project of making a railroad in Cochin China. The authorities were confronted by one of those criminal problems which set imagination at defiance. It was probably not for the purpose of theft that the assassin had resorted to such numerous and clever devices; he would hardly have lead a man of business into so skilfully laid a trap merely to rob him of a few thousand francs and a watch. Was the murder committed for revenge? A search into the life of my father revealed nothing whatever that could render such a theory tenable. Every suspicion, every supposition, was routed by the indisputable and inexplicable fact that Rochdale was a reality whose existence could not be contested, that he had been at the Imperial Hotel from seven o'clock in

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the evening of one day until two o'clock in the afternoon of the next, and that he had then vanished, like a phantom, leaving one only trace behind—*one only*. This man had come there, other men had spoken to him; the manner in which he had passed the night and the morning before the crime was known. He had done his deed of murder, and then—nothing. "All Paris" was full of this affair, and when I made a collection, long afterwards, of newspapers which referred to it, I found that for six whole weeks it occupied a place in the chronicle of every day. At length the fatal heading, "The Mystery of the Imperial Hotel," disappeared from the columns of the newspapers, as the remembrance of that ghastly enigma faded from the minds of their readers, and solicitude about it ceased to occupy the police. The tide of life, rolling that poor waif amid its waters, had swept on. Yes; but I, the son? How should I ever forget the old woman's story that had filled my childhood with tragic horror? How should I ever cease to see the pale face of the murdered man, with its fixed, open eyes? How should I not say: "I will avenge thee, thou poor ghost?" Poor ghost! When I read *Hamlet* for the first time, with that passionate avidity which comes from an analogy

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between the moral situation depicted in a work of art and some crisis of our own life, I remember that I regarded the Prince of Denmark with horror. Ah! if the ghost of my father had come to relate the drama of his death to me, with his unbreathing lips, would I have hesitated one instant? No! I protested to myself; and then? I learned all, and yet I hesitated, like him, though less than he, to dare the terrible deed. Silence! silence! Let me go back to the facts.

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IV.

I REMEMBER little of the succeeding events. All was so trivial, so insignificant, between that first vision of horror and the vision of woe which came to me two years later, that, with one exception, I hardly recall the intervening time. In 1864, my father died; in 1866, my mother married M. Jacques Termonde. The exceptional period of the interval was the only one during which my mother bestowed constant attention upon me. Before the fatal date my father was the only person who had cared for me; at a later period there was no one at all to do so. Our apartment in the Rue Tronchet became unbearable to us; there we could not escape from the remembrance of the terrible event, and we removed to a small hotel in the Boulevard de Latour-Maubourg. The house had belonged to a painter, and stood in a small garden which seemed larger than it was because other gardens adjoined it, and overshadowed its boundary wall with greenery. The centre of the house was a kind of hall, in the English style, which the former occupant had

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used as a studio; my mother made this her ordinary sitting-room. Now, at this distance of time, I can understand my mother's character, and recognize that there was something unreal and slightly theatrical about her, which, although it was very harmless, led her to exaggerate the outward expression of all her feelings. While she occupied herself in studying the attitudes by which her emotions were to be fittingly expressed, the sentiments themselves were fading away. For instance, she chose to condemn herself to voluntary exile and seclusion after her bereavement, receiving only a very few friends, of whom M. Jacques Termonde was one; but she very soon began to adorn herself and everything around her, with the fine and subtle tastefulness that was innate in her. My mother was a very lovely woman; her beauty was of a refined and pensive order, her figure was tall and slender, her dark hair was very luxuriant and of remarkable length. No doubt it was to the Greek blood in her veins that she owed the classical lines of her profile, her full-lidded soft eyes, and the willowy grace of her form. Her maternal grandfather was a Greek merchant, of the name of Votronto, who had come from the Levant to Marseilles when the Ionian Islands were annexed to France. Many

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times in after years I have recalled the strange contrast between her rare and refined beauty and my father's stolid sturdy form, and my own, and wondered whether the origin of many irreparable mistakes might not be traced to that contrast. But I did not reason in those days; I was under the spell of the fair being who called me, "My son." I used to look at her with a kind of idolatry when she was seated at her piano in that elegant sanctum of hers, which she had hung with draped foreign stuffs, and decorated with tall green plants and various curious things, after a fashion entirely her own. For her sake, and in spite of my natural awkwardness and untidiness, I strove to keep myself very clean and neat in the more and more elaborate costumes which she made me wear, and also more and more did the terrible image of the murdered man fade away from that home, which, nevertheless, was provided and adorned by the fortune which he had earned for us and bequeathed to us. All the ways of modern life are so opposed to the tragic in events, so far removed from the savage realities of passion and bloodshed, that when such things intrude upon the decorous life of a family, they are put out of sight with all speed, and soon come to

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be looked upon as a bad dream, impossible to doubt, but difficult to realize.

