THE INTRUDER

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THE ROMANCES OF THE ROSE

THE INTRUDER

BY

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TRANSLATED BY
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Beati immaculati...

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1898

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By the Same Author.
THE TRIUMPH OF DEATH.
THE MAIDENS OF THE ROCKS.

THE INTRUDER.[*]

[*] In the original Italian, this novel is entitled "L'Innocente."

Should I go before the judge and say: "I have committed a crime. He would not be dead if I had not killed him. It is I, Tullio Hermil, who am his assassin. I premeditated that assassination in my house. I committed it with perfect lucidity of conscience, methodically, in all security. And I have gone on living in my house with my secret for a whole year, until to-day. To-day is the anniversary I deliver myself into your hands. Listen to me, judge me."

Can I go before the judge? Can I speak to him like that?

I cannot, and I will not. The justice of men does not reach as far as me. There is no tribunal on earth competent to judge me.

And yet I feel a desire to accuse myself, to confess. I feel a desire to reveal my secret to someone.

TO WHOM?

My first recollection is as follows:

It was in April. For several days, during the festivities of the Pentecost, Juliana and I and our two little daughters, Maria and Natalia, had been in the country, at my mother's house, a roomy old place known as the Badiola. It was the seventh year of our marriage.

Three years had already slipped by since another Pentecost which, passed in that villa, white and isolated as a monastery, and embalmed with tufts of violets, had seemed to me a veritable festival of pardon, peace, and love. At that time Natalia, the second of my little girls, barely emerged from swaddling clothes like a flower from its envelope, was learning to walk; and Juliana was very good and indulgent with me, although there was a shade of melancholy in her smile. I had come back to her, repentant and submissive, after the first serious infidelity. My mother, who knew nothing of what had happened, had tied with her dear hands a sprig of olive at the head of our bed, and filled the little silver holy-water dish hanging on the wall.

But what had not happened in three years! Between Juliana and myself the breach was henceforth definitive and irreparable. I had gone on wronging her repeatedly; I had insulted her in the most outrageous manner without regard for her feelings, without restraint, carried away by an appetite greedy for pleasure, by the vertigo of my passions, by the curiosity of my corrupted mind. I had had as mistresses two of her intimate friends; I had spent several weeks at Florence with Teresa Raffo, shamelessly; I had fought with the false Count Raffo a duel in which my unfortunate adversary covered himself with ridicule owing to certain bizarre circumstances. And nothing of all this had remained unknown to Juliana; and she had suffered, but with much pride, and almost without saying anything.

We had only had on this subject a few very short interviews, at which I did not tell a single falsehood. It seemed to me that my sincerity would attenuate my fault in the eyes of this sweet and noble woman, who I knew had a superior mind.

I knew also that she recognized my intellectual superiority and that she excused in part the disorders of my conduct by the specious theories that, more than once, I had aired in her presence, to the great detriment of the moral doctrines that the majority of men profess to believe in. The conviction that she would not judge me like any ordinary man lightened my conscience of the weight of my errors. "She, too, understands," I thought, "that, since I am different from others,

since I have a different conception of life, I have the right to elude the duties that others would impose on me. I have the right to despise the opinions of others, and to lead with absolute sincerity the only life possible to my higher nature."

I had the conviction of being not only a higher nature, but also a rare intelligence; and I believed that the rarity of my sensations and my feelings ennobled, distinguished, all my acts. Proud and curious of this rarity of mine, I was incapable of conceiving the slightest sacrifice, the slightest abnegation of myself; I was incapable of renouncing the expression, the manifestation of one of my desires. But, at the bottom of all my subtilties, there was only a terrible egotism that caused me to neglect my duties, while at the same time I accepted the benefits of my situation.

Insensibly, in fact, from one abuse to another, I had succeeded in reconquering my old-time liberty, even with Juliana's consent, without hypocrisy, without subterfuge, without degrading lies. I made a study of being loyal, no matter at what cost, as others make a study of deception.

At all times, I strove to confirm, between Juliana and myself, the new pact of fraternal affection and pure friendship. She was to be my sister, the best of my friends.

My sister, my only sister, Constance, had died when she was nine years old, leaving in my heart infinite regret. I often thought, with profound melancholy, of that little soul who had not been able to offer me the treasure of her tenderness, a treasure that I dreamed inexhaustible. Among all human affections, among all earthly loves, that of a sister had always seemed to me the highest and the most consoling. I often thought of that lost great consolation, and the irrevocableness of death added a sort of mystery to my pain. Where can one, on earth, find another sister?

Spontaneously, this sentimental aspiration turned towards Juliana.

Too proud to accept a division, she had already renounced all caresses, all abandon. And I, for some time past, no longer felt a shade of sensual disturbance when near her. In vain I felt her breath on my cheek, respired her perfume, looked at the little brown mole on her neck. I remained absolutely cold. It seemed impossible to me that this was the same woman.

I then offered to become a brother to her; and she accepted, without affectation. If she were sad, I myself was still more so in thinking that our love was buried forever and without hope of resurrection, in thinking that our lips doubtless would never, never meet again.

And, in the blindness of my egotism, it seemed to me that at heart she ought to be grateful to me for this sadness, which I felt was already incurable; it seemed to me that she ought to be pleased at it and find a consolation in it, as if with a reflection of our past love.

There had been a time when we both dreamed, not only of love, but of passion until death—*usque ad mortem.* We had both believed in our dream—and more than once, during our moments of ecstasy, we had uttered the great illusionary words: *Always! never!* We had ended by believing in the affinity of our flesh, in that affinity so rare, so mysterious, which binds two human creatures together by the frightful bond of insatiable desire. We believed so because the acuteness of our sensations had not diminished even after, by the creation of a new being, the obscure Genius of the Species had attained, by means of our persons, his unique object.

Then the illusion had faded away; the flame had gone out. My soul—I swear it—had sincerely wept over the catastrophe. But how to prevent a necessary phenomenon? How to avoid the inevitable?

It was, therefore, very fortunate that, after the death of our love, caused by the fatal necessity of the phenomenon, and consequently by the fault of neither of us, we were able to go on living in the same house, bound by a new sentiment, which was perhaps not less profound than the old one, and which, assuredly, was higher and more singular. It was very fortunate that a new illusion could replace the old one, and establish between our souls an exchange of pure affections, delicate emotions, and exquisite sadness.

But, in reality, what was to be the end of this species of platonic rhetoric? To induce the victim to smilingly consent to her own immolation.

In reality, our new existence, henceforth fraternal and no longer conjugal, was based entirely on this hypothesis: that the *sister* should make complete abnegation of herself. I myself resumed my liberty, I could go in quest of those new sensations which my nerves needed, I could feel passion for another woman, devote to my mistress all the time that I liked, live away from home a strange and ardent existence, and then return, find there again the *sister* who was awaiting me, see everywhere in my rooms visible traces of her care: on my table, a vase full of roses that her hands had arranged; on all sides order, refinement, and the radiant cleanliness of a place in which lives a Grace. Was not that an enviable condition for me? And was not she an extraordinarily precious wife, who would consent to sacrifice her youth to me and who considered herself well recompensed if only I pressed a grateful and almost religious kiss on her proud and gentle brow?

At times my gratitude became so warm that it took the form of an infinity of attentions and affectionate greetings. I possessed the art of being the best of brothers. When I was absent, I wrote Juliana long letters full of melancholy and tenderness, which were often posted at the same time as those addressed to my mistress. And my mistress could not have been jealous of them any more than she could be jealous of my adoration of Constance's memory.

All absorbed as I was by the intensity of my peculiar life, I could not elude the problems which, at times, presented themselves to my mind. That Juliana could continue her sacrifice with such marvellous strength, she must love me with a sovereign love; but if she loved me and could be only my *sister*, she must, without any possible doubt, bear in her soul the secret of a mortal despair. Was not, therefore, any man a madman who, without remorse, immolated to other loves, disturbed and chimerical, this creature who smiled so sadly, and was so gentle and brave? I remember (and I am surprised now at my perversity at that time), I remember that, among the reasons that I advanced to calm myself, the strongest was this one: "Since moral greatness results from the violence of the sorrows over which one triumphs, it is necessary that she should suffer all I make her suffer so that she may have an opportunity to display her heroism."

But, one day, I noticed that she was also suffering in her health. I perceived that her pale face was growing still whiter, and at times took on livid tints. More than once I noticed on her face the contractions of suppressed pain; more than once, in my presence, she was seized with an irresistible trembling which shook her entire being and made her teeth rattle as by the shiver of a sudden fever. One evening while she was upstairs I heard her give a piercing cry. I ran to her and found her standing upright, leaning against a cupboard, convulsed, writhing, as if she had taken poison. She seized my hand, and held it tight as in a vise.

"Tullio! Tullio! How horrible it is! Oh, how horrible it is!"

She looked at me, close to; she kept fixed upon me her dilated eyes, which in the twilight seemed of unusual size. And in those large orbs I saw pass something like the waves of some mysterious agony. That persistent, intolerable gaze suddenly filled me with a mad terror. It was evening, twilight, and the window was open, and the swollen curtains shook at the breath of the wind, and a candle was burning on a table, before a mirror. And, I know not why, the shaking of the curtains, the hopeless flickering of the tiny flame which reflected her paleness in the glass, assumed in my mind a sinister significance, and increased my terror. The idea of poison flashed across my mind. At that moment she could not repress another cry, and, beside herself by the excess of pain, she threw herself upon my breast distractedly.

"Oh! Tullio, Tullio! Help me, help me!"

Paralyzed with terror, I remained for a moment without power to utter a word, without power to make a movement.

"What have you done, Juliana? What have you done? Speak, speak! What have you done?"

Surprised at the great change in my voice, she drew back a little and looked at me. My face must have been whiter and more upset than hers; for she replied quickly, in a rambling way:

"Nothing, nothing, Tullio! Don't be frightened. See, it's nothing—only one of my usual spells. You know—it will soon be over—don't be alarmed."

But, seized by the terrible suspicion, I doubted her words. It seemed to me that all around revealed to me the tragic event and that an inner voice repeated: "*It's for you, for you, that she wanted to die; it's you, you, who have urged her on towards death.*" And I took her hands, and I felt they were cold, and I saw a bead of sweat running down her brow.

"No, no," I cried; "you're deceiving me. For pity's sake, Juliana, my cherished soul, speak, speak! Tell me, have you— Oh! for pity's sake, tell me, have you taken——"

And my horrified eyes sought all around, on the furniture, on the carpet, everywhere, for some sign.

Then she understood. Again she let herself fall on my breast, and shuddering, making me shudder, she said to me her mouth against my shoulder (never, never, shall I forget that indefinable tone), she said to me:

"No, no, no, Tullio; no!"

Ah! what else in the world can equal the vertiginous acceleration of our inner life? We remained in this attitude in the middle of the room, silent; and, in a single moment, the inconceivable immensity of a universe of feelings and thoughts surged up in me with frightful distinctness. "*And if it were true?*" demanded the voice; "*if it were true?*"

Continual starts shook Juliana against my breast—she still kept her face hidden; and I myself knew well that, in spite of the sufferings of her poor flesh, she thought only of the possibility of the deed I had suggested—she thought only of my mad terror.

A question rose to my lips: "Have you ever been *tempted?*" Then another: "Is there a possibility of your giving way to the *temptation?*" I did not give expression to either of them, and yet it seemed to me that she understood. From then on, we were both under the empire of this thought of death, this picture of death; we both were subjected to a kind of tragic exaltation which made us forget the moment of doubt in which it was born, and lose consciousness of the real. All at once she burst into sobs, and her tears provoked my tears. We mingled our tears, such hot tears, alas! which yet were powerless to change our destiny.

I knew later that, for several months already, she had been tormented with complicated internal troubles, those terrible occult maladies which, in the woman, disturb all the vital functions. The doctor whom I consulted gave me to understand that another pregnancy might be fatal to her.

This grieved me, and, nevertheless, relieved me from two sources of anxiety. I was convinced that I had nothing to do with Juliana's decline, and I had an excuse in my mother's eyes for our separate beds and all the other changes that

had taken place in our domestic life. About that time my mother was coming to Rome from the country, where, since my father's death, she passed the greater part of the year with my brother Federico.

My mother was very fond of her young daughter-in-law. In her eyes Juliana was truly the ideal wife, the companion of whom she had dreamed for her son. She did not believe that anywhere in the world there was a more beautiful, more gentle, more noble woman than Juliana. She could not conceive that I could desire other women, abandon myself in other arms, sleep upon other hearts. As she had been loved for twenty years by a man, always with the same devotion, with the same fidelity, until death, she was ignorant of the lassitude, the disgust, the treachery, and all the miseries and all the shames that the conjugal alcove shelters. She was ignorant of the wounds that I had inflicted and that I was still inflicting on this dear soul which did not deserve them. Deceived by Juliana's generous dissimulation, she still believed in our felicity. How it would have grieved her had she known the truth!

At that period I was still under the domination of Teresa Raffo, whose violent and empoisoned charms evoked in me the image of Menippo's mistress. Do you remember what Appollonius says to Menippo in the ravishing poem: "O beautiful young man, thou art caressing a serpent; a serpent is caressing thee!"

Chance favored me. The death of an aunt compelled Teresa to leave Rome and to remain absent some time. I was then able by unusual assiduity when with my wife to fill the great void that the departure of the "Biondissima" left in my days. The disturbance which had taken place in me that evening had not yet been quieted. Since that evening there floated between Juliana and myself something new, indefinable.

As her physical suffering increased, my mother and I were able, not without great difficulty, to secure her consent to the surgical operation necessitated by her condition. After the operation she was confined to her bed for thirty or forty days and compelled to take the greatest precautions during her convalescence. Already the poor invalid's nerves were extremely weak and irritable. The preparations, long and wearisome, exhausted and exasperated her so much that, more than once, she tried to throw herself out of bed, to revolt, to escape the brutal punishment which violated her, humiliated her, degraded her.

"Tell me," she said to me one day with bitterness, "aren't you disgusted with me when you think of it? Oh, how horrible it is!"

And she made a gesture of repugnance at herself, frowned, then was silent.

Another day as I entered her room she cried:

"Go away, go away, Tullio! Please go away! You can come back when I'm better. If you stay here you'll hate me. I'm odious now, odious—don't look at me."

Sobs choked her. The same day, a few hours later, while I was standing by her bedside in silence, because I thought she was about to doze off, she let fall these obscure words, pronounced with the strange tone of someone speaking in his sleep:

"Yes, really, I did it. It was a good idea——"

"What are you saying, Juliana?"

She did not reply.

"What are you thinking of, Juliana?"

She replied only by a contraction of her mouth, which was meant to be a smile.

I believed I understood. And a tumultuous wave of regret, tenderness, and pity assailed me. I would have given everything so that at that moment she could have read in my soul, that she could have observed there in its plenitude my inexpressible and consequently vain emotion. "Forgive me! Forgive me! Tell me what I must do to obtain my forgiveness, to make you forget all the pain I have caused you.... I will come back to you, I will be entirely yours, forever. It is you, you alone whom I have truly loved; you are the only love of my life. My soul ceaselessly turns towards you, and seeks you, and regrets you. I swear it! When away from you I have never felt sincere joy, I have never had an instant of complete forgetfulness. Never, never! I swear it! You alone, of all the women in the world, are the living expression of goodness and gentleness. You are the best and the sweetest creature that I have ever dreamed of. You are the Unique! And yet I have offended you, I have caused you to suffer, I have made you think of death as a desirable thing! Oh! you will pardon me; but I—I can never forgive myself. You, you will forget; but I, I shall not forget. I shall always be in my own eyes an unworthy being, and the devotion of all my life will not seem a sufficient reparation. Henceforth, as formerly, you will be my mistress, my friend, my sister; as formerly, you will be my guardian and my adviser. I will tell you everything, I will reveal everything to you. You will be my soul. And you will get better. It is I who will cure you. You will see how tender your doctor will be to you. Oh, you already know his tenderness. Remember, remember! Then, too, you were ill, and you wouldn't have any other doctor than me. And I did not leave your bedside night or day. And you used to say: 'Juliana *will always remember*, always!' And you had tears in your eyes and I drank them, trembling. Saint! Saint! Remember. When you can get up, when you are convalescent, we'll go back there, we'll return to the Lilacs. You will still be a little weak, but you'll feel so well! And I, I shall feel once more my old-time gayety and I will make you smile, I will make you laugh. You yourself will have once more your sweet bursts of joy that rejuvenated my heart, you will have once more your exquisite girl-like airs, and you'll wear once more on your shoulders that plait of hair which pleased

me so much. We are young. We can, if you wish it, reconquer happiness. We'll live—yes—we'll live...." That is how I spoke inwardly; but the words did not issue from my lips. It was in vain that I was moved and that my eyes became moist; I knew that my emotion was temporary, that these promises were deceptive. I knew also that Juliana would not entertain any illusions and that she would reply by that feeble and distrustful smile which, at other times, I had already noticed on her lips. That smile meant: "Yes, I know, you are good and you would like to spare me pain; but you are not master of yourself, you cannot resist the fatalities that control you. Why should I blind my eyes to the truth?"

That day I said nothing; and the days that followed, in spite of the frequent return of the same confused impulse of repentance, vague intentions, and dreams, I did not dare to speak. "To come back to her, you must abandon those things you delight in, that woman who corrupts you. Have you the strength to do it?" I replied to myself: "Who knows?" And I waited from day to day for the strength that did not come; I waited from day to day for some event, without knowing what, that could determine my resolution, render it inevitable. My mind pictured our new life, the slow reblossoming of our legitimate love, the strange savor of certain sensations renewed. "We'll go back there, to the Lilacs, to the house where still linger our sweetest memories; we'll be there alone, all alone, because Maria and Natalia would stay with my mother at the Badiola." The weather would be mild and the invalid would not leave the support of my arms, in those familiar paths where each of our footsteps would awaken a souvenir. At certain moments her pale face would suddenly be covered with a faint flush, and we should both feel a little timidity in each other's presence; at others, we should seem preoccupied; at others, we should avoid each other's gaze. Why? Finally, one day, the suggestion of the spot would master us, and I should be bold enough to speak to her of the early days. "Do you remember? Do you remember?" And, little by little, we should both feel the disturbance grow and become unbearable; we should both at the same time clasp each other in a wild embrace, we should kiss each other on the mouth, we should feel about to faint. She would faint, yes; and I would lift her in my arms, I would call her by the names that a supreme tenderness would suggest to me. Her eyes would reopen, all the veils would be lifted from her gaze, and, for an instant, her very soul would be riveted on me: she would appear to me transfigured. Then the old ardor would retake possession of us, we should reënter into the great illusion. We should both have but a unique and incessant thought; we should be tormented by inexpressible uneasiness. I should ask her, my voice trembling: "*Are you better?*" And, by its tone, she would understand the question that this question concealed; and she would reply, without succeeding in dissimulating a thrill: "*Not yet.*" And in the evening, when we left each other and each retired to a separate chamber, we should feel as if dying

of anguish. But, one morning, with an unexpected glance, her eyes would say to me: "*To-day, to-day...*" And, in the terror of this divine and terrible moment, she would take some childish pretext to flee from me. She would say to me: "*Let us go out, let us go out.*" We would go out, on a grayish, cloudy, oppressive afternoon. The walk would tire us. Drops of rain, warm as tears, would begin to fall on our hands and faces. I would say to her in a changed voice: "*Let us go home.*" And, on the threshold, unexpectedly I would seize her in my arms, I would feel her abandon herself almost fainting in my arms, I would carry her upstairs without perceiving her weight. It is so long ago—so long ago! And our beings, under the shock of a divine and terrible sensation, never experienced before, never before imagined, would be utterly exhausted. And, afterwards, she would appear to me almost as if she were dying, her face all bathed in tears, as white as her pillow.

Ah! that is how she appeared to me, it was dying that I saw her, the morning when the doctors put her to sleep with chloroform; and she, feeling that she was slowly sinking into the insensibility of death, tried two or three times to stretch out her arms to me, tried to call me. I left the room, completely overcome. For two long hours, endless hours, I waited, exasperating my suffering by excessive imagination. And my man's being felt a pang of hopeless pity for that poor creature whom the surgeon's steel was violating, not only in her poor flesh, but in the most sacred recesses of her soul, in the most delicate sentiment that a woman can defend—pity for her, and also for the others, for all those tormented by indefinite aspirations towards the idealities of love, abused by the captious dream with which virile desire surrounds them, insensibly captivated with a higher life, but so weak, so sickly, so imperfect, irremediably equal to the females of the beasts by the laws of nature which impose on them the duties of the Species, afflict them with horrible maladies, leave them exposed to all kinds of degeneration. And then, shuddering in every fibre, I saw in them, I saw in all of them, with frightful lucidity the original wound...."

When I reëntered Juliana's room she was still under the influence of the anæsthetic, unconscious, silent, still, like a dying woman. My mother was very pale and very much excited. But it seemed that the operation was a success. The doctors appeared pleased. The assistant surgeon was rolling a bandage. Things gradually began to be orderly and quiet again.

The invalid remained a long time unconscious, and a slight fever set in. In the night she was taken with spasms; laudanum did not quiet her. I was nearly frantic; the spectacle of these horrible sufferings made me think that she was going to die. I no longer know either what I said or what I did. I suffered with her.

The following day the condition of the patient improved; then, from day to day, the improvement continued. Her strength came back very slowly.

I did not quit her bedside. I showed a kind of ostentation in recalling to her, by my acts, the nurse of the old days; but my actual feeling was very different. It was not always the feeling of a *brother* only. It often happened to me that my mind was preoccupied with a phrase written by my mistress, at the very moment that I was reading to her some chapter from one of her favorite books. I did not succeed in forgetting the Absent. Nevertheless, when in replying to a letter I felt myself a little distracted and almost bored, during those strange respites that are still left to us by a strong passion the object of which is far from us, I thought I recognized by this sign that I no longer loved, and I repeated to myself: "Who knows?"

One day, in my presence, my mother said to Juliana:

"When you are up, when you can walk, we'll all go together to the Badiola; won't we, Tullio?"

Juliana looked at me.

"Yes, mother," I replied, without hesitation, without reflection. "But first, Juliana and I will go to the Lilacs."

And she looked at me again, and she smiled, an unexpected, indescribable smile, with an almost infantile expression of credulity. It looked like the smile of a sick baby to whom has been made a great promise which it did not hope for. And she lowered her eyelids; but she continued to smile, and her half-closed eyes seemed to contemplate something, far away, very far. And the smile faded away, faded away, without disappearing.

How she pleased me then! How I adored her at that moment! How I felt that nothing in the world equals the simple emotion of kindness!

Infinite kindness emanated from this creature, penetrated all my being, filled my heart. She was lying on the bed, supported by two or three pillows; her face, amid the mass of untied brown hair, seemed of extraordinarily delicate mould, a sort of visible immateriality. She had on a night-dress tightly closed at the neck, tight around the wrists, and her hands rested flat on the counterpane, so pale that they were only distinguishable from the linen by the blue of their veins.

I took one of these hands (my mother had just left the room), and I said in a low tone:

"So we'll return there—to the Lilacs."

"Yes," replied the invalid.

And we became silent, to prolong our emotion, to preserve our illusion. We both knew the profound meaning concealed under these few whispered words. A sagacious instinct warned us not to insist, not to define anything, not to go too far. If we had said a word more we should have found ourselves face to face with the exclusive realities of the illusion on which our souls existed and in which,

imperceptibly, they lost themselves with rapturous dreams.

One afternoon—we were almost always alone—we were reading, stopping every now and then, bent together over the same page, and following the same lines with our eyes. It was a volume of poetry, and we were giving to the verses an intensity of meaning which they did not possess. Silent ourselves, we spoke to each other by the mouth of the poet. I myself marked with my nail the lines which seemed to interpret to my thoughts:

Je veux, guidé par vous, beaux yeux aux flammes douces,
Par toi conduit, ô main où tremblera ma main,
Marcher droit, que ce soit par des sentiers de mousses
Ou que rocs et cailloux encombrent le chemin,

Oui, je veux marcher droit et calme dans la Vie ...

And she, after reading, sank back for an instant on her pillows, her eyes closed,

and with an almost imperceptible smile on her lips pointed to the passage:

Toi la bonté, toi le sourire,
N'es-tu pas le conseil aussi,
Le bon conseil loyal et brave ...

But on her breast I saw the batiste follow the rhythm of respiration with an

easy grace which began to disturb as also the feeble perfume of iris which was exhaled by bedclothes and pillows. I hoped and I expected that seized by a sudden languor, she would put her arm around my neck and put her cheek to mine, so close that I could feel myself touched by the corner of her mouth. She laid her slender thumb on the book, and with her nail made a mark on the margin, guiding my emotion:

La voix vous fut connue (et chère?),
Mais, à present, elle est voilée
Comme une veuve désolée...

Elle dit, la voix reconnue,
Que la bonté, c'est notre vie...

Elle parle aussi de la gloire,

D'être simple sans plus attendre,

Et de noces d'or, et du tendre
Bonheur d'une paix sans victoire.

Acceuillez la voix qui persiste
Dans son naïf épithalame.
Allez, rien n'est meilleur à l'âme
Que de faire une âme moins triste!

I seized her wrist, and, slowly, I lowered my head until I touched with my lips the hollow of her hand; and I murmured:

"Could you—forget?"

She closed my mouth and uttered her great word:

"Silence!"

At that moment my mother came in to announce the visit of Signora Talice. I noticed Juliana's impatient little gesture, and I felt irritated myself against the importunate visitor. Juliana sighed:

"Oh! *mio Dio!*"

"Tell her that Juliana is sleeping," I suggested to my mother in an almost supplicating tone.

She made me a sign that the visitor was waiting in the adjoining room. We must see her.

This Signora Talice was a spiteful and fastidious gossip. Every few moments she glanced at me with curiosity. In the course of conversation, my mother happened to say that I had sat with the invalid all day almost without interruption, and Signora Talice, looking fixedly at me, said in a tone of manifest irony:

"What an ideal husband!"

She finally irritated me so that I found a pretext to leave the room.

I left the house. On the steps I met Maria and Natalia coming in with their governess. As usual they assailed me with an infinity of caresses, and Maria, the elder, handed me several letters that the janitor had given her. Among them I suddenly recognized the letter of the Absent. And then I escaped from their caresses with a sort of impatience. As soon as I was in the street I stopped to read.

It was a short letter, but full of passion, with two or three of those singularly incisive phrases that Teresa knew how to write when she wished to disturb me. She announced her return to Florence on the twentieth to the twenty-sixth of that month, and said she hoped to meet me as before. She promised to furnish

me with more precise particulars concerning the rendezvous.

In a second all the phantoms of the recent illusions and emotions became detached from my mind like the flowers of a tree shaken by a gust of wind. And, as the fallen flowers are forever lost to the tree, so these things of the soul were lost to me. They became foreign to my being. I made an effort, I tried to regain possession of myself; I did not succeed. I began to walk through the streets, aimlessly; I entered the shop of a confectioner, I entered a book-shop; I bought bonbons and books, mechanically. Twilight fell; the street lamps were lighted; the pavements were crowded; two or three ladies bowed to me from their carriages; one of my friends passed quickly, laughing and talking with his mistress, who held a bunch of roses in her hand. The maleficent breath of fashionable life penetrated me, awakened my curiosity, my desires, my jealousies. My blood seemed suddenly aflame. Certain images, extraordinarily distinct, passed before my mind like a lightning flash. The Absent regained possession of me merely by certain "expressions" of her letter, and all my desires went out towards her, madly.

But when the first tumult was appeased, while I was re-ascending the steps of my house, I understood the gravity of what had taken place, of what I had done; I understood that, a few hours before, I had effectively tightened the bond, I had pledged my faith, I had given a promise, a tacit but solemn promise, to a creature still weak and ill. I could not break my word without infamy, and I was conscious of it. Then I was sorry I had not mistrusted this deceitful compassion; I was sorry I had dwelt too long on this sentimental languor! And I examined minutely my acts, my words, of that day, with the cold subtilty of a dishonest tradesman who seeks a quarrel in order to avoid the obligations of a contract he has made. My last words had been too serious. That "Could you forget?" pronounced in that tone, after the reading of those verses, had had the value of a definite understanding. And that "Silence!" of Juliana had been the seal of the contract.

"But," I thought, "was she really convinced, this time, of my repentance? Has she not always been a little sceptical concerning my good impulses?" And I saw once more that weak and unbelieving smile that, on former occasions, I had already noticed on her lips. "If in the secret recesses of her heart she had not believed, or, again, if her illusion had suddenly faded away, then perhaps my retraction would be less serious, would not greatly wound her or offend her. There would merely have been an episode without consequence, and I should resume my former liberty. The Lilacs would still be a dream to her." But then I saw the other smile, that new, unexpected, credulous smile which had appeared on her lips at the mention of the Lilacs. What could I do? What should I decide? What attitude should I take? Teresa Raffo's letter had the same effect on me as a severe burn.

When I reëntered Juliana's room, I noticed at once that *she was waiting for me.* She seemed pleased. Her eyes shone brilliantly. Her cheeks had more color.

"Wherever have you been?" she asked, laughing.

"Signora Talice drove me away," I replied.

She laughed again, a limpid and young laugh which transfigured her. I held out to her the books and the box of sweetmeats.

"For me?" she cried joyously, like a greedy child.

And she hastened to open the box with graceful little gestures, which aroused in my mind fragments of distant memories.

"For me?"

She took a bonbon, made a motion as if about to carry it to her mouth, hesitated a little, let it fall back, thrust aside the box, and said:

"Later, later——"

"You know, Tullio," explained my mother, "she's not eaten anything yet. She wanted to wait for you."

"Oh, I haven't told you yet," interrupted Juliana, her face flushing. "I haven't told you yet that the doctor came during your absence. He said I am much better. I may get up on Thursday. You understand, Tullio? I may get up on Thursday."

Then she added:

"In ten or fifteen days, at the most, I shall even be able to undertake a journey."

After a moment's reverie she added, in a lower tone:

"The Lilacs!"

So that had been the unique object of her thoughts, the unique object of her dreams! She *had* believed; she *believed.* I had difficulty in dissimulating my anguish. I busied myself, perhaps with excessive eagerness, with the preparations for her little dinner. It was I who put the portable table on her knees.

She followed all my movements with a caressing look that pained me. "Ah! if she could guess!" All at once my mother exclaimed naïvely:

"How beautiful you are to-night, Juliana!"

In fact, an extraordinary animation lit up her features, brightened her eyes, completely rejuvenated her. My mother's exclamation made her blush, and during the whole evening her cheeks preserved a reflection of that redness. She repeated:

"On Thursday I will get up. Thursday—in three days! I shan't know how to walk any more——"

She spoke persistently of her recovery, of our approaching departure. She asked my mother for news of the villa, of the garden.

"I planted a willow branch near the basin, the last time I was there. Do you remember, Tullio? Who knows if we shall find it again——"

"Yes," replied my mother, beaming; "yes, you will find it again. It has grown since then; it is a tree now. Ask Federico."

"Really? Really? Tell me, mother——"

It seemed as if at that moment this trifling detail had incalculable importance in her eyes. She began to prattle. And I was astonished that she could venture so far into the illusion. I wondered at the transfiguration that was the result of her dream. "Why, this time, *has she believed*? How comes it that she permits herself this transport? What gives her this unusual confidence?" And the thought of my approaching infamy, inevitable perhaps, froze the blood in my veins. "Why inevitable? Shall I never be able to free myself, then? *I must, I must* keep my promise. My mother was a witness of my promise. I will keep it at any cost." And, with an inward effort, I might say with an upheaval of my conscience, I emerged from the tumult of my uncertainties, and I went back to Juliana by a sudden conversion of my soul.

I found her as charming as ever, full of animation, life and youth. She reminded me of the Juliana of former days—the Juliana who, so often, amidst the calm of domestic life, I had suddenly taken in my arms, as if in a sudden frenzy.

"No, no, mother; do not make me drink any more," she pleaded, staying the hand of my mother, who was pouring out some wine for her. "I have already drunk too much without noticing it. What delicious Chablis it is! Do you remember, Tullio?"

She laughed, looking straight at me as she recalled the love memories over which floated the delicate vapor of that pale, slightly bitter wine, her favorite beverage.

"Yes, I remember," I replied.

She half-closed her eyes, with a slight trembling of the lashes. Then she said:

"It's warm, isn't it? My ears are burning."

She took her head between her hands to feel how hot it was. The lamp, placed near the bed, threw a bright light on her long profile, causing to glitter the few golden threads in the depths of her hair, where the delicate and tiny ear peeped out. While I helped to clear the table (my mother and the servant had gone out for a moment and were in an adjoining room), she called me in a low voice:

"Tullio!"

And, drawing me furtively to her, she kissed my cheek.

Did she not mean by this kiss to reclaim me entirely, body and soul, forever? Did not such an act, coming from her, so reserved and proud, signify that she wished to forget all, that she had already forgotten all, so as to live once more a new life with me? How could she have yielded to my love with more grace,

with greater confidence? In an instant, the sister became once more the lover. The impeccable sister had retained in her blood and in the depths of her veins the memory of my caresses, the organic recollection of sensations so vivid and tenacious in women. In thinking of it again when I found myself alone, I had a fleeting vision of distant days, of evenings long gone by. A June twilight, warm and roseate, in which floated mysterious perfumes, dangerous to the solitary, to those who regret, or those who desire. I enter the room. She is seated near the window with a book on her knees, very, very pale, in the attitude of one about to faint.

"Juliana!" She shudders and recovers herself. "What are you doing?" "Nothing," she answers. But an indefinable change, as if she were undergoing an inward struggle to repress something, passed in her black eyes. How many times had her poor flesh been compelled to suffer these tortures since the day of the sad renouncement! My mind dwelt upon the images raised by the recent trifling incident. The singular excitement displayed by Juliana reminded me again of divers exhibitions of her physical and extraordinarily acute sensibility. Perhaps the malady had increased, had provoked this sensibility. And I, curious and perverse, thought I should be able to see the fragile life of the convalescent inflame and dissolve under my caresses; I thought, too, that this voluptuousness would have, as it were, a flavor of sin. "If she died from it," I thought. Certain words of the surgeon recurred to me in a sinister way. And, because of the cruelty that is at the heart of every sensual man, the peril, instead of frightening me, attracted me. I lingered over this examination of my feelings with that species of bitter complaisance, mixed with disgust, that I brought to bear upon the analysis of all the inner manifestations in which I believed I discovered a proof of the natural wickedness of man. Why does human nature possess that horrible faculty of feeling acute pleasure when one knows one is harming the creature who gives the pleasure? Why is the germ of this execrable sadic perversion to be found in every man who loves and desires?

It was these unhealthy reflections, rather than the first instinctive impulse of kindness and pity, that strengthened during the night my plans in favor of the Abused. Even from a distance, the Absent still empoisoned me. To conquer the resistance of my egotism, it was necessary for me to oppose to the thought of the delicious depravity of that woman the image of a new depravity, very choice, that I promised myself to cultivate at leisure in the virtuous security of my own house. Then, with the alchemistic talent that I possessed for combining the several products of my mind, I analyzed the series of the characteristic states of soul determined in me by Juliana at the various epochs of our common existence, and I drew from it certain elements that I used in the construction of a new, artificial state, singularly appropriate for increasing the intensity of the sensations that I

wished to experience. Thus, for instance, with the object of rendering still more acute the savor of the sin that attracted me and exalted my wicked phantasy, I sought to picture to myself the moments in which I had most deeply expressed the fraternal feeling, the moments in which Juliana had seemed most like a sister.

And he who dwelt on these wretched maniacal subtleties was the man who, a few hours before, had felt his heart palpitate with a simple emotion of kindness at the glimmer of an unexpected smile! These contradictory crises made up his life—an illogical, fragmentary, incoherent life. There were in him all kinds of tendencies, the possibility of every opposite, and, between these opposites, an infinity of intermediary degrees, and, between these tendencies, an infinity of combinations. According to the weather and according to the place, according to the accidental shock of circumstances, of an insignificant fact, of a word, according to the inner influences, even still more obscure, the permanent basis of his being assumed the most changing, the most fugitive, the strangest aspects. In him a special organic condition corresponded to every special tendency while strengthening it, and this tendency became a centre of attraction toward which converged all the conditions and tendencies directly associated, and the association spread further and further. Then his centre of gravity was displaced; his personality was changed to another personality. Silent floods of blood and ideas caused to blossom on the permanent basis of his being, either gradually or all at once, new souls. He became *multanime*.

I insist on this episode because really it marks the decisive point.

The following morning, on awakening, I retained only a confused notion of all that had happened. Cowardice and anguish seized upon me again, just as soon as I had before my eyes a second letter from Teresa Raffo, who decided upon the 21st for our meeting at Florence and gave me precise instructions. The 21st was a Sunday, and on Thursday, the 18th, Juliana rose for the first time. I argued for a long time with myself all the possibilities, and, arguing, I began to compromise. "There is certainly no doubt about it; the rupture is necessary, inevitable. But how to break off? Under what pretext? Can I announce my decision to Teresa in a mere letter? My last letter to her was still warm with passion, filled with longing. How can I justify the sudden change? Does the poor woman deserve so unexpected and brutal a blow? She has loved me much, she loves me still, and there was a time when she braved dangers for my sake. And I too have loved her.... I still love her. Our passion, powerful and strange, is known; she is envied, and she is also watched. How many men aspire to take my place! Too numerous to count." In making a rapid review of my most redoubtable rivals, of my most probable successors, I pictured to myself their forms. "Is there in Rome a woman more blonde, more fascinating, more desirable than she?" The same sudden fire that had heated my blood the evening before gushed through every vein, and the

idea of voluntarily renouncing her seemed to me absurd, inadmissible. "No, no; I shall never have the courage; I never will and never can."

This tumult calmed, I followed my useless debate, at the same time retaining the conviction in the depths of my being that, when the hour came, it would be impossible for me not to go. Yet I had the courage, when I quitted Juliana's room still vibrating with emotion, I had the supreme courage to write to her who claimed me: "I will not come." I invented a pretext; and, I remember clearly, a kind of instinct made me choose one that would not appear very important to her. "So you hope that she will pay no attention to the pretext, and will command you to go?" asked an inner voice. I found myself without an answer to this sarcasm, and an irritation, an atrocious anxiety, took possession of me, and gave me no more peace. I made unheard-of efforts to dissimulate in the presence of Juliana and my mother; I carefully avoided being left alone with the poor abused one; each moment I thought I read in her gentle, humid eyes the shadow of a doubt, I thought I saw a cloud pass over her pure brow.

On Wednesday I received an imperious and threatening telegram. Did I not rather expect it? "Either you will come, or you will never see me again. Answer." I answered: "I will come."

As soon as I had done it, under the impulse of that species of unconscious superexcitation that, in life, accompanies every decisive act, I found myself singularly solaced by the view of the determined turn that events had taken. The feeling of my own irresponsibility, of the necessity of what had occurred and what was about to happen, became very profound. "If, though knowing all the evil that I do, though condemning myself, I cannot act in any other manner, it is a sign that I obey an unknown superior power. I am the victim of a cruel, ironical, irresistible destiny."