Yes, our life had almost resumed its normal course when my mother's second marriage was announced to me. This time I accurately remember not only the period, but also the day and hour. I was spending my holidays with my spinster aunt, my father's sister, who lived at Compiègne, in a house situated at the far end of the town. She had three servants, one of whom was my dear old Julie, who had left us because my mother could not get on with her. My aunt Louise was a little woman of fifty, with countrified looks and manners: she had hardly ever consented to stay two whole days in Paris during my father's lifetime. Her almost invariable attire was a black silk gown made at home, with just a line of white at the neck and wrists, and she always wore a very long gold chain of ancient date, which was passed under the bodice of her gown and came out at the belt. To this chain her watch and a bunch of seals and charms were attached. Her cap, plainly trimmed with ribbon, was black like her dress, and the smooth bands of her hair, which was turning gray, framed a thoughtful brow and eyes so kind that she was pleasant to behold, although her nose was large

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and her mouth and chin were heavy. She had brought up my father in this same little town of Compiègne, and had given him, out of her fortune, all that she could spare from the simple needs of her frugal life, when he wished to marry Mdlle. de Slane, in order to induce my mother's family to listen to his suit. The contrast between the portrait in my little album of my aunt and her face as I saw it now, told plainly enough how much she had suffered during the past two years. Her hair had become more white, the lines which run from the nostrils to the corners of the mouth were deepened, her eyelids had a withered look. And yet she had never been demonstrative in her grief. I was an observant little boy, and the difference between my mother's character and that of my aunt was precisely indicated to my mind by the difference in their respective sorrow. At that time it was hard for me to understand my aunt's reserve, while I could not suspect her of want of feeling. Now it is to the other sort of nature that I am unjust. My mother also had a tender heart, so tender that she did not feel able to reveal her purpose to me, and it was my aunt Louise who undertook to do so. She had not consented to be present at the marriage, and M. Termonde, as I afterwards learned, preferred

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that I should not attend on the occasion, in order, no doubt, to spare the feelings of her who was to become his wife. In spite of all her self-control, Aunt Louise had tears in her brown eyes when she led me to the far end of the garden, where my father had played when he was a child like myself. The golden tints of September had begun to touch the foliage of the trees. A vine spread its tendrils over the arbor in which we seated ourselves, and wasps were busy among the ripening grapes. My aunt took both my hands in hers, and began:

"André, I have to tell you a great piece of news."

I looked at her apprehensively. The shock of the dreadful event in our lives had left its mark upon my nervous system, and at the slightest surprise my heart would beat until I nearly fainted. She saw my agitation and said simply:

"Your mother is about to marry."

It was strange this sentence did not immediately produce the impression which my look at her had led my aunt to expect. I had thought from the tone of her voice, that she was going to tell me of my mother's illness or death. My sensitive imagination readily conjured up such fears. I asked calmly;

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"Whom?"

"You do not guess?"

"M. Termonde?" I cried.

Even now I cannot define the reasons which sent this name to my lips so suddenly, without a moment's thought. No doubt M. Termonde had been a good deal at our house since my father's death; but had he not visited us as often, if not more frequently, before my mother's widowhood? Had he not managed every detail of our affairs for us with care and fidelity, which even then I could recognize as very rare? Why should the news of his marriage with my mother seem to me on the instant to be much worse news than if she had married no matter whom? Exactly the opposite effect ought to have been produced, surely? I had known this man for a long time; he had been very kind to me formerly—they said he spoiled me—and he was very kind to me still. My best toys were presents from him, and my prettiest books; a wonderful wooden horse which moved by clockwork, given to me when I was seven—how much my poor father was amused when I told him this horse was "a double thoroughbred"—"Don Quixote," with Doré's illustrations, this very year; in fact some new gift constantly, and yet I was never easy and light-

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hearted in his presence as I had formerly been. When had this restraint begun? I could not have told that, but I thought he came too often between my mother and me. I was jealous of him, I may as well confess it, with that unconscious jealousy which children feel, and which made me lavish kisses on my mother when he was by, in order to show him that she was my mother, and nothing at all to him. Had he discovered my feelings? Had they been his own also? However that might be, I now never failed to discern antipathy similar to my own in his looks, notwithstanding his flattering voice and his over-polite ways. At my then age, instinct is never deceived about such impressions. This was quite enough to account for the shiver that went over me when I uttered his name. But I saw my aunt start at that shiver and my cry.

"M. Termonde," said she; "yes, it is he; but why did you think of him immediately?" Then, looking me full in the face with a searching gaze, she said in a low tone, as though she were ashamed of putting such a question to a child:

"What do you know?"

At these words, and without any other cause than the weakness of nerves to which I had been subject ever since my father's death, I burst into

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tears. The same thing happened to me sometimes when I was shut up in my room alone, with the door bolted, suffering from a dread which I could not conquer, like that of a coming danger. I would forecast the worst accidents that could happen; for example, that my mother would be murdered, like my father, and then myself, and I peered under all the articles of furniture in the room. It had occurred to me, when out walking with a servant, to imagine that the harmless man might be an accomplice of the mysterious criminal, and have it in charge to take me to him, or at all events to lose me in some unknown place. My too highly-wrought imagination overmastered me. I fancied myself, however, escaping from the deadly device, and in order to hide myself more effectually, making for Compiègne. Should I have enough money? Then I reflected that it might be possible to sell my watch to an old watchmaker whom I used to see, when on my way to the Lycée, at work behind the window of his little shop, with a glass fixed in his right eye. That was a sad faculty of foresight which poisoned so many of the harmless hours of my childhood! It was the same faculty that now made me break out into choking sobs when my aunt asked me what I had in my mind against M. Termonde. I

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related the worst of my grievances to her then, leaning my head on her shoulder, and in this one all the others were summed up. It dated from two months before. I had come back from school in a merry mood, contrary to my habit. My teacher had dismissed me with praise of my compositions and congratulations on my prizes. What good news this was to take home, and how tenderly my mother would kiss me when she heard it! I put away my books, washed my hands carefully, and flew to the salon where my mother was. I entered the room without knocking at the door, and in such haste that as I sprang toward her to throw myself into her arms, she gave a little cry. She was standing beside the mantlepiece, her face was very pale, and near her stood M. Termonde. He seized me by the arm and held me back from her.