Nevertheless, I had scarcely put foot on the threshold of Juliana's room when I felt the pressure on my heart of an enormous weight, and I stopped, swaying, between the portières that hid me. "A look will suffice her to divine all," I thought, desperate. And I was on the point of turning back. But in a voice that had never before seemed so gentle to me, she said:

"Is it you, Tullio?"

Then I advanced a step. She exclaimed, on seeing me:

"What ails you? Are you not well?"

"A dizziness ... It is already gone," I answered. And I felt reassured on thinking: "She has not guessed."

In fact she had not the slightest suspicion; and it seemed to me strange that it should be so. Should I prepare her for the brutal blow? Should I speak frankly, or concoct some falsehood out of pity for her? Or would it not be better to go away unexpectedly, without letting her know, and leave a letter for her

containing my confession? What was the best way of rendering my effort less painful, of making her surprise less cruel?

Alas! in this difficult debate, a grievous instinct inclined me to consider my own comfort more than hers. And without the least doubt I should have chosen the method of the sudden departure and the explanatory letter, if I had not been prevented from doing so out of regard for my mother. It was absolutely necessary to spare my mother, always, at any cost. This time, too, I could not rid myself of the inner sarcasm: "At *any* cost. What generosity! But it is very easy for you to return to the old conventions, and, further, very safe. This time, also, if you exact it, the victim will endeavor to smile, while she feels she is dying. Count on her, therefore, and do not concern yourself about the rest, O generous heart!"

At times, truly, man finds a singular joy in feeling a sincere and supreme contempt for himself.

"What are you thinking of, Tullio?" Juliana inquired of me with a naïve gesture, touching me between the eyebrows with the tip of her finger, as if to arrest my thought.

I took her hand without replying. And my very silence, that appeared grave to me, sufficed to modify anew the condition of my mind. There was so much gentleness in the voice, in the gesture, of the poor deluded woman that I became tender, and felt arise the enervating emotion that causes tears to flow and which is called *pity for one's self.* I felt a keen desire to be pitied. At the same time, an inner voice whispered: "Profit by this disposition of your soul; but, for the time being, reveal nothing. By slightly exaggerating, you will succeed in weeping, without difficulty. You well know the prodigious effect on a woman of the tears of a man whom she loves. Juliana will be distracted by them; and you yourself will seem to be crushed by some terrible grief. Then, to-morrow, when you tell her the truth, the recollection of your tears will raise you in her regard. She may think: 'This is then the reason why he wept yesterday. Poor fellow!' And it will be to your advantage not to be taken for an odious egotist; on the contrary, people will think that you have vainly fought with all your might against the evil influences that have possession of you, and that you are afflicted with some incurable malady, that you bear in your bosom a broken heart. Profit, therefore, by the opportunity."

"Have you anything on your conscience?" asked Juliana, in a low, caressing voice, full of confidence.

I bent my head, and, assuredly, was affected. But the preoccupation of these *useful* tears caused a diversion in my feelings by interrupting the spontaneity, and, in consequence, retarded the physiological phenomena of tears. "If I could not weep? Suppose the tears *do not come?*" I thought with ridiculous and puerile fear, as if my fate depended on this slight material fact that my will did

not suffice to produce. And yet a voice always the same whispered inwardly: "What a mistake! What a mistake! No opportunity could be more propitious. One can scarcely see one's self in this room. What effect sobbing would have in the dark!"

"You do not answer me, Tullio," went on Juliana, after a short silence, passing her hand over my face and through my hair to compel me to raise my face. "You know you can tell me everything."

Ah! in truth, never since then have I heard a human voice of such sweetness. Even my mother had never spoken to me like that.

My eyes became moist, and I felt between my lids the warmth of the tears. "Quick, this is the moment, you must burst out." But it was only a solitary tear. And (shall I make the humiliating confession? but it is in the comedy of similar puerilities that the manifestations of the major part of human emotions are lowered)—and I raised my face to permit Juliana to notice it, and for an instant I felt an insane anxiety because I feared that, in the dark, she would be unable to see the tear glisten. To attract her attention to it I gave a deep sigh, as one does when trying to repress a sob. Bringing her face close to mine, so as to examine it more closely and made uneasy by my prolonged silence, she repeated:

"You don't answer me?"

Then she noticed it; and to be more certain, she seized my head, and drew it back with an almost brutal movement.

"You are crying."

Her voice had changed.

I freed myself as if confused. I rose to flee, like one who is no longer master of an overflowing affliction.

"Adieu, adieu! Let me go. Adieu, Juliana!"

And I left the room precipitately.

When I was alone, I felt disgusted with myself.

It was the evening of the party given in honor of the invalid. A few hours later, when I went back to her to be present as usual at her slight meal, I found that my mother was with her. As soon as my mother saw me she cried:

"Well, Tullio, to-morrow is the great day."

Juliana and I looked at each other, both of us anxious. Then we spoke of the morrow, of the hour at which she should rise, of a thousand petty details, but with a kind of effort. We were preoccupied. I wished inwardly that my mother would not leave us alone.

I was fortunate; my mother left us only once, and came in again almost immediately. In the interval, Juliana asked me rapidly:

"What was the matter with you a short time ago? Won't you tell me?"

"Nothing, nothing."

"See how you will spoil my pleasure!"

"No, no ... I'll tell you, I'll tell you ... later. Forget it for the present, please."

My mother came in with Maria and Natalia. But the tone in which Juliana had pronounced those few words sufficed to convince me that she suspected nothing of the truth. Perhaps she supposed that my sorrow arose from a sombre recollection of my ineffaceable and inexpiable past, or supposed that I was tortured by remorse for having done her so much wrong and by the fear of not deserving her full pardon.

The following morning, I was again much agitated. In obedience to her wish I was waiting in an adjoining room, when I heard her call me in her limpid tones:

"Come here, Tullio!"

I entered. She was standing up, and seemed taller, more svelte, more fragile. Robed in a sort of ample and wavy tunic, with long straight folds, she smiled, hesitating, scarcely able to stand, with her arms stretched out as if to maintain her equilibrium, turning by turns toward me and my mother.

My mother looked at her with an inexpressible expression of tenderness, ready to give her support. I, too, stretched out my hands, ready to support her.

"No, no, please," she said; "let me be, let me be. I am strong. I want to walk all alone as far as the armchair."

She advanced one foot, and made a step slowly. Her face lit up with an infantile joy.

"Take care, Juliana!"

She made two or three steps more; then, seized by a sudden fear, a foolish dread that she was about to fall, she hesitated for an instant between my mother and me, and ended by throwing herself in my arms, on my breast, a dead weight, and trembling as if she were sobbing. On the contrary, she was laughing, a little oppressed by her nervousness; and, as she wore no corset, my hands felt through the dress how meagre and frail she was, my breast felt each motion of the palpitating and sickly form, my nostrils respired the perfume of her hair, my eyes recognized the little brown mole upon her neck.

"I was afraid," she said in a gasp, laughing and panting; "I was afraid I should fall."

And as she threw back her head without detaching herself from me so as to look at my mother, I caught a slight view of her bloodless gums, the whites of her eyes, and the convulsed appearance of her entire face. I felt as though I were holding in my arms a poor, ill creature, profoundly afflicted by her malady, with debilitated nerves, impoverished veins, and perhaps incurable. But I thought again also of her transfiguration, of the evening of the unexpected kiss; and the labor of charity, of love, and of reform which I was renouncing once more seemed

to me a labor of sovereign beauty.

"Tullio, lead me to the arm-chair," she said.

Supporting her with my arm passed around her waist, I led her slowly and gently; I helped her to sit in it; I arranged the down cushions at her back, and I remember that I chose the cushion having the most exquisite shade for her to lean her head upon. Then, in order to slip one beneath her feet, I went down on my knees, and caught a glimpse of her gray stocking, and her little slipper that hid only the tip of her foot. As on *that evening*, she followed all my movements with affectionate interest. I took a long time to do everything. I went up to a small tea-table, placed on it a vase of fresh flowers, a book, and an ivory paper-cutter. Without having premeditated it, I put into these attentions a shade of affectation.

The ironical voice went on: "Very clever, very clever! Acting like this before your mother will help you considerably. How could she suspect anything after being a witness of such an exhibition of tenderness? Besides, the shade of affectation won't be noticed; the poor woman is a little short-sighted. Go on, go on. Everything is progressing famously. Keep it up!"

"Oh, how nice it is here!" exclaimed Juliana, with a sigh of relief, and half-closing her eyes. "Thank you, Tullio!"

A few minutes later, when my mother had gone out and we were alone, she repeated, in a deeper tone: "Thank you!"

She raised a hand towards me so that I might take it in mine. As her sleeve was large, the gesture exposed the arm almost as far as the elbow. And that white and faithful hand, which offered me love, indulgence, peace, dreamland, oblivion, all that is beautiful and all that is good, trembled in the air a second, stretched towards me as if making the supreme offering.

I believe that at the hour of death, at the precise instant when my sufferings come to an end, it will be that gesture, only that one, that I shall see; amid all the numberless images of my past life, I shall see only that one gesture.

When I look back I do not succeed in reconstructing with exactitude the state of soul in which I found myself. What I can affirm is, that again at that moment I understood the extreme gravity of the situation, and the prime importance of the acts that were being accomplished, or that were about to be accomplished. I had, or I believed I had, perfect lucidity. Two phenomena of my conscience were developing without becoming confounded, perfectly distinct, parallel. In one of them predominated, joined to pity for the poor creature whom I was on the point of striking, a bitter sentiment of regret for the offering that I was about to reject. In the other predominated, joined to the deep, eager desire for the absent mistress, an egotistical sentiment that busied itself in coldly examining the circumstances most suitable for favoring my impunity. This parallelism gave to my inner life an incredible intensity and acceleration.

The decisive hour had come. Having to start the following morning, I could not temporize any longer. So that the affair should not seem too ambiguous and altogether too sudden, I must prepare my mother for my departure that very morning at breakfast, and allege some plausible pretext. I must also tell Juliana, before telling my mother, so as to prevent any possible contretemps. "And suppose Juliana should rebel? Suppose, in a moment of grief and indignation, she reveals the truth to my mother? How can I obtain from her a promise of silence, a new act of abnegation?" Up to the last moment I argued with myself. "Will she understand immediately, at the first word? And if she should not understand? If she should innocently ask me the object of my journey? What could I answer? But she will understand. It is impossible that she has not already learned from one of her friends, from Signora Talice, for instance, that Teresa Raffo has left Rome."

My strength began to give way. I could not have borne much longer the crisis that became more acute each moment. With a contraction of all my nerves, I came to a decision; and since she was speaking, I determined that she herself should furnish me the opportunity for delivering the blow.

She spoke of a thousand things, and especially of the future, with unaccustomed volubility. That strange, convulsed appearance that I had already noticed in her seemed more apparent. I was still standing behind her chair; up to then I had avoided her eyes by adroit manoeuvring in the room, remaining attentive behind her chair, busy either in arranging the window curtains or straightening the books in the little bookcase, or in picking up from the carpet the petals of a bouquet of roses that had shed its leaves. Standing up, I looked at the parting in her hair, her long and curved eyelashes, the light palpitation of her bosom, and her hands, her beautiful hands extended on the arms of the arm-chair, lying flat, just as on that day, white as on that day, "when they could be distinguished from the linen only by the azure of their veins."

Oh, that day! Not more than a week had gone by since then. Why did it seem to me to be so far away?

Standing behind her, in that state of extreme tension, and, so to speak, on the watch, I imagined that perhaps she instinctively felt the danger hovering over her head: I believed I divined in her a sort of vague uneasiness. Once more I felt sick at heart.

She finally said:

"*To-morrow*, if I am better, you will take me out on the terrace, in the open air."

I interrupted her.

"*To-morrow*, I shall not be here."

She trembled at my strange voice. I added, without waiting:

"I am going..."

Then, making a violent effort to loosen my tongue, and terrified like a man who must strike a second blow to put his victim to death, I added hastily:

"I am going to Florence."

"Ah!"

She had suddenly understood. She turned round with a rapid movement, she twisted herself on her cushions to look me in the face; and in that tragic pose, I saw again the whites of her eyes and her bloodless gum.

"Juliana!" I stammered, without finding anything else to say to her, bending toward her, fearing she would faint.

But she lowered her eyelids, sank back, withdrew into herself, so to speak, as if chilled by severe cold. She remained thus for several minutes, her eyes closed, lips compressed, motionless. Only the pulsations of the carotid artery, visible at the neck, and a few convulsive contractions of her hands indicated that she was still alive.

Was not this a crime? Yes, this was the *first* of my crimes, and not the least, without a doubt.

I went away under terrible circumstances. My absence lasted more than a week. On my return and the days following, I was astonished myself at my almost cynical impudence. I was bewitched by a sort of malefice that suspended in me every moral sense and rendered me capable of the worst injustices, the worst cruelties. This time again Juliana exhibited prodigious force of character; this time again she was able to keep silent. She appeared to me wrapped up in her silence as if in an impenetrable adamantine wall.

She went to the Badiola with her daughters and my mother. My brother accompanied them. I remained in Rome.

It was then that began for me a frightful period of sombre misery, the recollection of which suffices to fill me with disgust and humiliation.

Harassed by a feeling that, more than any other, stirs up in man the dregs of his being, I suffered every torture that a woman can make a feeble, passionate, and ever-wakeful soul suffer. The fire of a terrible sensual jealousy, kindled by suspicion, dried up in me every honest source, fed on the dregs deposited in the baser depths of my animal nature.

Never had Teresa Raffo seemed to me to be so desirable as since the day when I indissolubly associated her with an ignoble image and a stain. And she made herself a weapon of my very contempt to excite my covetousness. Atrocious agonies, abject joys, dishonoring submission, cowardly complacencies proposed and unblushingly accepted, tears more acrid than all the poisons, sudden frenzies that drove me almost to the confines of dementia, such violent plunges into the abyss of indulgence that for many days after I lay in a stupefied state,

every misery, every ignominy of the lower passions exasperated by jealousy—all, yes, I have known all. I became a stranger in my own house; the presence of Juliana became an encumbrance to me. Sometimes entire weeks passed without my addressing a single word to her; absorbed in my inner torture, I did not see her, I did not listen to her. At certain moments, when I raised my eyes towards her, I was surprised at her pallor, at the expression of her face, by such and such a detail of her features, as if these things were new, unexpected, strange; I did not succeed in entirely reconquering the notion of the reality. Every act of her life was unknown to me; I felt no desire to question her, to know anything; I felt neither preoccupation, interest, nor fear in regard to her. An inexplicable coldness acted as a cuirass against her. And still more: sometimes I felt a kind of vague and inexplicable rancor against her. One day I saw her laugh, and that laugh irritated me, almost put me in a passion.

Another day I had a shock on hearing her singing in a distant room. She was singing an air from "Orphée."

"*Que ferai-je sans Eurydice?*"

That was the first time she had sung while going through the house for a long time; it was the first time I heard her for a long time.

"Why was she singing? Was she then happy? To what condition of her soul does that unusual effusion correspond?" An inexplicable agitation seized me. Without thinking, I went up to her, calling her by name.

When she saw me enter her room she was surprised, and remained for a moment speechless; she was evidently startled.

"Are you singing?" I said, so as to say something, embarrassed and astonished myself at the eccentricity of what I was doing.

She smiled a hesitating smile, not knowing what to answer, not knowing what attitude to assume toward me. And I thought I read in her eyes a grieved curiosity, the fugitive expression of which I had already noticed more than once—the compassionate curiosity with which one gazes at a person suspected of insanity, a maniac. As a matter of fact, I saw myself in a mirror opposite, and my face looked emaciated, my eyes sunken, my mouth puffed up—that feverish appearance that I had had for a month.

"Are you dressing to go out?" I asked, still disturbed, almost ashamed, not finding any other question to ask her, preoccupied only with avoiding silence.

"Yes."

It was in the morning, in November. She was standing near a table trimmed with lace, and on which scintillated the scattered innumerable little articles that serve nowadays to beautify women. She wore a dress of vigonia, of a dark color, and held in her hand a light-colored shell comb mounted in silver. The dress, very simple in cut, set off her slim, graceful figure. A large bouquet of white

chrysanthemums, placed on the table, reached up as far as her shoulder. The sun of the St. Martin's summer entered through the window, and in the air there was a perfume of chypre, or some other odor I could not recognize.

"What perfume do you use now?" I asked.

"Crab-apple," she replied.

"I like it," I said.

She took a small bottle from the table, and handed it to me. I inhaled it deeply, so as to be doing something, and to gain time to prepare some other phrase. I did not succeed in dissipating my confusion, or in recovering my assurance. I felt that all intimacy between us was at an end. She seemed to me to be *another woman.* And yet the air from "Orphée" still surged through my soul, still disturbed me:

"*Que ferai-je sans Eurydice?*"

In that warm and golden light, amidst that delightful perfume, among these objects impressed with feminine grace, the echo of the ancient melody seemed to put the palpitation of a secret life, to shed a shadow of some strange mystery.

"The air that you sang just now is very beautiful," I said, obeying an impulse that came from my uneasiness.

"Yes, very beautiful," she cried.

A question rose to my lips: "Why are you singing?" but I repressed it and began to seek in myself the reasons of the curiosity which tormented me.

There was an interval of silence. She ran her finger-nail across the teeth of the comb, producing a light, grating noise. This grating is a circumstance that I recall with perfect clearness.

"You were dressing to go out. Go on," I said.

"I have only to put on my jacket and hat. What time is it?"

"A quarter to eleven."

"What! So late already?"

She took her hat and veil, and sat down before the glass. I watched her. Another question rose to my lips: "Where are you going?" Yet, although it might appear quite natural, I restrained myself again, and continued to observe Juliana attentively.

She reappeared to me once more what she was in reality—a young and stylish woman, a gentle and noble face full of a refined physical delicacy, radiant with an intense moral expression; in short, an adorable woman, and one who could be as delightful a mistress for the flesh as for the mind. "Suppose she were really someone's mistress?" I thought then. "Assuredly, it is impossible but that many men have hovered around her; everyone knows how I neglect her, everyone knows how I wrong her. Suppose she has yielded, or is about to yield? Suppose she has at last considered the sacrifice of her youth to be useless and

unjust? Suppose she was at last grown tired of her abnegation? Suppose she has made the acquaintance of a man superior to me, some delicate and deep seducer, who has inspired her with renewed curiosity, who has taught her to forget her faithless husband? Suppose I have already lost her heart, which I have so often trampled upon without pity and without remorse?" A sudden fright seized me, and the anguish was so keen that I thought: "That is what I will do; I will confess my suspicion to Juliana. I will look into the depths of her eyes and say, 'Are you still *faithful?*' And I will know the truth. She is incapable of lying."

"Incapable of lying? Ah! ah! ah! A woman! ... What do you know about it? A woman is capable of everything. Never forget that. Sometimes the large cloak of heroism serves but to hide half a dozen lovers. Sacrifice! Abnegation! Those are appearances, words. Who will ever know the truth? Swear, if you dare, that your wife is faithful to you; and I speak, not of the present faithfulness, but of that which preceded the episode of the illness. Swear in perfect assurance, if you dare." And the wicked voice (ah! Teresa Raffo, how your poison acts), the perfidious voice made me shudder.

"Do not be impatient, Tullio," said Juliana, almost timidly. "Will you stick this pin in my veil—here?"

She raised her arms and held them over her head to fasten the veil, and her white fingers tried in vain to fasten it.