"Oh, how you frightened me!" said my mother.

"Is that the way to come into a salon?" said M. Termonde.

His voice had turned rough like his gesture. He had grasped my arm so tightly that where his fingers had fastened on it I found black marks that night when I undressed myself. But it was neither his insolent words nor the pain of his

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grasp which made me stand there stupidly, with a swelling heart. No, it was hearing my mother say to him:

"Don't scold André too much; he is so young. He will improve."

Then she drew me toward her, and rolled my curls round her fingers; but in her words, in their tone, in her glance, in her faint smile, I detected a singular timidity, almost a supplication, directed to the man before her, who frowned as he pulled his moustache with his restless fingers, is if in impatience of my presence. By what right did he, a stranger, speak in the tone of a master in our house? Why had he laid his hand on me ever so lightly? Yes, by what right? Was I his son or his ward? Why did not my mother defend me against him? Even if I were in fault it was toward her only. A fit of rage seized upon me; I burned with longing to spring upon M. Termonde like a beast, to tear his face and bite him. I darted a look of fury at him and at my mother, and left the room without speaking. I was of a sullen temper, and I think this defect was due to my excessive and almost morbid sensitiveness. All my feelings were exaggerated, so that the least thing angered me, and it was misery to me to recover myself. Even my father had found it

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very difficult to get the better of those fits of wounded feeling, during which I strove against my own relentings with a cold and concentrated anger which both relieved and tortured me. I was well aware of this moral infirmity, and as I was not a bad child in reality, I was ashamed of it. Therefore, my humiliation was complete when, as I went out of the room, M. Termonde said:

"Now for a week's sulk! His temper is really insufferable."

His remark had one advantage, for I made it a point of honor to give the lie to it, and did not sulk; but the scene had hurt me too deeply for me to forget it, and now my resentment was fully revived, and grew stronger and stronger while I was telling the story to my aunt. Alas! my almost unconscious second-sight, that of a too sensitive child, was not in error. That puerile but painful scene symbolized the whole history of my youth, my invincible antipathy to the man who was about to take my father's place, and the blind partiality in his favor of her who ought to have defended me from the first and always.

"He detests me!" I said through my tears; "what have I done to him?"

"Calm yourself," said the kind woman. "You are just like your poor father, making the worst of

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all your little troubles. And now you must try to be nice to him on account of your mother, and not to give way to this violent feeling, which frightens me. Do not make an enemy of him," she added.

It was quite natural that she should speak to me in this way, and yet her earnestness appeared strange to me from that moment out. I do not know why she also seemed surprised at my answer to her question, "What do you know?" She wanted to quiet me, and she increased the apprehension with which I regarded the usurper—so I called him ever afterward—by the slight faltering of her voice when she spoke of him.

"You will have to write to them this evening," said she at length.

Write to them! The words sickened me. They were united; never, nevermore should I be able to think of the one without thinking of the other.

"Are you?"

"I have already written."

"When are they to be married?"

"They were married yesterday," she answered, in so low a tone that I hardly heard the words.

"And where?" I asked, after a pause.

"In the country, at the house of some friends." Then she added quickly: "They preferred that

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you should not be there on account of the interruption of your holidays. They have gone away for three weeks; then they will go to see you in Paris before they start for Italy. You know I am not well enough to travel. I will keep you here until then. Be a good boy, and go now and write."

I had many other questions to put to her, and many more tears to weep, but I restrained myself, and a quarter of an hour later, I was seated at my dear good aunt's writing-table in her salon.

How I loved that room on the ground floor, with its glass door opening on the garden. It was filled with remembrance for me. On the wall at the side of the old-fashioned "secretary" hung the portraits, in frames of all shapes and sizes, of those whom the good and pious soul had loved and lost. This funereal little corner spoke strongly to my fancy. One of the portraits was a colored minature, representing my great-grandmother in the costume of the Directory, with a short waist, and her hair dressed *à la* Proudhon. There was also a miniature of my great-uncle, her son. What an amiable, self-important visage was that of the staunch admirer of Louis Philippe and M. Thiers! Then came my paternal grandfather, with his strong *parvenu* physiognomy, and

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my father at all ages. Underneath these works of art was a bookcase, in which I found all my father's school prizes, piously preserved. What a feeling of protection I derived from the *portières* in green velvet, with long bands of needle-work, my aunt's masterpieces, which hung in wide folds over the doors! With what admiration I regarded the faded carpet, with its impossible flowers, which I had so often tried to gather in my babyhood! This was one of the legends of my earliest years, one of those anecdotes which are told of a beloved son, and which make him feel that the smallest details of his existence have been observed, understood, and loved. In later days I have been frozen by the ice of indifference. And my aunt, she whose life had been lived among these old-fashioned things, how I loved her, with that face in which I read nothing but supreme tenderness for me, those eyes whose gaze did me good in some mysterious part of my soul! I felt her so near to me, only through her likeness to my father, that I rose from my task four or five times to kiss her, during the time it took me to write my letter of congratulation to the worst enemy I had, to my knowledge, in the world.

And this was the second indelible date in my life.

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V.