Her pose was full of grace. The white fingers made me think: "How long it is since we clasped hands! Oh, the frank and warm clasps that her hand used to give me, as if to assure me that she bore me no ill-will for any offence! Now that hand is perhaps defiled." And while I fastened the veil, I felt a sudden revulsion in thinking of the possible pollution.

She arose, and I helped her again to put on her cloak. Two or three times our eyes met by stealth, and again I observed in hers a sort of anxious curiosity. Perhaps she was asking herself: "Why did he come in here? Why is he staying here? What does that absent-minded air mean? What does he want with me? What has happened to him?"

"Excuse me a moment," she said.

And she left the room.

I heard her call Miss Edith, the governess.

When I was alone my eyes turned involuntarily towards the small desk littered with letters, cards, and books. I approached, and my eyes ran for an instant over the papers, as if they sought to discover—what? The *proof*, perhaps? I dismissed this base and stupid suspicion. I looked at a book covered with an antique cloth, with a small dagger stuck between the leaves. She had not yet finished reading it, and had cut only about half of it. It was the latest novel by Filippo Arborio, *The Secret*. I read on the frontispiece an autographic dedication

by the author:

TO YOU,
JULIANA HERMIL, TURRIS EBURNEA,
I offer this unworthy homage.
F. ARBORIO.
All Saints' Day, '85.

So Juliana knew the novelist? And what did Juliana think of him? I conjured up the writer's fine and seductive face as I had seen it several times in public. There was certainly much in him that must please Juliana. According to current gossip, he pleased women. His romances, full of a complicated psychology, at times very subtle, often false, disturbed sentimental souls, fired restless imaginations, taught with supreme grace contempt of common life. *An Agony, The True Catholic, Angelica Doni, Giorgio Aliora, The Secret*, suggested an intense vision of life, as if life were a vast conflagration of innumerable ardent figures. Each of his characters fought for his chimera, in a hopeless duel against reality.

Had not this extraordinary artist, who in his books appeared to be, so to speak, like a distilled quintessence of pure spirit, also exerted his fascination on me? Had I not said of his *Giorgio Aliora* that it was a *fraternal* work? Had I not found in certain of his literary creations strange resemblances with my inner being? And suppose the strange affinity that there is between us facilitated his work of seduction, perhaps already undertaken? Suppose Juliana was yielding to him, precisely because she had recognized in him some one of those attractions by which, previously, I had made myself adored by her? I thought with a new fright.

She reëntered the room. On seeing me with the book in my hand, she said, with an embarrassed smile, and blushing slightly:

"What are you looking at?"

"Do you know Filippo Arborio?" I asked her immediately, but without any change in my voice, in the most calm and natural voice that I could command.

"Yes," she answered frankly. "He was introduced to me at the Monterisi. He has even been here several times, but you have not had the opportunity of meeting him."

A question rose to my lips: "Why have you never spoken of him to me?" But I restrained it. How could she have mentioned it, since, by my attitude, I had interrupted for a long time past all friendly exchange of news and confidences?

"He is much more simple than his works would lead one to suppose," she continued carelessly, slowly drawing on her gloves. "Have you read *The Secret*?"

"Yes, I have read it."

"Did you like it?"

Without thinking, and by an instinctive desire to affirm my superiority in Juliana's eyes, I answered:

"No, it is commonplace."

At last she said:

"I am going."

She made a motion to leave. I followed her as far as the antechamber, walking in the wake of the perfume she left behind her, so subtle as to be scarcely perceptible. In the presence of the servant she said only:

"*Au revoir.*"

And, with a light step, she crossed the threshold.

I went back to my room. I opened the window, and leaned out to watch her in the street.

She hurried along, with her light step, on the sunny side of the street, straight on, without turning her head to the right or left. The St. Martin summer shed a delicate gilding over the crystal of the sky; a calm warmth softened the air and conjured up the perfume of the absent violets. An immense sadness weighed on me, crashed me down on the window-sill; gradually it became intolerable.

Rarely in my life have I suffered so much as from that doubt which crumbled at one stroke my faith in Juliana, a faith that had lasted for so many years. Rarely had the flight of an illusion drawn from my soul such cries of anguish. But was it true that the illusion had fled and that the evil was irremediable? I could not, I would not, be persuaded of it.

That great illusion had been the companion of my whole misguided life. It answered not only to the exigencies of my egotism, but also to my æsthetic dream of moral greatness.

"Since moral greatness results from the violence of pains which one triumphs over, it is necessary, so that she may have an opportunity to be heroic, that she should suffer all I have made her suffer." This axiom, which had often succeeded in calming my remorse, was deeply rooted in my mind, and had caused to surge there from the best part of myself an ideal phantom to which I had vowed a sort of platonic cult. Debauched, culpable, tired, I took pleasure in recognizing in the ray of my own existence a soul severe, upright, and strong, an incorruptible soul, and it pleased me to be the object of its love, of an eternal love. All my vice, all my misery, all my feebleness, found a support in this illusion. I believed that for me there was a possible realization of the dream of all intellectual men: to be constantly unfaithful to a constantly faithful woman.

"What are you seeking? All the intoxication of life? Very well! go, run on, intoxicate yourself. In your house a dumb creature remembers and waits, like a veiled image in a sanctuary. The lamp in which you do not put a single drop

more of oil burns without ever becoming extinguished. Is not that the dream of all intellectual men?"

And again: "No matter at what hour, no matter after what adventure, you will find her there on your return. She was awaiting your return with confidence, but she will not tell you of her waiting. You will rest your head on her knees and she will caress your temples with her finger-tips, to take away your pain."

I had a presentiment that one day I would return thus; I would end by coming back, after one of those intimate catastrophes that metamorphose a man. All my hopelessnesses were softened by the secret conviction that this refuge could not fail me, and in the depth of my abjectness a little light came to me from that woman who, for love of me and *by my work*, had raised herself to the summit of greatness and had perfectly realized the form of my ideal.

Would one doubt suffice to destroy all that in a moment?

I repassed from one end to the other the scene that had taken place between Juliana and myself from the moment I had entered the room to the instant she had left it. And it was in vain I attributed a great part of my inner agitation to a special and transient nervous condition; I could not succeed in dissipating the strange impression exactly translated by these words:

"She seemed to me to be *another woman*."

There was certainly something new about her. But what? Was not Filippo Arborio's dedication in a sense reassuring? Did it not precisely affirm that the *Turris Eburnea* was impregnable? This glorious qualification had been suggested to the author either simply by the reputation for purity that Juliana Hermil's name bore, or by the non-success of an attempted assault, or, possibly, by the abandonment of a siege undertaken. In consequence, the Ivory Tower still remained unsullied.

While reasoning thus to allay the gnawings of suspicion, I could not remove the confused anxiety that lay at the bottom of my being, as if I feared a sudden apparition of some ironical objection. "You know, Juliana has extraordinarily white skin. She is literally *as white as her night-dress*. The pious qualification might well hide some profane meaning." But the word *unworthy*? "Oh! Oh! What subtleties!"

An attack of impatience and anger cut short this humiliating and vain debate. I withdrew from the window, shrugged my shoulders, made two or three turns in the room, mechanically opened a book, then threw it down again. But my anguish did not decrease. "In short," I thought, stopping short, as if to confront some invisible adversary, "to what does all this lead me? Either she has already fallen, and the loss is irreparable; or she is in danger, and in my present situation I cannot interfere to save her; or else she is pure, and then there is no change. In any case, it is not for me to *act*. What exists, exists of necessity; what

is to happen, will of necessity happen. This crisis of suffering will pass. One must wait. How beautiful those white chrysanthemums were that were on Juliana's table just now! I will go and buy a heap more just like them. My rendezvous with Teresa is for two o'clock to-day. I have still almost three hours before me. Did she not tell me, the last time, that she wished to find the fire burning? This will be the first fire of the winter on such a warm day. It seems to me she is in a week of kindness. I only hope it will last! But, at the first opportunity, I shall challenge Eugenio Egano."

My thoughts followed a new course, with sudden checks, with unforeseen divergences. In the midst even of the pictures of the approaching voluptuousness, another contaminating imagination passed like a lightning flash, one that I feared, one from which I should like to flee. Certain audacious and ardent pages of *The True Catholic* recurred to me. One of these passions aroused the other, and, while suffering from the distinct pains, I confounded the two women in the same pollution, Filippo Arborio and Eugenio Egano in the same hate.

The crisis passed, leaving in my soul a species of vague contempt mixed with rancor against the *sister*. I drifted away still further from her; I became more and more hardened, more and more careless, more and more reserved. My sad passion for Teresa Raffo became more exclusive, occupied all my faculties, left me no respite. I was really a maniac, a man possessed by a diabolical insanity, devoured by an unknown and frightful malady. My mind has retained of that winter only confused, incoherent souvenirs, interspersed with strange, rare obscurities.

That winter I never encountered Filippo Arborio at my house; but I saw him sometimes in public. One evening, however, I met him in a salle d'armes; and there we became acquainted. We were introduced by the fencing-master, and we exchanged a few words. The gaslight, the creaking of the flooring, the flash and clatter of the foils, the clumsy or graceful attitudes of the swordsmen, the rapid extension of all those bent limbs, the warm and acrid exhalations of all those bodies, the guttural cries, rude interjections, the bursts of laughter—such are the details that my memory furnishes to reconstruct with singular clearness the scene that unrolled itself before us, while we were standing face to face and the master pronounced our names. I again see the gesture with which Filippo Arborio, raising his mask, displayed a heated face all bathed in perspiration. He was panting with fatigue, and somewhat convulsed, like a man unaccustomed to muscular exercise. Instinctively I thought that he would not be a formidable opponent in a duel. I affected also a certain haughtiness; I especially avoided saying anything that bore any reference to his celebrity or to my admiration; I assumed the attitude I would have taken towards a perfect stranger.

"So it is for to-morrow?" said the fencing-master to me, smiling.

"Yes, at ten o'clock."

"Are you going to fight?" asked Arborio, with evident curiosity.

"Yes."

He hesitated a little, and then added:

"May I ask with whom, if it is not an indiscretion?"

"With Eugenio Egano."

I noticed that he would have liked to learn more, but that he was restrained by the coldness of my attitude and my apparent inattention.

"Maestro," I said, "I'll give you five minutes."

I turned my back to go to the dressing-room. At the door I stopped, and glancing back, saw that Arborio had recommenced to fence. One glance sufficed to show me that he was a very poor swordsman.

When, watched by all the persons present, I engaged with the fencing-master, a singular nervous excitement seized upon me and redoubled my energy. I felt Arborio's eyes were fastened on me.

Later on, I saw him again in the dressing-room. The room had a very low ceiling, and was already full of smoke and an acrid, sickening smell of men. All those in it, naked save for their large white dressing-gowns, were smoking and slowly rubbing their chests, arms, shoulders, and chaffing one another loudly. The splashing of the shower-bath alternated with the loud laughter. Two or three times, with an indefinable motion of repulsion, with a start similar to that which a violent physical shock would produce, I saw the frail form of Arborio, whom my eyes sought involuntarily. And, once again, the odious image was formed.

Since then I had no other opportunity to approach or meet him. I ceased to busy myself with him, and, as a consequence, I remarked nothing suspicious in Juliana's behavior. Outside the constantly narrowing circle in which I moved, there no longer existed for me anything lucid, or sensible, or intelligent. Every external impression passed over me like drops of water over red-hot iron, rebounding or evaporating.

Events came one after the other. Toward the end of February, after a last proof of infamy, a definite rupture occurred between Teresa Raffo and myself. I left for Venice, alone.

I remained there about one month in a state of incomprehensible uneasiness, in a sort of stupor that made the fogs seem thicker and the lagoons more silent. There remained to me only the innate sensation of my own isolation amidst the inert phantoms of all things. For long hours, I felt no other sensation than that of the persistent and crushing weight of life, and that of the slight pulsation of an artery in my head. For long hours, I endured that strange fascination exerted by the uninterrupted and monotonous murmur of some indistinct thing on the soul. It drizzled; on the water, the fog at times took on lugubrious

forms, advancing like spectres, with slow and solemn step. Often I found a sort of imaginary death in a gondola, as in a coffin. When the rower asked where I desired to be taken, I almost always answered by a vague gesture, and I comprehended internally the hopeless sincerity of the answer: "*No matter where ... beyond the world.*"

I came back to Rome during the last days of March. I felt a new sensation of the reality, as if after a long eclipse of conscience. Sometimes, unexpectedly, a timidity, an uneasiness, an unreasoning fear seized me, and I felt as powerless as an infant. I looked about me ceaselessly with unusual attention, to grasp once more the true sense of things, to find again the proper connections, to take note of what was changed and what had disappeared. And, in proportion as I slowly reëntered into the ordinary existence, the equilibrium reëstablished itself in my being, hope revived, and I began to become preoccupied with the future.

I found Juliana's strength much reduced and her health very much changed. She was sadder than ever. We spoke but little and without looking at one another, without opening our hearts. We both sought the society of our two little daughters; and, with their happy innocence, Maria and Natalia filled our long silences with their fresh chatter. One day Maria asked:

"Mamma, shall we go this Easter to the Badiola?"

I answered, without hesitation, instead of her mother:

"Yes, we shall."

Then Maria began to dance around the room in token of her joy, dragging her sister with her. I looked at Juliana.

"Does it suit you that we should go there?" I asked, fearfully, almost humbly.

She consented by a nod.

"I see you are not well," I added, "nor am I well. Perhaps the country ... the spring..."

She was stretched out in an arm-chair, the arms of which supported her white hands, and that attitude recalled another attitude—that of the convalescent on the morning when she first rose, after I had told her.

The departure was decided upon. We made our preparations. A hope shone in the depth of my soul, but I dared not look straight at it.

I.

My first recollection is as follows:

By this, when I began this narrative, I meant: "Among my recollections this is the first in any way connected with the frightful thing."

It was, therefore, in April. We had been at the Badiola for several days.

"Ah! my children," my mother had said, with her unceremonious candor, "how pale you both look! Oh! that Rome, that Rome. To put some color in your cheeks you must stay in the country with me for a long, long time."

"Yes," Juliana had answered, with a smile; "yes, mother, we will stay as long as you wish."

That smile often appeared on Juliana's lips when my mother was by. And, although her eyes invariably retained their melancholy, that smile was so sweet, so profoundly kind, that I permitted even myself to be deceived by it. I dared now to entertain some hope.

During the first few days my mother could not tear herself away from her dear visitors; one might have thought she wished to surfeit them with tenderness. I saw her two or three times under the influence of some indefinable emotion, I saw her caress Juliana's hair with her blessed hand, I heard her ask her:

"Is he as kind to you as ever?"

"Yes, poor Tullio!" replied the other voice.

"So it is not true..."

"What?"

"I was told that..."

"What were you told?"

"Nothing, nothing ... I thought that Tullio had caused you some unhappiness."

They spoke in the embrasure of a window, behind waving curtains, while outside the wind sighed through the elm-trees. I came up to them before they were aware of my presence, and raising a portière, showed myself.

"Ah! Tullio!" cried my mother.

They exchanged a look, a little embarrassed.

"We were speaking of you," said my mother.

"Of me? Bad or good?" I asked lightly.

"Good," replied Juliana, quickly.

I detected in her voice the evident intention to reassure me.

The April sun shone on the window-sill, lit up my mother's gray hair, lightly touched Juliana's temples. The very white curtains were waving to and fro, reflected in the luminous window-panes. The lofty elms on the lawn, covered with young leaves, produced a murmur, at times loud, at times soft, on which the shadows, more or less stationary, regulated their swing. From the wall of the house, covered with thousands of bunches of violets, arose a paschal odor, like

an invisible vapor of incense.

"How penetrating that odor is!" murmured Juliana, passing her hand over her brow and half-closing her eyes. "It makes one dizzy!"

I was between her and my mother, a little in the rear. A desire seized me to put my arms around both and lean out of the window. In that familiar and simple act I wished to put all the tenderness that swelled my heart, and make Juliana understand a multitude of inexpressible things and, by that one gesture, reconquer her entirely. But I was restrained by an almost infantile feeling of timidity.

"Look, Juliana," said my mother, pointing to the top of the hill, "look at your dear Lilacs. Can you see them?"

"Yes, yes."

And, shading her eyes from the sun with her hand, she made an effort to see better. I, who was watching her, remarked a slight trembling of her lower lip.

"Can you see the cypress?" I asked her, with the intention of increasing her agitation by this suggestive question.

And I saw once more, in imagination, the venerable old cypress, whose trunk rose amid a rose-bush, and whose top sheltered a nest of nightingales.

"Yes, yes; I see it, but with difficulty."

The Lilacs stood out white against its background of foliage half-way up the slope. The chain of hills rolled away in the distance in a noble, peaceful, undulating line, and the olive-tree plantations on their sides appeared of extraordinary lightness, like a kind of greenish fog piled up in motionless shapes. The trees in blossom, dotted here and there with bouquets of red and white, broke the uniformity. The sky seemed to pale from minute to minute as if a stream of milk were being continually spread in and mixed with its fluid atmosphere.

"We will go to the Lilacs after Easter; everything there will be in flower," I said, trying to revive in that soul the dream which I had so brutally shattered.

I dared to draw closer to her, and put my arms around Juliana and my mother, and lean out of the window, advancing my head between theirs in such a manner that the hair of each brushed me. The spring, the purity of the air, the nobleness of the country, the peaceful transfiguration of every creature by the season's maternal influence, and that sky, that sky of divine paleness, more divine in measure as it became paler—all awoke in me such a new sentiment of life that I thought, with an internal tremor: "Can it be possible? Can it be possible? After all that has happened, after all that I have suffered, after so many transgressions, can I still find enjoyment in life? Can I, then, still *hope*? Can I still have a presentiment of happiness? From whence does this blessing come to me?" It seemed to me that all my being was relieved, became expanded, became dilated beyond its limits, with a subtle, rapid, and continuous vibration. Nothing

can convey an idea of the feeling developed in me by the imperceptible sensation of a hair grazing my cheek.

We remained several minutes in this attitude, without speaking. The elms moaned. The constant thrill of the thousands of yellow and violet flowers that carpeted the wall beneath our window enchanted my eyes. A heavy and warm perfume arose in the sunshine with the rhythm of a breath.

All at once Juliana drew back, and grew pale. Her eyes looked troubled, her mouth was contracted as if with nausea. She said:

"That odor is terrible. It makes one giddy. Are you not affected by it too, mother?"

She turned round, tottered a few steps, and left the room hastily. My mother followed her.

I watched them as they passed through the corridors, still dominated by what rested of my former sensations, lost in the dream.

II.

My confidence in the future increased from day to day. It was as if I had forgotten everything. My soul, too fatigued, no longer remembered its sufferings. At certain periods of complete abandon, all became disintegrated, diluted, dissolved, lost in the original fluidity, became unrecognizable. Then, after these strange internal decompositions, it seemed to me that a new principle of life had entered into me, that a new power had penetrated me.

A multitude of sensations, involuntary, spontaneous, unconscious, and instinctive, made up my real existence. Between the exterior and the interior there was established a play of minute actions and instantaneous minute reactions, that vibrated in endless repercussions, and each one of these incalculable repercussions became converted into an astonishing psychic phenomenon. My entire being was modified by the slightest odor of the circumambient atmosphere, by a breath, by a shadow, by a flash of light.

The great maladies of the soul, like those of the body, renew a man, and the convalescences of the mind are not less charming nor less miraculous than the physical convalescences. Before a small, flowering shrub, before a branch covered with small buds, before a vigorous shoot growing out of an old and almost dead trunk, before the most modest metamorphoses accomplished by spring, I

stopped, artless, ingenuous, stupefied.