INDELIBLE! Yes, those two dates and only those have remained so, and when I retrace the past in fancy, I am always pulled up by them. The two images—my father assassinated, my mother married again—weighed long upon my heart. Other children have restless and supple minds which yield easily to successive impressions; they surrender themselves entirely to the actual moment, pass from a pleasure to a childish trouble, and forget in the evening what they have felt during the day. But I? ah, no! From my two recollections I was never released. An ever present hallucination kept before my mind's eye the dead face on the pillow, and my mother kneeling at the bed's foot, or the sound in my ears of my aunt's voice announcing the other news. I could always see her sad face, her brown eyes, and the black bows on her cap shaking in the wind of the September afternoon. And still, even to-day, when I am endeavoring to reproduce the history of my mind's life, or the real and solitary André Cornélis, all other remembrances vanish before those two; not

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a phase of my youth but is pervaded by them and contained in them, as the cloud contains the lightning, and the fire it kindles, and the ruins of the homesteads which it strikes. Of all the images that crowd upon my memory, recalling what I was during my long years of childhood and youth, those two disastrous days are always the chief; they form the lurid background of the picture of my life, the dark horizon of a more melancholy landscape.

What are the other images? A large space, with old trees in it, some children playing late on an autumn day; while others, who are not playing, but only look on, lean against the old brown tree-stems, or wonder about like forsaken creatures. This is the playground of the Lycée at Versailles. The scholars who are playing are the "old" boys, the others, the shy exiles, are the "new," and I am one of the latter. It is just four short weeks since my aunt told me of my mother's marriage, and already my life is entirely changed. On my return from the holidays it was decided that I should enter the school as a boarder. My mother and my stepfather were about to travel in Italy until the summer, and the question of their taking me with them was not even mooted. My mother proposed to allow me to remain as a day-

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pupil, under the care of my aunt, who would come up to Paris; but my stepfather negatived the proposition at once by quite reasonable arguments. Why should so great a sacrifice of all her habits be imposed upon the old lady, and what was there to dread in the rough life of a boarding-school, which is the best means of forming a boy's character?

"And he needs that schooling," added my stepfather, directing the same cold glance toward me as on the day when he grasped my arm so roughly. In short, it was settled that I was to go to school, but not in Paris."

"The air is bad," said my stepfather.

Why am I not in the least obliged to him for his seeming solicitude for my health? It was not because I foresaw what he had forseen already—he, the man who wanted to separate me from my mother for ever—that it would be easier for them to leave me at school outside the city than at one nearer home, when they returned? What need has he of these calculations? Is it not enough that he should give utterance to a wish for Madame Termonde to obey him? How I suffer when I hear her say "thou" to him, just as she used to say it to my own father. And then I think of the days when I came home from my classes at the

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Lycée Bonaparte, and that dear father helped me with my lessons. My stepfather brought me to this school yesterday in the afternoon, and it was he who presented me to the head master, a tall thin personage with a bald head, who tapped me on the cheek and said:

"Ah, he comes from Bonaparte, the school of the 'Muscadins.'"

That same evening I had the curiosity to refer to the dictionary for this word "Muscadin," and I found the following definition: "A young man who studies personal adornment." It is true that I do not resemble the fellows in tunics among whom I am to live, for I am handsomely dressed, according to my mother's taste, and my costume includes a large white collar and smart English boots. The other boys have shapeless képis, coarse blue stockings which fall over their broken shoes, and their buttons are mostly torn off. They wear out the last year's outdoor costume in the house. During the first play-time on my first day, several of the boys eyed me curiously, and one of them asked me: "What does your father do?" I made no answer. What I dread, with unbearable misery, is that they may speak to me of *it*. Yesterday, while my stepfather and I were coming down to Versailles in the railway

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carriage, without exchanging a word, what would I have given to be able to tell him of this dread, to entreat him not to throw me among a number of boys, and leave me to their heedless rudeness and cruelty, to promise him that I would work harder and better than before, if I might but remain at home! But the look in his blue eyes is so sharp when they rest on me, it is so hard for me to say the word "Papa" to him—that word which I am always saying in my thoughts to the other; to him who lies, in the sleep that knows no waking, in the cemetery at Compiègne! And so I addressed no supplication to M. Termonde, and I allowed myself to be shut up in the Versailles Lycée without a word of protest. I preferred to wander about as I do among strangers, to uttering one complaint to him. Mamma is to come to-morrow; she is going away the next day, and the nearness of this interview prevents me from feeling the inevitable separation too keenly. If she will only come without my stepfather!

She came—and with him. She took her seat in the parlor, which is decorated with vile portraits of scholars who have taken prizes at the general examinations. My schoolfellows were also talking to their mothers, but none could

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boast a mother so worthy to be loved as mine! Never had she seemed to me so beautiful, with her slender and elegant figure, her graceful neck, her deep eyes, her fine smile. But I could not say a word to her, because my stepfather, "Jack," as she called him, with her pretty affectation of an English accent, was there between us. Ah! that antipathy which paralyzes all the loving impulses of the heart, how intensely have I felt it, then and since! I thought I could perceive that my mother was surprised, almost saddened by my coldness when she bade me farewell; but ought she not to have known that I would never show my love for her in *his* presence? She is gone; she is on her travels, and I remain here.