Often, in the morning, I went out with my brother. At that hour, everything was cool, graceful, unconstrained.

Federico's company purified me and strengthened me not less than the good country air. Federico was then twenty-seven years old; he had almost always lived in the country, where he led a sober and laborious existence, and the earth seemed to have communicated to him its mild sincerity. He was in possession of the rule of life. Leon Tolstoï, as he kissed his fine, serene brow, would have called him, "My son."

We walked across the fields, without an object, exchanging but few words. He praised the fertility of our domains, explained to me the innovations introduced in their cultivation, pointing out the progress made. The cottages of our peasants were large and airy and coquettishly kept. Our stables were full of healthy and well-nourished cattle. Our dairies were admirably equipped. Often, on the way, he stopped to examine a plant, and his virile hands could touch with the greatest delicacy the little green leaves at the tip of a new shoot. At times we passed through an orchard. The peach-trees, apple-trees, pear-trees, cherry-trees, plum-trees, and apricot-trees bore on their branches thousands of flowers, and, below, the transparency of the rosy and silvery petals metamorphosed the light into a sort of humid atmosphere, into an indescribable thing, divinely graceful and hospitable. Through the small interstices of these light garlands smiled the blue sky.

While I was admiring the flowers, he was already anticipating the future treasure suspended from the branches, and said:

"You will see—you will see the fruit."

"Yes, I shall see it," I repeated to myself, inwardly. "I shall see the flowers fall, the leaves born, the fruit grow, color, ripen, and fall."

It was from my brother's mouth that this affirmation first issued, and it assumed for me a grave importance, as if it presaged I know not what promised and expected happiness, that was certain to arrive during the period of the vegetal labor, at the period separating the flower from the fruit. "Even before I manifested my intention to do so, it already seems natural to my brother that, henceforth, I should live here, in the country, with him and our mother; for he said I shall see the fruit of his trees. He is *sure* I shall see them. So it is quite true that a new life has begun again for me, and that my innate sensation does not deceive me. In fact, everything, now, is being accomplished with a strange, unusual facility, with an abundance of love. How I love Federico! Never have I loved him so much before." Such were the soliloquies that I indulged in, soliloquies somewhat disconnected, incoherent, at times puerile, because of the singular disposition of soul that made me recognize in no matter what insignificant fact a favorable sign,

a happy prognostication.

My keenest joy was in knowing myself to be far removed from the past, far from certain places and certain persons, freed forever. Sometimes, in order to better enjoy the peace of this vernal country, I imagined to myself the space that separated me now from the shadowy world in which I had suffered so many and such culpable sufferings. Sometimes, too, a confused fear seized me again, compelled me to restlessly seek about me the motives of my present security, forced me to place my arm on my brother's arm, and read in his eyes the indubitable and protecting affection.

I had a blind confidence in Federico. I should have liked not only that he should love me, but that he should dominate me. I should have liked to cede to him my right as the elder, because he was more worthy, to submit to his advice, to have him for a guide, to obey him. At his side, I should not have run the peril of being lost, since he knew the right way and trod it with an infallible step. And, more than that, he was strong of arm, he would have defended me. He was the exemplary man—good, energetic, sagacious. To me, nothing equalled in nobleness the sight of his youth devoted to the religion of "to act conscientiously," consecrated to the love of the Earth. One would say that his eyes, in the continual contemplation of verdant nature, had borrowed something of its limpid vegetal color.

"Jesus of the soil," I called him one day, smiling. That was on a morning pregnant with innocence, one of those mornings that evoked the images of primordial daybreaks at the infancy of the world. My brother was speaking to a group of laborers at the edge of a field. He spoke standing, taller by a head than those around him, and his calm gesture indicated the simplicity of his words. Old men grown white in wisdom, mature men already on the confines of old age, were listening to the young man. All bore on their knotty bodies the mark of the great common toil. As there were no trees in the vicinity, and as the wheat was low in the furrows, their attitudes were fully outlined in the sanctity of the light. When he saw that I was coming towards him, he dismissed his men in order to come forward to meet me. And then fell spontaneously from my lips this salutation:

"Jesus of the soil, hosanna!"

To every vegetable growth he paid infinite attentions. Nothing escaped his penetrating and, so to speak, omnispective regard. During our matinal walks, he stopped at every step to remove from some leaf a snail, a caterpillar, or an ant. One day, while carelessly walking along, I struck the plants with the end of my stick, and at every blow the ends of the verdant stems flew in all directions. That gave him pain, since he took the stick from my hands, but with a gentle movement, and he blushed, thinking perhaps that his pity might seem to me an

exaggeration of sickly sentimentality. Oh! that blush on that manly face.

Another day, as I was breaking off a flowering branch from an apple-tree, I surprised in Federico's eyes a shadow of sorrow. I stopped immediately, and withdrew my hands, saying:

"Does it displease you..."

He burst into a laugh.

"Not at all, not at all. You may despoil the entire tree."

Yet the broken branch, held by several live fibres, hung down the trunk, and, truly, that wound, moist with sap, had an appearance of a thing in pain; those fragile flowers, flesh-colored with pale spots, like bunches of simple roses, grown from a germ henceforth condemned, continued to thrill in the breeze.

Then, so as to excuse the cruelty of my aggression, I said:

"It is for Juliana."

And, breaking the last live fibres, I detached the broken branch.

III.

I carried this branch to Juliana, and many others besides. I never returned to the Badiola without a load of flowered gifts.

One morning, as I was carrying a bunch of hawthorns, I met my mother in the vestibule; I was somewhat out of breath, heated, disturbed by a slight intoxication.

"Where is Juliana?" I asked.

"Upstairs, in her room," she answered, laughing.

I ran up the staircase, crossed the corridor, entered the room, crying:

"Juliana, Juliana, where are you?"

Maria and Natalia ran to meet me, giving me a boisterous welcome, delighted at the sight of the flowers, dancing about as if possessed.

"Come in! Come in!" they cried. "Mamma is here, in the bedroom. Come in!"

On crossing the threshold my heart beat faster. Juliana was there, smiling and embarrassed. I threw the bunch at her feet.

"Look!"

"Oh! how beautiful!" she exclaimed, bending over the fragrant treasure.

She was dressed in one of her favorite gowns, hanging in ample and grace-

ful folds, and of a green hue resembling the green of an aloes-leaf. Her hair, not yet dressed, covered the nape of her neck, hiding her ears beneath its thick masses. The emanations from the hawthorns, that odor of thyme mixed with bitter almonds, enveloped, inundated the room, penetrating everything.

"Take care not to prick yourself," I said to her. "See my hands."

I showed her the still bleeding lacerations, as if to enhance the value of my offering. "Oh! if now she would take my hands!" I thought. And in my mind passed confusedly the recollection of a day, far distant, when she had kissed my hands, lacerated by the thorns, when she had wanted to suck the drops of blood that appeared one after the other. "If now she would take my hands, and if, by this single action, she would accord me full pardon, and yield herself up to me entirely!"

At that time I was in constant expectation of some such movement. I could not, of course, have said what gave me such confidence; but I was sure that Juliana would give herself to me again in this manner sooner or later, by some simple and silent action by which she would "accord me full pardon and yield herself up to me entirely."

She smiled. A shade of suffering passed over her pale face and in her sunken eyes.

"Don't you feel a little better since you are here?" I asked, approaching her.

"Yes, I'm better," she answered.

Then, after a pause:

"And you?"

"Oh, I! I am cured. Don't you see?"

"Yes, it is true."

At that time, when she spoke to me, her words had a curious hesitation that seemed to me full of grace, but which now it is impossible for me to define. One would have said that she was continually preoccupied in restraining the word that rose to her lips, to pronounce another word. Moreover, her voice was, so to speak, more *feminine*; it had lost its former firmness, and some of its sonorousness; it was veiled, like an instrument played in secret.

But, since it had only tender accents for me now, what obstacle prevented us from being all in all to each other again? What obstacle maintained the separation between us?

During that period, which in the history of my soul will ever remain mysterious, my natural perspicacity seemed to have deserted me. All my terrible analytical faculties, even those that had made me suffer so much, seemed exhausted; the power of these restless faculties appeared to be annihilated. Innumerable sensations, innumerable feelings relative to that epoch, are now incomprehensible, inexplicable, because I have no indication to aid me in retracing their origin,

in determining their character. There was a break in the continuity, or lack of solder between that period of my psychic existence and the other periods.

Formerly, I had narrated a fabulous tale in which a young prince, after the adventures of a long pilgrimage, finally succeeds in rejoining the lady whom he had pursued with his ardent love. The young man trembled with hope, and the lady smiled on him, close by. But a veil seemed to render this smiling lady intangible, a veil of unknown substance, so subtle that it was confounded with the air; and, nevertheless, this veil was a barrier that prohibited the young man from clasping the woman he loved to his heart.

This fable helps me a little to form an idea of the singular state in which I found myself at that time *vis-à-vis* Juliana. I felt that between her and me an unknown something constantly maintained an abyss. But, at the same time, I was confident that, sooner or later, the "simple and silent gesture" would annihilate the obstacle and bring back my happiness.

Meanwhile, how Juliana's room pleased me! It was furnished with light-colored hangings, with faded pink flowers and it had a deep alcove. What a perfume the hawthorns shed!

"This odor is penetrating," she said, very pale. "It gives one a headache. Don't you feel it?"

She went and opened a window.

Then she added:

"Maria, call Miss Edith."

The governess came in.

"Edith, please take these flowers to the music-room; put them into vases. Take care not to prick yourself."

Maria and Natalia wanted to carry a part of the bunch. We remained alone. She went once more to the window, and leaned against it, her back turned toward the light.

"Have you anything to do? Do you wish me to go?" I asked.

"No, no; stay, be seated. Tell me about your walk this morning. How far did you go?"

She spoke with some precipitation. As the window support was at about the height of her waist, she had placed her elbows on it, and her bust was inclined backward, framed by the rectangle of the window. Her face, turned directly toward me, was entirely shaded, particularly about the orbits of the eyes; but her hair, on the summit of which fell the light, formed a slight aureole; the light also touched the tops of her shoulders. One of her feet—the one that supported the weight of her body—was raised, drawing up the dress, partly disclosing the ash-colored stocking and the patent-leather slipper. In that attitude, in that light, her entire person possessed extraordinarily seductive power. A section of bluish

and voluptuous landscape, pinked out between the two window-posts, formed a distant background behind her head.

And then, instantaneously, as if by a crushing revelation, I saw once more in her the desirable woman; and all my blood fired up at the memory of, and the desire of, her caresses.

I spoke to her, my eyes fixed on her. And the more I gazed on her, the more disturbed I became. She also, no doubt, must have read my look, since her uneasiness became visible. I thought, with poignant internal anxiety: "If I only dared? If I went closer to her? If I took her in my arms?" The apparent assurance that I sought to put in my frivolous remarks rapidly abandoned me. My disturbance grew. My embarrassment became insupportable. From the adjoining rooms came the sound of the voices of Maria, Natalia, and Edith, indistinctly.

I arose, approached the window, and stood beside Juliana. I was on the point of bending toward her to speak at last the words that I had so many times repeated to myself in imaginary conversations. But the fear of a probable interruption stopped me. I thought that perhaps the moment was badly chosen, that perhaps I should not have the time to say all to her, to open all my heart to her, to relate my intimate life during the last few weeks, the mysterious convalescence of my soul, the awakening of my most tender fibres, the arousing of my most delicate dreams, the depth of my new sensation, the tenacity of my hope. I thought that I should not have the time to recount in detail the recent episodes, to make those little, innocent confessions to her, so delicious to the ear of the woman who loves, fresh with sincerity, more persuasive than any eloquence. In fact, I must succeed in convincing her of a great truth, perhaps incredible to her after so many disillusions; succeed in convincing her that now my return was no longer deceptive, but sincere, definite, necessitated by a vital desire of my entire being. Of course, she was still distrustful; of course, her distrust was the cause of her reserve. Between us the shadow of an atrocious recollection ever interposed itself. It was for me to banish this shadow, to draw my soul and hers so closely together that nothing more could interpose between them. But, for that, a favorable occasion was required in some secret and silent place, inhabited only by memories. That place was the Lilacs.

We remained in the embrasure of the window, by each other's side, both silent. From the adjoining rooms came the sound of the voices of Maria, Natalia, and Edith, indistinctly. The perfume of the hawthorn was dissipated. The curtains that hung from the arch of the alcove permitted a view of the bed in its depth, and my eyes wandered ceaselessly toward it, searching the shadows, almost concupiscent.

Juliana had lowered her head, perhaps because she also felt the delicious and agonizing weight of the silence. The light breeze toyed with a loose curl on

her temple. The restless agitation of that dark curl, in which were light scattered threads of gold, on that temple white as a wafer, made me languorous. And, as I gazed at her, I saw again on her neck the little brown mole which, in former days, had so often curiously attracted me.

Then, incapable of containing myself, with a mixture of apprehension and hardihood, I raised my hand to arrange the curl; and my fingers trembled on her hair, and they brushed against the ear, the neck, but lightly, very lightly, with the most furtive of caresses.

"What are you doing?" said Juliana, shaken by a start, turning on me a bewildered look, trembling perhaps more than I.

She left the window. Then, feeling that I was following her, she made several steps as if to flee, dismayed.

"Ah! Juliana, why, why?" I cried, stopping short.

Then immediately I added:

"It is true. I am still unworthy. Pardon!"

At that moment the two bells of the chapel began to chime. And Maria and Natalia rushed into the room, ran up to their mother with cries of joy, and hung around her neck, one after the other, covering her face with kisses; then, leaving their mother, they came to me, and I raised them in my arms, one after the other.

The two bells chimed furiously; the whole of the Badiola seemed to be invaded by the thrill of the bronze. It was Holy Saturday, the hour of the Resurrection.

IV.

In the afternoon of that same Saturday, I had a strange attack of melancholy.

The post had arrived at the Badiola, and I happened to be in the billiard-room with my brother, glancing through the newspapers. My eyes fell by chance on the name of Filippo Arborio, mentioned in an article. A sudden agitation seized me. Thus it is that a slight jar will stir up the dregs of a quiescent liquid.

I remember. It was a foggy afternoon, illuminated by the fatigued reverberation of a whitish light. Outside, before the window looking on the lawn, Juliana passed with my mother, arm in arm, chatting. Juliana carried a book, and walked as if fatigued.

With the incoherence of the images that unrolled before me in thought,

there arose in my mind certain remnants of my past life: Juliana before the mirror, on that November day; the bouquet of white chrysanthemums; my anxiety on hearing the air from Orpheus; the words written on the fly-leaf of *The Secret*; the color of Juliana's dress; my soliloquy at the window; Filippo Arborio's face, dripping with perspiration; the scene in the dressing-room of the salle d'armes. I thought with a shudder of fear, like a man who suddenly finds himself leaning over the edge of a precipice: "Can it be possible that I am lost?"

Overcome by anguish, feeling a desire to be alone in order to commune with myself, to meet my fear face to face, I took leave of my brother, left the hall, and returned to my room.

My agitation was mingled with impatience and anger. I was like a man who, in the midst of the comfort of an illusory cure, in the full assurance of having regained his health, would feel all at once the sting of his old malady, would perceive that in his flesh the ineradicable disease still remained, and would be constrained to watch himself, to note his symptoms, in order to convince himself of the horrible truth. "Can it be possible that I am lost? And why?"

In the strange forgetfulness in which the entire past was buried, in that sort of obscurity which seemed to have entirely invaded one layer of my conscience, the doubt against Juliana, that odious doubt, had also vanished, was dissolved. My soul had so great a desire to lull itself with illusions, to believe and to hope! My mother's saintly hand, in caressing Juliana's hair, had rekindled for me the aureole around that head. By one of those sentimental errors frequent during the period of weakness, when I had seen the two women leading the same existence in such sweet concord, I had involved them in the same irradiation of purity.

But now, a slight accidental fact, a mere name read by chance in a journal, the awakening of a recollection had sufficed to upset me, to frighten me, to open an abyss beneath my feet; and I did not dare sound the depths of a resolute scrutiny, because my dream of happiness withheld me, drew me back, clung to me obstinately. I wavered at first in an obscure and indefinable anguish, traversed at moments by dreadful glimpses. "It may be that she is not pure, and then? Filippo Arborio, or another ... who knows? Were I certain of the sin, could I pardon it? What sin? What pardon? You have not the right to judge her; you have not the right to raise your voice. She has kept silent too often. Now, it is your duty to keep silent. And your happiness? The happiness that you dream of, is it your own or does it belong to both of you? To both of you, of course; for the shadow of *her* sorrow would suffice to obscure all your joys. You suppose that, if you are happy, she will be happy also—you with your past of constant misconduct, she with her past of constant martyrdom? The happiness that you dream of has for its only foundation the abolition of the past. Why, then, if she had truly ceased to be pure, would it be impossible to throw a veil over it or condone her sin as you

would your own? Why, if she forgets, should you not forget, yourself? Why, if you claim to be a man without prejudice and completely freed from social convention, should you not consider her also as a woman in the same state of being? Such an inequality would be perhaps the worst of your injustices. But the Ideal? But the Ideal? My own felicity would not be possible except on the condition of recognizing in Juliana a creature absolutely superior, impeccable, worthy of every adoration; and it is precisely also in the innate feeling of this superiority, in the consciousness of her personal moral greatness, that she would find the most precious elements of her own felicity. I should not succeed in forgetting my own past or hers, because the existence of this special happiness presupposes both the profligacy of my former life and her unconquered and almost superhuman heroism, the image of which has always constrained my mind to bow before it. But do you take into account the amount of egotism and high ideality that enters into your dream? Do you believe you merit that supreme prize, happiness? By what privilege? So your long misconduct has entitled you, not to expiation, but to a reward?"

I rose hastily to my feet to cut short this debate. "In brief, it concerns only an old suspicion, very vague, and awakened by chance. This unreasonable agitation will go away. I have made a substance of a shadow. In two or three days, after Easter, we will go to the Lilacs, and then I shall know, I shall unquestionably *feel* the truth. But is not that profound and immutable melancholy which is in her eyes also suspicious? That bewildered air, that species of continual preoccupation which is marked so heavily on her brow, that great fatigue which is revealed by certain attitudes, that anguish which she cannot succeed in dissimulating at your approach—is not all that *suspicious*?" The ambiguity of such symptoms bore also a favorable interpretation. Then, submerged by a flood of the most violent pain, I went up to the window, with the instinctive desire of plunging into the spectacle of the outer world to discover there something that would correspond to the state of my soul—a revelation or an appeasement.

The sky was quite white, like a scaffolding of superimposed veils between which the air circulated, producing large mobile folds. One of these veils seemed at times to detach itself and approach the earth, graze the tops of the trees, break up, be reduced to falling fragments, undulate on the ground, fade away. On the horizon, the lines of the heights were confusedly unrolled, disappearing to reappear in the fantastic landscapes, like a vista perceived in a dream, without reality. A lead-colored shadow covered the valley, and the Assoro, whose shores were invisible, animated it with its reflections. This tortuous river, glistening in that sombre gulf, beneath that slow and continued disaggregation of the sky, attracted the attention, and had for the mind the fascination of symbolical things, seemed to bear in itself the occult sense of that indefinable spectacle.

My pain gradually lost its acuteness, became appeased and calm. "Why do you aspire with such avidity to a happiness of which you are not worthy? Why do you base the whole edifice of your future life on an illusion? Why believe with such blind faith in a privilege that does not exist? All men perhaps, in the course of their lives, encounter a decisive period in which the most perspicacious are able to understand what *their life should be.* That period you have already met. Remember the moment when the white and faithful hand which offered you love, indulgence, peace, dreams, forgetfulness, everything that is good and beautiful, trembled in the air, was extended toward you *as if for the supreme offering...*"

Bitterness swelled my heart with tears. I leaned my elbows on the balustrade, my hands to my face, and, my eyes fixed on the windings of the river at the bottom of the leaden valley, while the scaffolding of the sky ceaselessly disaggregated, I remained for several minutes under the menace of an imminent punishment, I felt that an unknown disaster was suspended above me.

But, suddenly, from the room below arose the sound of the piano; and instantaneously, that heavy oppression disappeared, and I was seized by a confused anxiety in which all the dreams, every desire, each hope, every regret, remorse, and terror were mingled anew with inconceivable and suffocating rapidity.

I recognized the music. It was a *Romance without Words* of which Juliana was very fond, and which Miss Edith often played; it was one of those veiled yet profound melodies in which the Soul appeared to ask Life, with ever-changing accents, this single question, "Why have you disappointed my expectation?"

Yielding to a kind of instinctive impulse, I went out, agitated, traversed the corridor, descended the staircase, and stopped before the door from which issued the sounds. The door was ajar; I slipped in without making any noise, and looked through the portières. Was it Juliana? At first my eyes, blinded by the light, were incapable of distinguishing anything, before adapting themselves to the darkness; but I was struck by the penetrating perfume of the hawthorns, that odor of mingled thyme and bitter-almond, fresh as country milk. I looked in. The room was poorly lighted by a greenish light that struggled in from between the slats of the Venetian blinds. Miss Edith was alone at the piano, and she continued to play without noticing my presence. The polished case of the instrument glistened in the dark; the branches of hawthorns made a white spot. In the quiet of this retreat, in this perfume emanating from the branches that recalled the happy matinal intoxication, and Juliana's smile and my own fear, the romance seemed more desolate than ever.

Where was Juliana? Gone upstairs? Still out of doors? I withdrew; I went down the other stairs; I traversed the vestibule without meeting anyone. I had an unconquerable desire to seek her, to see her; I thought that, perhaps, it would suffice me to be near her in order to recover my calmness, to regain confidence.

On going out on the lawn, I perceived her beneath the elms, sitting with Federico.

Both smiled at me. When I came up to them my brother said smilingly:

"We were speaking of you. Juliana thinks you will soon be tired of the Badiola.... If so, what will become of our projects?"

"No, Juliana *does not know*," I replied, making an effort to recover my habitual ease. "But you will see. On the contrary, it is of Rome that I am tired ... *and of everything else*."

I looked at Juliana. A marvellous change was taking place in my soul. The sad things that, up to then, had oppressed me, now faded away, disappeared, gave place to a salutary feeling that the mere sight of her and of my brother sufficed to awaken in me. She was seated in a careless and nonchalant attitude, holding on her knees a book that I recognized, the book that I had given her some days before, Tolstoï's *Peace and War*. Truly, all about her, her attitude, her look, breathed sweetness and goodness. And in me an emotion was born similar to that which I should doubtless have felt if, in the same place, beneath the familiar elms, that shed their dead flowers, I had seen Constance, the poor sister, side by side with Federico.

The elms rained thousands of flowers at every breath of the wind. There was, in the white light, a continual and very slow rain of diaphanous, almost impalpable pellicles, that loitered in the air, hesitating, trembling like the wings of dragon-flies, of an indefinable color between green and blond, and whose incessant fall imparted a sensation of vertigo. They fell on Juliana's knees, on her shoulders; from time to time she made a movement to remove one that had ensconced itself in her hair.

"Ah! If Tullio stays at the Badiola," said Federico, addressing her, "we will do great things. We will promulgate the new agrarian laws; we will establish the foundations of the new agricultural constitution... You smile? You also will have your share in our work; we will confide to you the execution of two or three precepts of our Decalogue. You will work like the others. Apropos, Tullio, when shall we commence this novitiate? Your hands are too white. Eh! It is not enough to simply prick them with thorns...."

He spoke gayly, in his clear and strong voice, that immediately inspired every listener with a feeling of security and confidence. He spoke of his old and new projects relative to the interpretation of the primitive Christian law on alimentary labor with a gravity of thought and emotion that tempered that sportive gayety with which he protected himself as with a veil of modesty against the admiration and eulogy of his auditors. In him all appeared simple, easy, spontaneous. This young man, by the sole power of a mind that illumined his inborn virtue, had had, for several years already, the intuition of the social theory that the Moujik Bondareff inspired in Leo Tolstoï. At that time, he had not the least

knowledge of *Peace and War*, the great book that had just appeared in the East.

"Here is a book for you," I said to him, taking the volume from Juliana's knees.

"Thanks; lend it to me. I will read it."

"Do you like it?" I asked Juliana.

"Yes; very much. It is sad and consoling at the same time. I already love Marie Bolkonsky, and Pierre Besoukhow too."

I sat down near her, on a bench. It seemed to me that I was thinking of nothing, that I had not one precise thought; but my soul kept vigil and meditated. There was a manifest contrast between the feeling that sprang from the circumstance, from the neighboring objects, and that which corresponded with Federico's words, with that book, with the names of the characters whom Juliana loved.

The time passed slowly and gently, almost lazily, in this diffused and whitish mist in which the elms gradually shed their flowers. The sound of the piano reached us, muffled, unintelligible, rendering the light more melancholy, cradling, so to speak, the drowsy atmosphere.

Absorbed, listening no longer, I opened the book, I turned the leaves at several places, and ran through the beginning of several pages. I noticed that there were several pages turned down at the corners, as if to mark them; on others, there were finger-nail marks, the habit of the reader. Then I wished to read in turn, curious, almost anxious. In the scene between Pierre Besoukhow and the unknown old man at the Torjok post-house, many passages were marked.

"Let your spiritual look fall back on your inner being. Ask yourself if you are satisfied with yourself. At what result have you arrived, having but your intelligence for a guide? You are young, you are rich, you are intelligent. What have you done with all these gifts? Are you satisfied with yourself and with your life?"

"No, I have a horror of it!"

"If you have a horror of it, change it, purify yourself. And, in measure as you transform yourself, you will learn to recognize wisdom. How have you passed your existence? In orgies, in debauches, in depravities, receiving everything from society without giving it anything. What use have you made of the benefits of fortune? What have you done for your fellow-man? Have you thought of your tens of thousands of serfs? Have you assisted them morally or materially? No, you have not. You have profited by their labor in order to live a life of corruption. Have you sought to employ yourself in the service of your fellow-man? No. You have lived in indolence. And then you married; you accepted the responsibility of serving as a guide to a young woman. And then? Instead

of helping her to find the path of truth, you have plunged her into the abyss of deceit and of misery....”

Again the unbearable load weighed me down, crushed me; and it was a more atrocious torture than that I had already suffered, because Juliana’s presence exasperated the crisis. On the leaf, the passage transcribed was marked by a single pencil stroke. Without any doubt, Juliana had marked it, thinking of me, of my misconduct. But the last line? To whom did that refer? To me? To us?

Had I thrown her, had she fallen ”into the abyss of deceit and misery”?

I feared that she and Federico would hear the beating of my heart.

There was another page turned down, with a very pronounced mark—that on the death of the Princess Lisa.

”The eyes of the dead woman were closed; but her small face had not changed, and she seemed constantly saying: ’What have you done to me?’ Prince André did not weep; but he felt his heart break as he thought that he was guilty of wrongs henceforth irreparable and unforgettable. The old prince came also, and kissed one of the frail waxen hands that lay crossed over one another. And one would have thought that the poor, small face was again repeating to him: ’What have you done to me?’”

That gentle yet terrible question pierced me like a dagger. ”What have you done to me?” I kept my eyes fixed on the page, not daring to make a movement, to look at Juliana, yet agonized by a desire to do so; and I feared that both she and Federico might hear my heart-beats, that they might turn toward me to look at me and that they would discover my agitation. My agitation was so great that it seemed to me that my face was distorted, that I was incapable of rising, incapable of uttering a single syllable. I threw a single rapid, stealthy glance at Juliana, and her profile impressed itself on me so strongly that I seemed to continue to see her before me on the page, beside the ”poor, small face” of the dead princess. It was a pensive profile, rendered graver by attention, shaded by long lashes; and the lips, tightly closed, somewhat depressed at the corners, appeared as if involuntarily confessing a feeling of fatigue and great sadness. She was listening to my brother. And my brother’s voice resounded confusedly in my ears, seemed to me far off, although he was quite close. And all these flowers shed by the elms, that rained, rained ceaselessly, all these dead flowers, almost unreal, almost bereft of being, induced in me an inexpressible sensation, as if that psychic vision were

transformed in me into strange internal phenomena, as if I had been present at the continuous passage of these thousands of impalpable shadows in an inner sky, at the bottom of my soul. "What have you done to me?" repeated the voice of the dead and the living, both the one and the other without moving their lips. "What have you done to me?"

"What are you reading, Tullio?" asked Juliana, turning and taking from my hands the book, which she closed and replaced on her knees with a sort of nervous impatience.

And immediately, without pause, as if to remove all significance from her action, she added:

"Why do we not rejoin Miss Edith and have a little music? Do you hear her? She is playing, I think, the Funeral March for the Death of a Hero, which you are so fond of, Federico...."

She listened. We all three listened. We heard several chords in the silence. She was not mistaken. Rising, she added:

"Well, come. Will you?"

I rose last, so to have her before me. She did not take the trouble to shake from her dress the elm flowers that had formed a soft carpet on the ground all around.

She stood still a minute, her head bent, regarding the layer of flowers which she hollowed out and piled up with the slender tip of her shoe, while on her, other flowers, and still other flowers, continued to rain, to rain ceaselessly. I could see nothing of her face. Was she really so attentive to that trifling action? Or was she not rather absorbed in perplexity?

V.

The following morning, among those who brought Easter offerings to the Badiola, came Calisto, old Calisto, the keeper at the Lilacs, with an enormous bouquet of fresh and odorous lilacs. He wanted to offer them to Juliana with his own hands, recalling to her the happy time of our stay there, and begging for another visit, a short visit. "Signora had seemed so gay, so happy over there. Why did she not return? The house had remained intact; nothing had been changed. The garden was now more filled. The lilac-trees, a veritable forest, were in full bloom. Did not their perfume reach as far as the Badiola, toward evening? Really, the

garden and the house expected a visit. Beneath the roof all the old nests were full of swallows. In deference to Signora's wish, these nests had been respected as if sacred. But, assuredly, there were too many now. Every week they were obliged to clean up the balconies and window-sills with a shovel. And what a warbling, from morning till night! When will Signora decide to come? Soon?"

"Shall we go there on Tuesday?" I asked Juliana.

After a slight hesitation, sustaining with the greatest difficulty the heavy care that bowed her head, she answered:

"We'll go on Tuesday, if you wish."

"Very well. Tuesday, then, Calisto," I said to the old man, in such a happy tone that I was surprised at it myself so sudden and spontaneous had been the rapture of my soul. "Expect us Tuesday morning. We will bring our lunch. Make no preparations. Do you understand? Let the house remain closed. I wish to open the door myself, and to open the windows myself, one after the other. Do you understand?"

A strange happiness, without a single cloud, agitated me, urged me on to puerile actions and puerile and almost foolish remarks, that I could hardly restrain. I should have liked to embrace Calisto, to stroke his fine, white beard, take him in my arms, speak to him of the Lilacs, of the past, of the "good old time," in a prolixity of words, under the grand Easter sun.

"Once more I see before me a simple, sincere man, a faithful heart," I thought, regarding him. And once more I felt security, as if the affection of this old man were for me a second talisman against the blows of fate.

Once more, since the close of the preceding evening, my soul expanded, stimulated by the abundance of joy that impregnated the atmosphere, that emanated from every being. That morning, one would have thought that the Badiola was the shrine of a pilgrimage. Not one peasant failed to bring his offering and well-wishes. My mother received upon her blessed hands a thousand kisses of men, women, and children. At the mass that was celebrated in the chapel a dense crowd was present. It overflowed the porch and spread over the lawn, full of religious zeal beneath the azure vault. The silver bells rang merrily in the still air with joyous, almost melodic harmony. On the tower, the inscription on the sundial said: *Hora est benefaciendi.* And on this glorious morning, on which one felt, so to speak, all the gratitude due to long kindness mounting toward the sweet maternal house, these three words seemed like a chant.

How then could I retain my perfidious doubt, suspicions, troubled recollections? What could I have to fear after having seen my mother press her lips on Juliana's smiling brow, after having seen my brother press in his noble and loyal hand the delicate and pale hand of her who was for him a second incarnation of

Constance.

VI.

The thought of the excursion to the Lilacs occupied me all that day and again the day following, without interruption. Never, I think, had the longing for the hour agreed upon for a first rendezvous filled me with such ardent impatience.

The disturbance of the senses contributed also to enshroud and dull my conscience. I wanted to reconquer Juliana body and soul. The name of the Lilacs reawakened in me memories, recollections, not only of a sweet idyll, but also of ardent passion. Without being aware of it, I had perhaps sharpened my longing by the inevitable images that suspicion engenders; it was a latent poison that I bore in me. Up to then, in fact, it had seemed to me that my dominant emotion was entirely spiritual, and, in the expectation of the great day, I had taken delight in imagining the conversation that I would hold with the woman whose pardon I wished to obtain. Now, on the contrary, what I saw, was less the pathetic scene that would take place between us than the scene that must be the immediate consequence. Gradually, by a rapid and irresistible elimination, a single image excluded all the others, invaded me, mastered me, became fixed, clear, precise in the smallest particulars. "It is after lunch. A small glass of Chablis has sufficed to disturb Juliana, who does not drink wine, so to speak. The afternoon becomes warmer and warmer; the odor of the roses, of the corn-flag, of the lilacs, become violent; the swallows pass and repass with a deafening twittering. We are alone, both invaded by an unbearable internal tremor. And, suddenly, I say to her: 'Shall we go and look at our old room?' It is the old nuptial chamber, that intentionally I had omitted to open during our first walk through the villa. We enter. There is a low humming noticeable, the same humming that one thinks one hears in the deep folds of certain shells; but it is only the murmur of my arteries. She also, no doubt, hears this humming; but it is only the murmur of her arteries. All around is silent; one would think that the swallows have ceased warbling. I want to speak, and, at my first word, that sticks in my throat, she falls into my arms, almost fainting."

This imaginary picture became ceaselessly more and more embellished, grew complicated, simulated the reality, attained an incredible actuality. I could not succeed in preventing its absolute empire over my mind. One would have

said that there was reborn in me the old-time libertine, so keen was my pleasure in contemplating and caressing the vision. The kind of life I had led for several weeks, in this warm springtime, produced its effect on my regenerated organism. Simple physiological phenomena completely modified the state of my conscience, gave an entirely different turn to my thoughts, made of me another man.

Maria and Natalia had expressed a desire to accompany us on this excursion. Juliana wanted them to come, but I objected, and I used all my skill, every persuasion, to accomplish my purpose.

Federico had made this proposition: "I must go to Casal Caldore on Tuesday. I will accompany you in the carriage as far as the Lilacs, where you will stop, and I will continue on my way. Then, in the evening, I will call for you again with the carriage, and we will return together to the Badiola." Juliana consented, in my presence.

I reflected that Federico's company, at least in going, would not inconvenience us; on the contrary, it would even spare me a certain embarrassment. In fact, what could we have spoken about, Juliana and I, had we been alone during the two or three hours the ride lasted? What attitude could I have taken toward her? Who knows even if I should not have spoiled the situation, compromised its success, or, at least, removed the freshness from our emotion? Was it not my dream to find myself again suddenly with her at the Lilacs, as if by magic, and there to speak to her my first word of tenderness and submission? The presence of Federico furnished the advantage of avoiding uncertain preliminaries, long and painful silences, sentences spoken in low tones on account of the coachman's ears; in a word, all the little irritations and tortures. We would get down at the Lilacs, and then, then only, we should find ourselves by each other's side at the gate of the lost paradise.

VII.

This is what took place. I cannot find words to describe the sensation I felt when I heard the sound of the bells and the noise of the carriage which bore Federico away in the direction of Casal Caldore. I said to Calisto, as I took the keys from his hands with manifest impatience:

"Now, you may go. I will call you later."

And I myself closed the gate behind the old man, who seemed rather surprised and dissatisfied at so unceremonious a dismissal.

"At last, we're here!" I cried, directly I was alone with Juliana. And the entire wave of happiness that had invaded me passed into my voice.

I was happy, happy, unspeakably happy; I was as if fascinated by an immense hallucination of unexpected, unhoped for happiness, that transfigured all my being, reawoke and multiplied all that there was still good and youthful in me, isolated me from the world, instantly concentrated my life within the circuit of the walls enclosed by that garden. Words sprang to my lips without connection, inexpressible; my reason wandered in a blazing flash of thoughts.

How was it that Juliana had not guessed what was passing in me? How was it she had not understood me? How was it that her heart had not received the counter-shock of my impetuous joy?

We looked at each other. I can still see the anxious expression of her face, over which hovered an indefinable smile. She spoke in that muffled, feeble voice, always hesitating with the singular hesitation that I had already remarked in other circumstances and that made her appear to be ceaselessly preoccupied in restraining the words that mounted to her lips in order to substitute for them other words. She said:

"Let us take a walk round the garden before opening the house. How long it is since I have seen it in such flower. The last time we were here was three years ago, do you remember? It was also in April, during Easter week."

Without doubt she wished to overcome her agitation, but she could not succeed; without doubt she wished to repress the effusion of her tenderness, but she could not. In this place, the first words issued from her own mouth had begun to evoke memories. After a few steps she stopped, and we looked at each other. An indefinable change, as if she were forcing herself to stifle something, passed through her dark eyes.

"Juliana!" I cried, incapable of controlling myself, feeling an afflux of passionate and tender words spring from the bottom of my heart, seized by a mad frenzy to kneel before her on the sand, to embrace her knees, to kiss her dress, her hands, her wrists, furiously, ceaselessly.

With a supplicating gesture, she made a motion for me to be quiet. And she continued to advance along the path, hastening her steps.

She wore a light-gray dress trimmed with darker shades, a gray felt hat, and carried a gray-silk parasol embroidered with white trefoils. I still see her walking between the tufted masses of lilacs that bent toward her their thousands of bluish-violet bunches.

It was hardly eleven o'clock. The morning was warm, a precocious warmth; in the azure floated a number of flocculent vapors. The charming bushes that had

given their name to this country-house blossomed on every side, were masters of the garden, formed a wood, interspersed here and there by tea-rose bushes and by the tufts of the corn-flag. Here and there the roses climbed up stalks, insinuated themselves between the branches, fell back again in chains, in garlands, festoons, bouquets; at the foot of the stalks, Florentine orris sprang from between their leaves, like long, greenish swords, flowers of large and noble design. The three perfumes harmonized in a deep accord that I *recognized*, because, since the now distant epoch, these had remained in my memory as clearly as the accord of three musical notes. In the silence only the warbling of the swallows could be heard. The house could scarcely be seen between the cones of the cypresses, and the swallows were as numerous there as bees around a hive.

Very soon Juliana slowed down her pace. I walked at her side, so near that at times our elbows touched. She glanced attentively around her, as if she feared something might escape her. Two or three times I detected on her lips a movement as if she were about to speak: it was like the first outline of a word that remained unpronounced.

I said to her, in a low voice and timidly:

"Of what are you thinking?"

"I am thinking that we should never have left here."

"You are right, Juliana."

At times the swallows almost brushed against us, with a cry, rapid and glistening like winged arrows.