Other images arise which recall our schoolroom in the evenings of that first winter of my imprisonment. The metal stove burns red in the middle of the gas-lit room. A bowl of water is placed upon the top lest the heat should affect our heads. All along the walls stretches the line of our desks, and behind each of us is a little cupboard in which we keep our books and papers. Silence reigns, and is rendered more perceptible by the scratching of pens, the turning over of leaves, and an occasional suppressed cough. The

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master is in his place, behind a desk which is raised above the others. His name is Rodolphe Sorbelle, and he is a poet. The other day he let fall out of his pocket a sheet of paper covered with writing and erasures, from which we managed to make out the following lines:

Je voudrais être oiseau des champs,
Avoir un bec,
Chanter avec:
Je voudrais être oiseau des champs,
Avoir des ailes.
Voler sur elles.
Mais je ne puis en faire autant,
Car j'ai le bec
Beaucoup trop sec,
Et je suis pion,
'Cré nom de nom!

This prodigious poem gave us, cruel little wretches that we were, the greatest delight. We sang the verses perpetually, in the dormitory, out walking, in the playground, setting the last words to the classic music of "Les Lampions." But the old watch-dog has sharp teeth, and defends himself by "detentions," so none of us care to brave him to his face. The lamp hung over his head shows up his greenish-gray hair, his red forehead, and his threadbare coat, which once

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was blue. No doubt he is rhyming, for he is writing, and every now and then he raises that swollen brow, and his large blue eyes—which express such real kindness when we do not torment him with our tricks—search the room and observe in turn each of the thirty-five desks. I, too, take a prolonged survey of the companions of my slavery; I already know their faces. There is Rocquain, a little fellow, with a big red nose in a long white face; and Parizelle, a tall, stout boy, with an underhung jaw. He is fair-skinned, has green eyes and freckles, and for a wager ate a cockroach the other day. There is Gervais, a brown, curly-haired lad, who makes his will every week. He has communicated to me the latest of these documents, in which there is the following clause: "I leave to Leyreloup some good advice, contained in my letter to Cornélis." Leyreloup is his former friend, who played him the trick of rolling him in a heap of dead leaves last autumn, having been egged on to the deed by big Parizelle, whom the vengeful Gervais ever since regards as a rascal, and the advice contained in the posthumous letter is a warning to distrust the giant. All this small school-world is absorbed in countless interests which even at that time I held to be puerile, when compared with

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the thoughts that are in me. And my schoolfellows themselves seem to understand that there is something in my life which does not exist in theirs; they spare me the torments that are generally inflicted upon a new boy, but I am not the friend of any of them, except this same Gervais, who is my walking companion when we go out. Gervais is an imaginative lad, and when he is at home he devours a collection of the *Journal pour Tous*. He has found in it a series of romances called "L'Homme aux Figures de Cire," "Le Roi des Gabiers," "Le Chat du Bord," and Thursday after Thursday, when we go out walking, he relates these stories to me. The tragic strain of my own fate is the cause of my taking a grim pleasure in these narratives, in which crime plays the chief part. Unfortunately I have confided the secret of this questionable amusement to my good aunt, and the head master has separated the improvised "feuilletoniste" from his public. Gervais and I are forbidden to walk together. My aunt believed that the excess of sensitiveness in me, which alarmed her, would be corrected by this prohibition. Poor woman! Neither her solicitous tenderness, nor her pious care and foresight—she comes to Versailles from Compiègne every Sunday to take me out—nor

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my studies—for I redouble my efforts so that my stepfather should not triumph in my bad marks—nor my religious enthusiasm—for I have become the most fervent of us all at the chapel—no, nothing, nothing appeases the hidden demon which possesses and devours me. While the evening studies are going on, and in the interval between two tasks, I read a letter whose envelope bears the effigy of King Victor Emmanuel. This is my food for the week, conveyed in the pages written by my mother. They give me details of her travels, which I do not understand very clearly; but I do understand that she is happy without me, outside of me—that the thought of my father and his mysterious death no longer haunts her; above all, that she loves her new husband, and I am jealous—miserably, basely jealous. My imagination, which has its strange lapses, has also a singular minuteness. I see my mother in a room in a foreign inn, and spread out upon the table are the various fittings of her traveling-bag, silver-mounted, with her cipher in relief, the Christian name in full, and encircling it the letter T. Marie T——. Well, had she not the right to make a new life for herself, honorably? Why should this mixture of her past with her present hurt me so much? So much,

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that just now, when stretched upon my narrow iron bed in the dormitory, I could not close my eyes.

How long those nights seemed to me, when I lay down oppressed by this thought, and strove in vain to lose it in the sweet oblivion of sleep! I prayed to God for sleep, with all the strength of my childlike piety. I said mentally twelve times twelve *Paters* and *Aves*—and I did not sleep. I then tried to "form a chimera;" for thus I called a strange faculty with which I knew myself to be endowed. When I was quite a little boy, on an occasion when I was suffering from toothache, I had shut my eyes, forcibly abstracted my mind, and compelled it to represent a happy scene in which I was the chief actor. Thus I was enabled to overrule my sensations to the point of becoming insensible to the toothache. Now, whenever I suffer, I do the same, and the device is almost always successful. I employ it in vain when my mother is in question. Instead of the picture of felicity which I evoke, the other picture presents itself to me, that of the intimate life of the being whom in all the world I most love, with the man whom I most hate. For I hate him, with an implacable hatred, and without being able to assign any other motive than that