"How much I have longed for this day, Juliana! Ah! you will never know how much I have longed for it!" I cried, prey to an emotion so strong that my voice became almost unrecognizable. "Never, do you understand, never have I felt an anxiety equal to that which devours me since the day before yesterday, since the moment you consented to come here. Do you remember the day when, for the first time, we saw each other in secret, on the terrace of the Villa Oggeri, where we kissed each other? I was mad with love for you, do you remember? Well, the expectation of the last night was nothing in comparison. You do not believe me, and you are right in misbelieving me, in doubting me. But I want to tell you all, to recount my sufferings, my fears, my hope. Oh! I know, my sufferings are doubtless little in comparison with those that I have made you suffer. I know, I know; all my pains are not equal to your pains, not worth your tears. I have not expiated my fault, and I am not worthy of pardon. But tell me, tell me that I may hope that you will pardon me. You do not believe me; but I wish to tell you all. It is you, you only whom I have truly loved; it is you alone whom I love. I know, I know; men will say these things in order to obtain pardon, and you are right not to believe me. Yet see; if you think of our love of long ago, if you think of our first three years of never-failing tenderness, if you remember, if you recollect, you will

see it is impossible to refuse to believe me. Even in my lowest abasements, you were to be for me unforgettable; and my soul ever longed to turn toward you, to seek you, to regret you, always, do you understand? Always. Did you not perceive it yourself? When you were as a sister to me, did you not sometimes perceive that I was dying of sorrow? I swear to you that, far away from you, I never felt sincere joy. I have never had one hour of complete forgetfulness. Never, never; I swear it. You were my constant, profound, secret adoration. The better part of myself has always been yours, and there has been in me a hope that has never been extinguished—that of being able to free myself from my malady and to find intact my first, my only love... Ah! Juliana, tell me that I have not hoped in vain!"

She walked with extreme slowness, no longer looking before her, her head bent, excessively pale. A slight, painful contraction appeared at times at the corner of her mouth. And, because she remained silent, I began to feel a vague uneasiness arise within me. An oppressive feeling began to be caused by the sun, the flowers, the cries of the swallows, by all the joyfulness displayed by triumphant springtime.

"You do not answer me?" I continued, taking the hand that she let hang by her side. "You do not believe me; you have lost all confidence in me; you still fear that I deceive you; you do not dare to give yourself up again because you are always thinking of *the last time*.... Yes, it is true, that was the most brutal of all my infamies. I repent it as I would a crime, and, even if you should pardon me, I shall never be able to forgive myself. But did you not notice that I was ailing, that I was losing my reason? A curse pursued me, and, since that day, I have not had one minute's respite, I have not had a single lucid interval. Do you not remember? Do you not remember? Surely you knew I was beside myself, in a state of madness; for you looked at me as one does upon a madman. How often have I surprised in your glances sad compassion, curiosity, fear! Do you not remember what I had become? I was unrecognizable. Well, I am cured; I saved myself for your sake. I have succeeded in opening my eyes, I have succeeded in seeing the light. At last it is light. It is you, you only whom I have truly loved all my life, it is you only whom I love. Do you hear?"

I pronounced the last words in a firmer voice, and more slowly, as if to impress them one by one upon this woman's soul, and I pressed firmly her hand, which I already held in my own. She stopped with the manner of one about to collapse, gasping. Later, only later, during the hours that followed, I understood the excess of mortal anguish exhaled by this panting. But, at that moment, I understood only this: "The recollection of my horrible treason, evoked by me, revives her suffering. I have touched wounds that are still open. Ah! if I could persuade her to believe me! If I could conquer her distrust! Does not my voice

convince her that I am speaking the truth?"

We had come to the intersection of two paths. There was a bench there. She murmured:

"Let us sit down a little."

We sat down. I do not know if she recognized the spot. Even I did not recognize it at first, bewildered like a man who has had both his eyes bandaged for some time. We both looked about us, then we looked at one another, and in our eyes we had the same thought. A crowd of tender recollections were connected with this old stone bench. My heart swelled, not with regret, but with a restless covetousness, with a sort of frenzy of living that, in a flash, gave me a chimerical, dazzling vision of the future. "Ah! she is ignorant of what new tenderness I am capable! In my soul there is a paradise for her." And the flaming up of that ideal of love was so strong that I became exalted.

"Are you sad? But what creature in all the world was ever loved as I love you? To what woman has it been given to obtain a proof of love equal to that I give you? You said just now: 'We should never have left here.' Without doubt, we should have been happy: you would not have suffered a martyrdom, you would not have shed so many tears, you would not have lost so many years of your life; but you would not have known my love, all my love."

Her head was bent on her bosom, her eyes half-closed, and she listened, motionless. Her eyelashes threw on the upper part of her cheeks a shadow that disturbed me more than a look would have done.

"And I myself would have had no knowledge of my love. Did I not believe the first time I left you that all was at an end? I sought another passion, another fever, another intoxication; I wished to embrace life in one single clasp. You did not suffice me. And during all those years I weakened myself by an atrocious life, oh! so atrocious that I have a horror of it, as a convict has a horror of the prison in which he has lived, *dying a little every day.* And I had to wander from darkness into darkness, before light fell on my soul, before this great truth appeared to me. I have loved only one woman, and you are she. You alone, in all the world, are good and gentle; and you are the best and most gentle creature I have ever dreamed of; you are the Unique. And you were in my house, while I sought you afar off. Do you understand, now? Do you understand? *You were in my house, while I sought you afar off.* Ah, tell me, is not this confession worth all your tears? Do you not wish you had shed more, much more, in order to purchase this certitude?"

"Yes, still more," she said, so low that I scarcely heard her.

The words passed like a breath from her pallid lips. And the tears gushed from between her eyelashes, rolled down her cheeks, wetted the convulsed mouth, fell on that palpitating bosom.

"Juliana, my love! Oh, my love!" I cried, with a thrill of supreme felicity, throwing myself on my knees before her.

And I threw my arms around her, I laid my head on her bosom, I felt again in all my being that frenetic tension in which ends useless effort to express by an action, by a gesture, by a caress, the inexpressible internal passion. Her tears fell on my cheek. If the material effect of these warm life-drops had equalled the sensations that I received from them, I should carry an indelible mark on my skin.

"Oh! let me drink," I begged.

Raising myself, I placed my lips to her eyelids and I bathed them with her tears, while my hands lavished on her distracted caresses. My limbs had acquired an extraordinary flexibility, a sort of illusory fluidity that prevented me from noticing the obstacle presented by the clothes. It seemed to me that I had the power to enclose and envelop the entire person of the loved one.

"Did you dream," I said, with the saline savor in my mouth that impregnated me to the heart (later, during the hours that followed, I was astonished at not having found an intolerable bitterness in these tears), "did you dream you would be loved so much? Did you dream of such happiness? It is I, look, it is I who speak to you like this; look well: it is I. If you knew how strange that seems to me! If I could tell you! I know that I do not know you from to-day, I know I do not love you from to-day, I know that you are what you have always been. And yet it seems to me that I only just found you a moment ago, when you said: 'Yes, still more.' You said it, did you not? Only three words—a breath. And I am reborn, and you are reborn, and we will be happy, happy forever."

I told her these things in a voice that seemed to come from a distance, broken, indefinable; in one of those tones whose intonations seem to rise to our lips, not from our material organs, but from the deepest depths of our soul. And she, who up to then had shed silent tears, burst into sobs.

Violent, too violent were her sobs; not as when one succumbs to a limitless joy, but when one gives vent to inconsolable despair. She sobbed so violently that, for several seconds, I was seized by the stupor caused by excessive manifestations, supreme paroxysms of human emotions. Unconsciously I drew back a little; but, immediately, I noticed the distance that now separated us; I at once noticed not only that there was no longer a physical contact, but also that the sensation of moral communion had become dissipated in the twinkling of an eye. We were still two beings, distinct, separate, external to one another. The very difference of our attitudes even accentuated this disunion. Sitting back at her end of the bench and covering her face with her two hands, she sobbed; and every one of her sobs shook her entire being, put in evidence her fragility, so to speak. Without touching her, I was again on my knees before her; and I looked at

her, stupefied, and yet strangely lucid, attentive to all that was passing within me, and yet with every sense open to the perception of surrounding objects. I heard both her sobs and the twittering of the swallows; I had an exact notion of time and place. And those flowers, and those perfumes, and the surrounding glory of the joyous springtime inspired me with a fright that grew and grew, becoming a sort of panicky terror, an instinctive and blind terror against which reason was powerless. And, like a thunderbolt that lights up a bank of clouds, one thought flashed out from the midst of this tumultuous fear, illuminated me, struck me to the heart: "She is impure!"

Ah! why did I not fall then, struck dead by the blow? Why did not one of my vital organs collapse? Why did I not expire at the feet of the woman who, in a few short moments, had raised me to the height of happiness, only to precipitate me into an abyss of misery?

"Answer!"

I seized her wrists, I uncovered her face, I spoke close to her; and my voice was so low that I scarcely heard it myself in the tumult of my brain.

"Answer! What do these tears signify?"

She ceased to sob, and looked at me; and her eyes, reddened by the tears, became dilated with an expression of supreme anguish, as if they had seen me dying. In fact, my face must have seemed lifeless.

"*It is too late, perhaps? Is it too late?*" I added, revealing my terrible thought by this obscure question.

"No, no, Tullio! No—it is—nothing. What could you have thought? No, no. I am so weak, you see. I am no longer what I was formerly. I have no strength. I am ill, you know; I am so ill! I have not had the force to resist your words. You understand. This crisis has come to me so unexpectedly. It is my nervousness—a sort of convulsion. When one has a spasm like this, one cannot distinguish whether it is from joy or sorrow. Oh! my God! See, it is passing. Rise, Tullio; come here, by my side."

She spoke to me in a voice still choked by tears, still broken with sobs; she looked at me with an expression that was well known to me, the expression that she had already often had at the sight of my suffering. At one time, she could not bear to see me suffer. Her sensibility to this was so exaggerated that I could obtain anything from her by showing her that I was sad. She would have done anything to free me from pain, even the slightest. Often at that time I feigned pain, in jest, to make her uneasy, so as to be consoled like a child, to obtain certain caresses that pleased me, to call forth certain graceful gestures that I adored. Was it not the same tender yet alarmed expression that reappeared now in her eyes?

"Come here, by my side; sit down. Or would you prefer to continue our walk in the garden? We have seen nothing yet. Let us go toward the fountain.

I would like to bathe my eyes. Why do you look at me so? Of what are you thinking? Are we not happy? See, I begin to feel well again, very well. But I must bathe my eyes, my face. What time is it? Noon, perhaps? Federico will be back at about six o'clock. We have plenty of time. Will you come?"

She spoke in a broken and still somewhat convulsive voice, and with a manifest effort, as if trying to collect herself, to regain command of her nervousness, to dissipate in me the shadow of an apprehension, to appear to me confiding and happy. The smile that trembled in her still humid and somewhat reddened eyes had a troubled gentleness that awakened my sympathy. I felt in her words, in her attitude, in all her person that gentleness that softened me, that made me languish with a half-sensual languor, is impossible for me to define the delicate seduction that, emanating from this creature, insinuated itself in my senses and in my mind, favored by the indefinable and confused state of my soul. She seemed to be silently saying to me: "It is impossible for me to be more adorable. Take me, then, since you love me; take me in your arms, but carefully, without hurting me, without clasping me too hard. Oh! I burn with desire to receive your caresses! But I believe they would kill me." This thought aided me a little to counteract the effect her smile produced upon me.

I looked at her mouth at the moment she asked me: "Why do you look at me like that?" and at the moment when she asked: "Are we not happy?" I felt the blind desire of an awakened sensation in which died away the uneasy feeling which my recent passion had left in me. When she arose, I seized her impetuously in my arms, and fastened my lips to hers.

It was a lover's kiss that I gave her, a kiss long and deep, that stirred all the essence of our two beings. She sank back on the bench, exhausted.

"Oh! no, no, Tullio; I beg of you! Enough, enough! Let me regain a little strength," she begged, stretching her hands out to push me away. "Otherwise, I shall be unable to keep on my feet. See, I am half dead."

But there had sprung up in me extraordinary phenomena. That sensation had had the same effect on my mind as an impetuous wave that sweeps away all obstacles, effaces every imprint, and leaves the sand smooth. Everything was instantly levelled; and, suddenly, I found myself in anew state determined by the immediate influence of circumstances, by the pressure of the blood which began to tingle. I no longer knew but one thing. I had there before me the woman whom I desired, trembling, overwhelmed by my kiss—in short, mine entirely; around us blossomed a garden, filled with memories, filled with secrets; a deserted house awaits us behind the flowering bushes guarded by the familiar swallows.

"Do you think I am not strong enough to carry you?" I said to her, seizing her hands, interlacing my fingers in hers. "You used to be as light as a feather. Now you must be still lighter. Let us try!"

A dark shadow passed in her eyes. For a second, she seemed absorbed in thought, as when one deliberates and takes a rapid resolution. Then she shook her head, and throwing herself back, hanging to me by her outstretched arms, laughing with a laugh that revealed a little of her bloodless gum:

"Very well! Lift me," she said.

Scarcely had she risen than she fell against my breast; and then it was she who kissed me first, with a sort of convulsive furor, as if a prey to a sudden frenzy, as if she wished at one stroke to appease an atrociously painful thirst.

"Ah! It is killing me!" she repeated, when our lips had parted.

And that humid mouth, somewhat projecting, half-open, that had become redder, animated by languor, in that face so pale and frail, really gave me the indefinable impression that, of all that body similar to a corpse, the lips only were alive.

She murmured, dreamily, raising her closed eyes, the long lashes of which trembled as if a slight smile had filtered out from beneath the lids:

"Are you happy?"

I pressed her to my heart.

"Very well, let us go. Carry me where you will. Support me a little, Tullio; I feel as if my knees would give way."

"To the house, Juliana?"

"Where you wish."

I supported her by placing my arm around her waist, and I drew her along. She walked like a somnambulist. At first we were silent; and, each moment, we both turned together toward one another, to look at each other. She seemed to me to be really a *new woman*; my attention was arrested by the details, was preoccupied by them; a slight mark scarcely visible on the skin, a little dimple on the lower lip, the curvature of the lashes, a vein at the temple, the shadow that encircled the eyes, the infinitely delicate lobe of the ear. The brown mark on the neck was hardly hidden by the edging of lace; at each movement of the head that Juliana made, one saw it appear or disappear; and that little particularity irritated my impatience. I was intoxicated, and yet, I was very lucid. I heard the cries of the swallows, more numerous, the splashing of the jets of water in the fountain close by. I had the sensation that life was fleeting, that time was flying. And that sun, and those flowers, and those perfumes, and those sounds, and all the joyousness of the springtime, aroused in me for the third time an inexplicable emotion of anxiety.

"My willow!" cried Juliana, as we arrived at the fountain; and she ceased leaning on me, walked more rapidly. "Look, look how tall it is! Do you remember? It was only a branch."

After being pensive for a moment, she added in a different tone and in a

low voice:

"I saw it before—you do not perhaps know? I came here, to the Lilacs, *the other time*."

She could not restrain a sigh. But immediately, as if to dissipate the shadow that these words had put between us, as if to remove the bitterness from her mouth, she bent toward one of the two faucets, drank a few mouthfuls, then turning towards me made a gesture as if asking a kiss. Her chin was still wet, and her lips cool. We both felt that what was to be must be, and we longed for the supreme reconciliation that every fibre of our beings demanded. When we disengaged ourselves, our eyes repeated the same intoxicating promise. And how extraordinary was the sentiment expressed by Juliana's physiognomy. But, then, I did not understand it! Later on, only during the hours that followed, did it become intelligible—only later I knew that a vision of death and a vision of voluptuousness had at the same time intoxicated the poor creature, and that in abandoning herself to the languors of her flesh she had made a funeral vow. I see as if I had her before my eyes, I shall always see that face full of mystery, under the shadow of that willow which rained on us its great vegetal chevelure. Beneath the sun, between the long branches of diaphanous foliage, silvery reflections from the water imparted a hallucinating vibration to the shade. The echoes combined, in a low and continuous monotone, the sonorous sound of the jets of water. All these appearances exalted my mind out of the world about me.

We went toward the house without speaking. My joy was so great at our reconciliation, our reawakened love, that my soul was transported in a whirlwind of joy so high, the pulsations of my arteries were so violent, that I thought: "Is this delirium? I felt nothing of this on my first marriage night, when I crossed the threshold of the nuptial chamber." Twice or three times I was seized by a savage transport, as if by a sudden attack of madness, and it is wonderful that I could contain myself: so great was my physical desire to take possession again of this woman. In her also the crisis must have become insupportable; because she stopped, and sighed: "Oh! my God, my God! This is too much!"

Suffocating, oppressed, she took my hand and placed it over her heart.

"Feel," said she.

I felt less the throbbing of her heart than the elasticity of her breast, through the cloth. I saw the iris in Juliana's eyes become hidden under the closing eyelids. For fear that she would faint, I supported her; then I bore her away, I carried her almost as far as the cypress, as far as a bench where we both sat down, both exhausted.

The house rose before us, as if in a dream.

Leaning her head on my shoulder, she said:

"Ah! Tullio, how terrible! Do you not think, too, that we could die from

it?"

She added, gravely, in a voice that seemed to come from I know not what depths of her soul:

"Shall we both die?"

I felt a strange shudder, which convinced me that these words expressed an extraordinary state of mind, perhaps the same sentiment that had transformed her face beneath the willow, after the embrace, after the silent resolution. But this time, again, I could not understand. I understood only that we were both possessed by a species of delirium and that we were both breathing the atmosphere of a dream.

The house rose before us as in a vision. On the rustic façade, on every cornice, on every projection, along the gutters, on the architraves, beneath the window ledges, beneath the stones of the balconies, between the brackets, between the eminences, everywhere, the swallows had built their nests. The clay nests, by thousands, old and new, cemented together like the cells of a hive, had but few spaces between them. In these spaces, and on the slats of the Venetian shutters, and on the iron-work of the balustrades, the excrements made white patches like thinned chalk. Closed and without inhabitants, this house nevertheless was full of life—a bustling life, joyous and tender. The faithful swallows whirled around in their flight, with their cries, their scintillations, with all their tendernesses, ceaselessly. While, in the air, flocks pursued one another, strong, swift strokes, as rapid as arrows, with great alternating clamors, flying away, coming closer in the twinkling of an eye, brushing close to the trees, then rising up again in reflecting flashes in the sunlight, indefatigable. In and about the nests there was an activity of another sort, but not the less ardent. Some of the swallows remained for several moments fixed before the orifices; others sustained themselves on their wings while in flight; others, half-way in, showed on the outside only their little forked tails, quivering and agile, black and white on the grayish mud; others, half-way out, showed a small portion of their shining breasts and fawn-colored throats; others, up to then invisible, flew out with a piercing cry, and flew off. All this lively and joyous movement around the closed house, all that animation around the nests of our nest of the old days, formed a spectacle so delightful, a miracle of gentleness so exquisite, that for several minutes, as if during a respite from our fever, we forgot ourselves in its contemplation.

I broke the enchantment by rising.

"Here is the key," I said. "What are we waiting for?"

"Ah! Tullio, let us wait a little longer," she begged, in a sort of fright.

"I am going to open the door."

And I approached the door; I mounted the three steps, which produced on me the effect that they were those of an altar. At the moment when I was about

to turn the key, with the trembling of a devotee who is opening a reliquary, I felt Juliana behind me. She had followed me, furtively, lightly as a shadow. I started.

"Is it you!"

"Yes, it is I," she murmured, caressingly, the exhalation of her breath warm on my ear.