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he has taken the first place in the heart which was all my own. Ah, me! I shall hear the slow hours struck, first from the belfry of a church hard by, and then by the school-clock—a grave and sonorous chime, then a treble ringing. I shall hear old Sorbelle walk through the whole length of the dormitory, and then go into the room which he occupies at the far end. How dull is the spectacle of the two rows of our little beds, with their brass knobs shining in the dim light; and how odious it is to be listening to the snores of the sleepers! At measured intervals the watchman, an old soldier with a big face and thick black moustaches, passes. He is wrapped in a brown cloth cape, and carries a dark lantern. Can it be that he is not afraid, all alone, at night, in those long passages, and on the stone staircases, where the wind rushes about with a dismal noise? How I should hate to be obliged to go down those stairs, shuddering in that darkness with the fear of meeting a ghost! I try to drive away this new idea, but in vain, and then I think. . . . Where is he who killed my father? Is it with fear, is it with horror that I shudder at this question? And I go on thinking. . . . Does he know that I am here? Panic seizes upon me, with the idea that the assassin might be capa-

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ble of assuming the disguise of a school servant, for the purpose of killing me also. I commend my soul to God, and in the midst of these awful thoughts I fall asleep at length, very late, to be awakened with a start at half-past five in the morning, with an aching head, shaken nerves, and an ailing mind, sick of a disease which is beyond cure.

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VI.

THREE years have passed away since the autumnal evening on which a hackney-coach had set down my stepfather and myself in that corner of one of the gloomy avenues of Old Versailles, which is made more gloomy by the walls of the school. I was to have remained at this school for ten months only—the period of my mother's stay in Italy. That evening was in the autumn of 1866; we are now in the winter of 1870, and I have been all this time imprisoned in the Lycée, "where the air is so good, and I get on so well." These are the reasons assigned by my mother for not taking me back to her home. My school-fellows pass before me in the twilight of my remembrance of that distant time. Rocquain, more pasty-faced than ever, with his comic-actor-like red nose, sings café-concert songs, smokes cigarettes in secret places, and collects the photographs of the actresses in vogue. Gervais, still brown and surly, has a passion for races, at which he is always playing, and is reconciled with Leyreloup, "the hedgehog," as we call him, whom he has in-

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fected with his dangerous mania. The two are constantly arranging insect or tortoise steeple-chases. They have even contrived a betting system, and ten of us have joined in it. The game is played by placing in front of a dictionary several bits of paper with the name of a horse written upon each of them. The dictionary is then opened and shut rapidly, and the bit of paper which is blown farthest away by the little breeze thus created, is the winner, and the boys who have backed it divide the stakes. Parizelle is bigger than ever; at sixteen he is already growing a beard, and has been entertained by some military acquaintances at a certain café, which he points out to us when we take our weekly walks. As for myself, I have a new friend, one Joseph Dediot, who has introduced me to some of the verses of De Musset. We go wild over this poet. Dediot's place in the school-room is by the side of Scelles, the bookseller's son, whom we call Bel-Œil, because he squints. Bel-Œil is as lazy as a lobster, and Dediot has made the oddest bargain with him. Dediot does all his exercises, and in return for each, Bel-Œil hands over to him a copy of twenty lines of "Rolla." In exchange for I know not how many versions, themes, and Latin verses, my friend has

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at last secured the entire poem, and we spout its most characteristic lines enthusiastically.

We have become sceptics and misanthropes. We play at despairing Atheism, just as Parizelle and Rocquain play at debauchery, Gervais and others at sport and fashion, politics and love. Old Sorbelle, having been dismissed from the Lycée, has just published a pamphlet in which he figures under the name of Lebros, and the Provost under that of M. Bifteck. This little book occupies our attention throughout the whole winter, and induces us to form a conspiracy which leads to nothing. Here we are, then, playing at revolution! What a strange discipline is that of those infamous schools, where young boys ruin their years of happy youth by the puerile and premature imitation of passions from which they will have to suffer in reality some day, just as children, who are destined to die in war as men, play at soldiers, with their flaxen curls and their ringing laughter! Alas! for me the game was over too soon.

Nevertheless, this shabby, dull, mean school was my home, the only place in which I felt myself really "at home," and I loved it. Yes, I loved that hulks which was also partly barracks and partly hospital, because there at all events I was

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not perpetually confronted with the evidence of my double misfortune. After all, the influence of my age made itself felt there, the nervous strain upon me was relaxed, and I escaped from the fixed idea of the murderer of my father to be discovered, and my stepfather to be detested. My half-holidays were such misery to me that they would have made me dread the termination of my school time, only that I knew the same date would place me in possession of my fortune, enabling me to devote myself entirely to the supreme aim and purpose of my life. I had sworn to myself that the mysterious assassin whom justice had failed to discover should be unearthed by me, and I derived extraordinary moral strength from that resolution, which I kept strictly to myself, without ever speaking of it. This, however, did not prevent me from suffering from trifles, whenever those trifles were signs of my doubly-orphaned state. How clearly present to me now are the torments of those sortie days! When the servant who was to take me to my mother's abode comes to fetch me on those Sunday mornings at eight, his careless manner makes me feel that I am no longer the son of the house. This wretch, this François Niquet, with his shaven chin and his insolent eye, does not remove his hat when I

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come down into the parlor. Sometimes, when the weather is bad, he presumes to grumble, and, although the smell of tobacco makes me sick, he lights his pipe in the railway carriage, and smokes without asking my leave. I would rather die than make any observation upon this, because I had once complained of my stepfather's valet, a vile fellow whom they made out to be in the right as against me, and I then and there resolved that never again would I expose myself to a similar affront. Besides, I had already suffered too much, and thus to suffer teaches one to feel contempt. The train proceeds, and I do not exchange a dozen words with the fellow. I know that I am regarded as proud and unamiable; but the same bent of mind which made me sullen when quite a child, now makes me take a pleasure in displeasing those whom I dislike. Amid silence and the reek of coarse tobacco, we reach the Montparnasse Station, where no carriage ever awaits me, no matter how bad the weather may be. We take the Boulevard Latour-Maubourg, and pass by the long avenues lined with buildings, hospitals, and bric-à-brac shops, turn down by the Church of Saint François Xavier with its two slender towers, cross the Place des Invalides, and reach the door of our hotel. I hate the con-

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cierge, also a creature of M. Termonde's, and his broad flat face, in which I read hostility which is no doubt absolute indifference. But everything transforms itself into a sign of enmity, to my mind, from the faces of the servants, even to the aspect of my own room. M. Termonde has taken my own dear old room from me; a large handsome room, which used to be flooded with sunshine, with a window opening on the garden, and a door communicating with my mother's apartment. I now occupy a sort of large closet, with a northern aspect and no view except that of a wood-stack. When I reach home on those Sunday mornings, I have to go straight to this room and wait there until my mother has risen and can receive me. No one has taken the trouble to light a fire; so I ask for one, and while the servant is blowing at the logs, I take a chair, and gaze at the portrait of my father, which is now banished to my quarters after having figured for so long upon an easel draped with black, in my mother's morning-room. The odor of damp wood in process of kindling is mingled with the musty flavor of the room, which has been shut up all the week. I have some bitter moments to pass there. These mean miseries make me feel the moral forsakenness of my position more

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keenly, more cruelly. And my mother lives, she breathes at the distance of a few steps from me; yes, and she loves me!

Now that I can cast a lurid look back upon my unhappy youth, I am aware that my own temper had much to do with the misunderstanding between my poor mother and myself which has never ceased to exist. Yes, she loved me, and at the same time she loved her husband. It was for me to explain to her the sort of pain she caused me by uniting and mingling those two affections in her heart. She would have understood me, she would have spared me the series of small dumb troubles that ultimately made any explanation between us impossible. When at length I saw her on those "sortie" days, at about eleven, just before breakfast, she expected me to meet her with effusive delight; how should she know that the presence of her husband paralyzed me, just as it had done when we parted before her journey to Italy? There was an incomprehensible mystery to her in that absolute incapacity for revealing my mind, that stony inertness which overwhelmed me so soon as we were not alone, she and I—and we were never alone. She used to come to see me at Versailles once a week, on Wednesday, and it hardly ever happened that she came without my stepfather.

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I never wrote a letter to her that she did not show to her husband; indeed, he saw every letter which she received. How well I knew this habit of hers, how she would say, "André has written to me," and then hand to him the sheet of paper on which I could not trace one sincere, heartfelt, trustful line, because of the idea that his eyes were to rest upon it! How many notes have I torn up in which I tried to tell her the story of the troubles amid which I lived! Yes, yes, I ought to have spoken to her, nevertheless, to have explained myself a little, confessed my sufferings, my wild jealousy, my brooding grief, my great need of having a corner in her thoughts for myself alone, were it only pity—but I dared not. It was in my nature to feel the pain that I must cause her by speaking thus, too strongly, and I was unable to bear it. All the various trouble of my heart then was bound up in a timid silence, in embarrassment in her presence which affected herself. Like many women she was unable to understand a disposition different from her own, a manner of feeling opposed to hers. She was happy in her second marriage, she loved, she was loved. In M. Termonde she had met a man to whom she had given her whole self, but she had also given to me freely, lavishly. I was her son, it seemed so net-

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ural to her that he whom she loved should also love her child. And, in fact, had not M. Termonde been to me a vigilant and irreproachable protector? Had he not carefully provided for every detail of my education? No doubt he had insisted upon my being sent to school as a boarder, but I had also been of his opinion as to that. He had chosen masters for me in all branches of instruction; I learned fencing, riding, dancing, music, foreign languages. He had attended to, and he continued to attend to, the smallest details, from the New Year's gift that I was to receive—it was always very handsome—to the fixing of my allowance, my "week," as we called it, which was paid on each Thursday, at the highest figure permitted by the rules of the Lycée. Never had this man, who was so imperious by nature, raised his voice in speaking to me. Never once since his marriage had he varied from the most perfect politeness toward me; a woman who was in love with him would naturally see in this a proof of exquisite tact and devoted affection. Put my grievances against my stepfather into words? No, I could not do it. And so I was silent, and how was my mother to explain my sullenness, the absence of any demonstrativeness on my part toward my stepfather otherwise than by my self-

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ishness and want of feeling? She did believe me, in fact, to be a selfish and unfeeling boy, and I, owing to my unhealthy mood of mind, felt that when I was in her presence I really became what she believed me. I shrank into myself like a surly animal. But why did she not spare me those trials which completed our alienation from each other? Why, when we met on those wretched Sundays, did she not contrive that I should have the five minutes alone with her that would have enabled me, not to talk to her—I did not ask so much—but to embrace her, as I loved her, with all my heart? I came into the room which she had transformed into a private sitting-room—in every corner of it I had played at my free pleasure when I, the spoiled child whose lightest wish was a command, was the master—and there was M. Termonde in his morning costume, smoking cigarettes and reading newspapers. It needed nothing but the rustle of the sheet in his hand, the tone of his voice as he bade me good-day, the touch of his fingers—he merely gave me their tips—and I re-coiled upon myself. So strong was my antipathy that I never remember to have eaten with a good appetite at the same table with him. My wretch-edness was at its height during those Sunday breakfasts and dinners. Ah, I hated everything

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about him; his blue eyes, almost too far apart, which were sometimes fixed, and at others rolled slightly in their orbits, his high prominent forehead, and prematurely gray hair, the refinement of his features, and the elegance of his manners, such a contrast with my natural dullness and lack of ease—yes, I hated all these, and even to the finely-shaped foot which was set off by his perfect boots. I think that even now, at this present hour, I should recognize a coat he had worn, among a thousand, so living a thing has a garment of his seemed to me, under the influence of that aversion. Only too well did I, with my filial instinct, realize that he, with his slender graceful figure, his feline movements, his flattering voice, his native and acquired aristocratic ways, was the true husband of the lovely, highly-adorned, almost ideal creature whom I, her son, resembled as little as my poor father had resembled her. Ah, how bitter was that knowledge!

Out of the depths of the silence which I preserved on those wretched half-holidays, I followed with intense interest all the conversations that took place before me, especially during breakfast and dinner, in the dining-room, newly furnished, like all the rest of the house. The hours of those

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meals were no longer the hours of my father's time. This change, and the new furnishing of our dwelling, typified the newness of my mother's life. M. Termonde, who was the son of a stock-broker, and had been for some time in diplomacy, had kept up social relations of a kind quite different from our former ones. My mother and he went frequently into that mixed and cosmopolitan society which was then, and is now, called "smart." What had become of the familiar faces at the dinners, few and far between, which my father used to give at the Rue Tronchet? Those dinner parties consisted of three or four persons, the ladies in high gowns, and the gentlemen in morning dress. The talk was of politics and business; a former Minister of King Louis Philippe's, who had gone back to his practice at the bar, was the oracle of the little circle; and the dinner hour was half-past six, instead of seven, on those days, because the old statesman always retired to rest at ten o'clock. In the wealthy but plain bourgeois life of our home, to go to a theatre was an event, and a ball formed an epoch. Thus, at least, did things represent themselves to my childish mind. Now the old ex-Minister came to the house no more, nor Mdme. Largeyx, the engineer's widow, whom

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papa was always quoting to mamma as a model, and whom my mother laughingly called her "mother-in-law." Now, my mother and my step-father went out almost every evening. They had horses and several carriages, instead of the coupé hired by the month with which the wife of the renowned lawyer had been content. All the men who came in after dinner, all the women whom I met at six o'clock in my mother's drawing-room, were young and full of life and spirits, and their talk was solely of amusements; new plays, fancy balls, races, and dress. My father, who was full of the ideas of the Monarchy of July, like his old political friend, used to speak severely of the imperial régime; but now, my mother was invited to the great receptions at the Tuileries. How could I have ventured to talk to her about the small miseries of my school life, which seemed to me so mean when I contrasted them with her brilliant and opulent existence? Formerly, when I was a day pupil at the Bona-parte, I used to relate to her every trifle concerning the school and my fellow pupils; but now, I should have been ashamed to bore her with Rocquain, Gervais, Leyreloup, and the rest. It seemed to me that she could not possibly be interested in the story of how Joseph Dediot had

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been traitorously deserted by his faithless cousin Cécile; and yet, how tragic the case was, to my mind! Notwithstanding that two locks of hair had been exchanged, a bouquet offered and accepted, a kiss snatched and returned, the false girl had married an apothecary at Avranches. Dediot had even written two poems, inspired by his misfortune, and one of them, dedicated to me, began thus:

Sèche ton cœur, André, ne sois jamais aimant.

How could I have talked of all these small things to a lady who dined with the Duchesse d'Arcole, whose intimate friends were a Maréchale and two Marquises, and whose entertainments were described in the society journals? My mother was now the beautiful Madame Termonde, and so completely had her new name replaced the old, that I was almost the only person who remembered she was also the widow of M. Cornélis, he whose tragical death had been related in the very same newspapers. Had she herself forgotten it?

"Forgetfulness! Is this then in all reality the world's law?" I asked myself, with the indignant revolt of a young heart, which does not admit the inevitable compromises of feeling. And I made answer to myself, No! There was one person

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who remembered as well as I did, one person to whom my father's death still remained a hideous nightmare, one person to whom I could tell all my thoughts and all my grief—my dear, good, kind aunt. In her case at least all the fond and and tender things of the past remained unchanged. When August came, and I went to Compiègne for a portion of my holidays, I found everything in its place, both in the house and in the heart of the dear old maid.

For my sake, I knew it well, she had consented to keep up her former relations with my mother and she dined with her three or four times a year. Dear Aunt Louise! She would listen with the utmost kindness to all my childish complaints, and she always sent me home softened, almost appeased; more indulgent towards my mother, and convinced that I was wrong in my judgment of M. Termonde.

Nevertheless, I did not tell Aunt Louise anything about my reprisals upon the man whom I accused of having stolen my mother's heart from me. I had perceived, very soon, certain signs of an antipathy toward myself on the part of my stepfather, similar to that which I entertained toward him. When I came rather suddenly into the salon, and he was engaged in a conversation

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