She put her arms around my neck, so that her delicate wrists crossed beneath my chin.

That furtive act, the laugh that rippled in her voice and betrayed her infantile joy at having startled me, that manner of embracing me, all those agile graces recalled to me the Juliana of the old days, the young and tender companion of the happy years, the delicious creature with the long tresses, merry laughter, and girlish ways. An effluvium of the old-time happiness enveloped me, on the threshold of this house filled with memories.

"Shall I open?" I asked.

My hand rested on the key, ready to turn it.

"Open," she answered.

She did not loosen her hold on me, and I continued to feel her breath on my neck.

At the creaking made by the key in the lock, her arms clasped me more firmly; and she pressed against me, communicating to me her tremor. The swallows warbled over our heads, and their light twitterings contrasted, so to speak, with the depth of the silence.

"Go in," she murmured, without loosing her hold on me. "Go in, go in."

That voice, coming from lips so near yet invisible, real and yet mysterious, breathed all warm in my ear and yet so intimate that it seemed to speak to the centre of my soul, more feminine, softer than ever voice was before. I hear it still. I shall hear it forever.

"Go in, go in."

I pushed the door open. We crossed the threshold together, as if dissolved into one single person, noiselessly.

The vestibule was lighted by a high, round window. A swallow flew over our heads, warbling. We raised our eyes in surprise. A nest hung among the grotesques of the ceiling. There was a broken window-pane in the window. The swallow flew out through the opening, still warbling.

"Now, I am entirely yours, entirely," murmured Juliana, without detaching her hold on my neck.

But, by a sinuous movement, she fell on my breast, and met my mouth. We exchanged a long kiss. I said to her, with intoxication:

"Come, let us go up. Shall I carry you?"

In spite of the intoxication, I felt a sufficient strength in my muscles to carry

her at one bound to the top of the stairway.

She answered:

"No. I can go up alone."

But to see her, to hear her, she seemed incapable of it.

I put my arms round her as I had already done in the garden. I raised her, I urged her up step by step. One would have said that in the house there was a deep and distant buzzing, like that heard in the folds of certain sea-shells; one would have said that no other sound penetrated there from the exterior.

When we were upon the landing, instead of opening the door facing us I turned to the right in the dark corridor, and I drew her on with my hand, without speaking. She was panting so that it pained me. Her agitation was communicated to me.

"Where are we going?" she asked.

"To *our* room," I answered.

One could scarcely see. I was guided as if by instinct. I found the knob, I opened; we entered.

The obscurity was partly illuminated by rays of light that filtered through the cracks of the shutters, and here a deeper buzzing was heard. I should have liked to run to the windows to immediately admit more light; but I could not leave Juliana; it seemed to me impossible to detach myself from her, to interrupt, were it but for a second, the contact of our hands, as if through the skin the live ends of our nerves were magnetically adhered. We advanced together, groping our way through the dark.

VIII.

It was two o'clock in the afternoon. About three hours had passed since our arrival at the Lilacs.

I had left Juliana alone for a few minutes; I had gone to call Calisto. The old man had brought the lunch basket; and on receiving for the second time a rather abrupt dismissal, he had shown, instead of surprise, a certain malicious good-nature.

Juliana and I now were seated at the table like two lovers, opposite each other, exchanging smiles. Before us were spread cold meats, preserved fruits, biscuits, oranges, and a bottle of Chablis. The room, with its ceiling decorated in

rococo, with its light-colored walls, its pastoral scenes painted over the doors, had a sort of gayety now out of fashion, the air of a past century. Through the open balcony a very soft light entered, because long milky streaks were spread over the heavens. In the rectangle of the pale sky stood out "the old, venerable cypress, whose trunk arose from the midst of a rose-bush and whose top sheltered a nest of nightingales." Lower down, through the bent iron-work of the balustrade, could be seen the exquisite forest of light violet tone, the vernal glory of the Lilacs. The triple perfume, the vernal soul of the Lilacs, was disseminated in the calm and slow harmonious undulations.

"Do you remember?" said Juliana.

She repeated: "Do you remember?"

To her lips rose one by one the most distant reminiscences of our love, that, barely evoked by a discreet allusion, were, nevertheless, revived with an extraordinary intensity, in that place that had seen their birth, among propitious objects. But the sad disquietude and the frenzy of life that had taken possession of me in the garden on our first entry were irritated now to impatience, and suggested to me hyperbolical visions of the future that I opposed to the phantoms of an importunate past.

"To-morrow, in two or three days at the latest, we must come back here to stay, but alone. You see, there is nothing lacking; everything is in its place. If you wish, we could even remain here to-night. You do not wish to? Really, you do not wish to?"

By my voice, gesture, look, I sought to tempt her. My knees touched her knees. But she looked at me fixedly, without answering.

"Remember the *first evening* here, at the Lilacs! We strolled here after the *Ave Maria*, and saw the lights at the windows! Ah! you understand me well.... The lights that illuminate a house for the first time, *the first evening*! Do you remember? Up to now, you have done nothing but remember, remember. And yet, you see, all your recollections are not worth to me one minute of to-day, will not be worth one minute of to-morrow. Could you possibly doubt the happiness that awaits you? I have never loved you, Juliana, as much as I love you at this moment; never, never, do you hear? Never have I been as much yours as now, Juliana. I will recount to you, I will describe to you my days, in order that you may understand your miracles. After so much unhappiness, who could have hoped for anything like this? I will tell you. At certain times, it seemed to me I had gone back to the period of my adolescence, to the time of my youth. I felt myself *candid* as I did then, good, tender, simple. I remembered nothing more. All, all my thoughts were of you; all my emotions were centred in you. Sometimes the sight of a flower, of a little leaf, sufficed to make my soul overflow, so full it was. And you knew nothing, you perceived nothing, perhaps. I will tell you. The

other day, Saturday, when I entered your room with the white hawthorns! I was as timid as an amorous boy, and, internally, I felt as if I were dying with desire to take you in my arms. Did you perceive it? I will tell you everything; I will make you laugh. That day, the curtains of the alcove permitted a view of your bed. I could not remove my eyes from it, I was all trembling. How I trembled! You cannot understand. Two or three times already, I have entered your room, alone, by stealth, my heart palpitating; and I have raised the curtains to look at your bed, to touch your cover, to bury my face in your pillow, like a fanatical lover. And certain nights, when all was asleep at the Badiola, I have ventured softly, softly, almost as far as your door; I thought I heard your breathing. Tell me, tell me, may I come to you to-night? Do you want me? Tell me, will you expect me? Can we sleep to-night separated from each other? No, it is not possible! Your cheek will find on my bosom its accustomed place, here, do you remember? How light you seemed, when you were sleeping."

"Be quiet, be quiet, Tullio!" she interrupted, supplicatingly, as if my words pained her.

She added, with a smile:

"You must not talk like that. I told you so just now. I am so weak! I am only a poor invalid. You make me feel dizzy. I can no longer stand upright. See to what a state you have reduced me. I am half dead."

She smiled, a weak, tired smile. Her eyelids were slightly reddened; but, in spite of the heaviness of the lids, the pupils burned with a febrile ardor, and constantly regarded me with an almost intolerable fixity, scarcely softened by the shadow of the eyelashes. In her entire manner there was some constraint, that my eyes could not discern nor my intelligence define. Had her face ever borne such a mysterious and disquieting character before? It seemed as if its expression became from moment to moment more complicated, vague, almost enigmatical. And I thought: "She is harassed by an internal tempest. She can no longer clearly distinguish what has taken place in her state. In her, without doubt, everything is upset. Has not one moment sufficed to change her existence?" And that profound expression attracted me, excited me ever more and more. The ardor of her look penetrated even to my marrow with a devouring fire. I was glad to see her so crushed: I was impatient to know her mine, to embrace her again, to hear her utter a new cry, to drink in her entire soul.

"You are not eating," I said, making an effort to dissipate the vapors that rapidly mounted to my brain.

"Nor are you."

"Take a bite, at least. Do you not recognize this wine?"

"Oh, yes! I recognize it."

"Do you remember?"

And we looked into the depths of each other's eyes, agitated by the evocation of the memory of our love, over which floated the delicate vapor of that pale and somewhat bitter wine, her favorite beverage.

"Let us drink together to our happiness!"

We clinked our glasses, and I drank mine at a single draught, but she did not even moisten her lip, arrested by an insurmountable repugnance.

"Well?"

"I cannot, Tullio."

"Why?"

"I cannot. Do not compel me to. One single drop would, I believe, suffice to make me ill."

She had become as pale as death.

"Juliana, you are ill!"

"A little. Let us rise. Let us go out on the balcony."

Putting my arm round her, I felt the softness of her waist; for, in my absence, she had removed her corset. I said to her:

"Would you like to lie down? You can rest, and I will remain near you."

"No, Tullio. You see, I already feel better."

We stopped on the sill of the balcony, with the cypress before us. She leaned against the side-post, and placed one hand on my shoulder.

From the projection of the architrave, below the cornice, hung a group of nests. The swallows were coming and going, with incessant activity. But below, the calm of the garden was so profound, the top of the cypress was so motionless, that the sounds of the wings, these flights, these cries, displeased me, tired me. Since, in this tranquil light, everything hid itself, I sought repose, a long period of silence, in order to taste in plenitude the suavity of the hour and the isolation.

"Are the nightingales always there?" I asked, pointing to the top of the venerable tree.

"Who knows? Perhaps."

"They sing at night. Would you not like to hear them again?"

"But at what time will Federico come back?"

"Let us hope, late."

"Oh, yes! late, very late," she cried, with such warm sincerity of hope that it caused me a thrill of joy.

"Are you happy?" I asked her, and I sought the answer in her eyes.

"Yes, I am happy," she answered, lowering her eyelids.

"You know that I love only you, that I am yours forever?"

"I know it."

"And you—how do you love me?"

"You will never know how much, my poor Tullio."

As she uttered these words, she left the side-post and leaned her entire weight on me, with one of those indescribable motions in which she threw all the sweetness and abandon that the most feminine of creatures could show to a man.

"How beautiful you are! How beautiful you are!"

Beautiful, in fact, beautiful from languor, beautiful in soft suppleness, and, how shall I say? so fluid that she made me think of the possibility of drinking her down in small portions, to quench my thirst of her. On the pallor of her face the mass of loosened hair seemed on the point of spreading out like a wave. The eyelashes threw a shadow on her cheeks, agitating me more than a look would have done.

"Nor will you ever know how much. If I told you the mad thoughts that are born in me! My happiness is so great that it becomes anguish, it makes me wish to die."

"Die!" she repeated, very low, with a feeble smile. "Who knows, Tullio, if you will not see me die before long?"

"Oh! Juliana!"

She turned round to look at me, and added:

"Tell me, what would you do if I were to die suddenly?"

"Child!"

"If, for instance, I were dead to-morrow?"

"Won't you be silent?"

I took her head, and kissed her on the mouth, cheeks, eyes, forehead, hair, with light and rapid kisses. She did not attempt to stop me; and even when I ceased, she murmured:

"More!"

"Let us return to our room," I begged her, drawing her away.

She permitted herself to be led.

In our room the balcony was permitted to remain open. And there entered through it, with the light, the musk-like odor of the tea-roses that flourished in the vicinity. Against the bright-colored tapestries, the little blue flowers seemed so faded that they were scarcely distinguishable. A corner of the garden was reflected in the mirror of a closet, receding in it like a chimerical landscape. Juliana's gloves, hat, and bracelet, lying on the table, seemed to have reawakened in this interior the happy life of long ago, to have shed a renewed intimacy.

"To-morrow, to-morrow, we must return here, not later," I said, burning with impatience, feeling an ardor and seduction from every one of these objects. "To-morrow we must sleep here. You wish it, too, do you not?

"To-morrow!"

"To begin to love again, in this house, in that garden, in this springtime; to

begin to love once more as if oblivion had effaced everything; to seek once more one by one our old-time caresses, and find in each one a new savor, as if we had never before tasted it; to have before us days, long days..."

"No, no, Tullio; we must not speak of the future. You know that it is an evil omen. To-day, to-day—think of to-day, of the present hour."

IX.

"I believe I heard the horses' bells," said Juliana, rising. "It's Federico."

We listened. She must have been mistaken.

"Is it not time?" she asked.

"Yes, it is almost six o'clock."

"Oh, *mio Dio!*"

We listened again. But no sound announced the approach of the carriage.

"It would be better to go and see, Tullio."

I left the room and descended the stairs. I hesitated a little; a cloud was before my eyes; it seemed to me that a mist rose from my brain. From the little side door that opened in the surrounding wall, I called Calisto, whose dwelling was near by. I interrogated him. The carriage had not been seen yet.

The old man would have liked to detain me in conversation.

"Do you know, Calisto," I said to him, "that probably we will return here to-morrow to stay?"

He raised his arms in token of his delight.

"Really?"

"Really. We shall have time to chat. When you see the carriage, come and let me know. Good-night, Calisto."

I left him to reënter the house. The day was waning and the swallows cried still more loudly. The sky seemed to be alive with them, as the flocks rapidly cleft the air.

"Well?" asked Juliana, turning from the mirror which she had approached in order to adjust her hat.

"Nothing."

"Look at me. Is not my hair dishevelled?"

"No."

"But what a face! Just look."

One would have thought that she had stepped from a coffin, she seemed so exhausted. Great violet rings encircled her eyes.

"And yet I still live," she added, attempting to smile.

"Are you suffering?"

"No, Tullio. But I do not know what ails me. It seems to me that I am entirely empty, that my head is empty, my veins empty, my heart empty. You might say I had given you all. You see—I am now a shadow, a shadow of life."

While pronouncing these words, she smiled in a strange manner; she smiled a subtle and sibylline smile, that troubled me, that raised up in me confused inquietudes. I was too enervated, I was too languid, too much blinded by my intoxication; the activity of my mind had become indolent, my consciousness became dulled. No sinister suspicion had penetrated me yet. Meanwhile I looked at her attentively, I examined her with anxiety, without knowing why.

She turned to the mirror again, and put on her hat; then she approached the table, and took her bracelet and gloves.

"I am ready," she said. She seemed to be still seeking something, and added:

"I had a parasol, had I not?"

"Yes, I think so."

"Ah! I must have left it in the alley, on the bench."

"Let us go and look for it together."

"I am too tired."

"Then I will go alone."

"No, send Calisto."

"I will go myself. I will gather you a few lilacs, a bouquet of musk-roses. Shall I?"

"No, don't pluck the flowers."

"Come, sit down here while waiting. Perhaps Federico will be late."

I drew up an arm-chair for her from the balcony, and she sank into it.

"As you are going down," she said, "see if my cloak is at Calisto's. I did not leave it in the carriage, did I? I feel a little cold."

In fact, she was shivering.

"Shall I close the balcony?"

"No, no. Let me look at the garden. How beautiful it is now! Do you see? How beautiful it is!"

The garden, here and there, had vague golden tones. The blooming cimes of the lilac-trees took on an ardent violet tone in the fading light; and as, below, the rest of the flowering branches formed a bluish-gray mass that undulated in the wind, one could have imagined it the reflections of a changeable moiré. At the fountain, the weeping willows bent their graceful tresses. The water seen between the trees had the soft brilliancy of mother-of-pearl. This motionless

brilliancy, these weeping trees, that delightful forest of flowers in that fading gold, composed an illusory, enchanting, unreal picture.

For several minutes we both remained silent beneath the empire of this magic. A confused melancholy enveloped my soul; the sombre despair that lies at the root of all human love arose within me. Before this ideal spectacle, my physical fatigue, the torpor of my senses, seemed to become heavier. I had become the prey of an uneasiness, a discontent, an indefinable remorse, like one experiences after an indulgence that has been too acute or too prolonged. I suffered.

Juliana said to me, as if in a dream:

"Yes, now, I would like to close my eyes never to reopen them again."

She added, with a thrill:

"I'm cold, Tullio. Go quickly."

Stretched out in the arm-chair, she huddled up as if to resist the fits of shivering that assailed her. Her face, particularly around the nose, was as transparent as certain white albatrosses. She was in pain.

"You don't feel well, poor soul!" I said to her, stirred by pity, and also by a slight fear, as I looked at her fixedly.

"I'm cold. Go, Tullio. Bring me my cloak, quick. Please!"

I ran down to Calisto's lodge, got the cloak, and went up again immediately. She hastened to put it on. I assisted her. When she was seated in the arm-chair again she said to me, burying her hands in her sleeves:

"That is better."

"Now, I'll go and fetch the parasol which you left over there."

"No. It doesn't matter."

I had a strange and mad desire to go back to the old stone bench where we had made our first halt, where she had cried, where she had spoken the three divine words: "Yes, still more." Was it a sentimental attraction? Was it the curiosity of a new sensation? Was it the fascination exercised over me by the mysterious aspect of the garden in the deepening twilight?

"I'll go and come back in a minute," I said.

I went out. When I was under the balcony, I cried:

"Juliana!"

She showed herself. I shall always retain in the eyes of my soul that silent, ghostly apparition, yet distinct as a living thing, her tall figure rendered still taller by the length of the amaranthine cloak, and, against this dark silhouette, that pale face, so pale! The words of Jacques to Amanda are indissolubly associated in my mind with that unchangeable vision:

"*How pale you are to-night, Amanda! Have you opened your veins to tint your robe?*"

She withdrew, or rather, to describe the sensation I felt, she evaporated. I advanced rapidly along the path, without full consciousness of what impelled me. I heard the sound of my own foot-falls resound in my brain. I was so preoccupied that I was obliged to stop to find out where I was. What caused this blind agitation in me? A simple physical cause, perhaps—a particular condition of my nerves. That is what I believed. Incapable of an effort of thought, of a methodical examination, of meditation, I submitted to the tyranny of my nerves, by which the external appearances were reflected, provoking phenomena of extraordinary intensity, as in hallucinations. But, like lightning-flashes, certain thoughts lit up all the rest, and increased the oppressive feeling that several unexpected incidents had already given rise to in me.

No, Juliana had not appeared to me to-day as I had imagined she would, as she should have done had she still been the same creature I knew before, "the Juliana of the old days." She had not assumed toward me the attitudes that I had expected, in certain circumstances. A strange element, something obscure, violent, and excessive had modified and deformed her personality. Must this change be attributed to the sickly condition of her organism? "I am ill, I am very ill," she had often repeated, as if in justification. Truly, illness produces profound changes, and may render a human being unrecognizable. But what was her malady? Was it the old one, not extirpated by the surgeon's steel, complicated perhaps, perhaps incurable? "Who knows if you will not see me die before long?" she had said in a singular tone, that may have been prophetic. She had spoken of death several times. She therefore knew that she carried within her a fatal germ? Was she dominated by this lugubrious thought? It was perhaps such a thought that had fired in her those sombre, almost hopeless, almost demented ardors, when she was in my arms? It was perhaps the great sudden light of happiness that had rendered more visible and more frightful the spectre that pursued her?

"Could it be possible that she might die? Could death strike her even while in my arms, in the midst of happiness?" I thought with a fright that froze me, that for several moments rooted me to the spot, as if the peril were immediate, as if Juliana had predicted truly when she had said:

"If, for instance, I were to die *to-morrow*?"

The twilight fell, slightly damp. Breaths of humid air ran over the bushes, causing a rustling like that which the rapid passage of animals through them would have produced. A few scattered swallows cleft the air with cries, like the flight of a stone propelled by a sling. At sunset, the horizon, still luminous, had the immense reverberations of a sinister forge.

I arrived at the bench, and found the parasol. I did not linger there, in spite of the recent memories, still keen, still warm, that disturbed my soul. It was there she had fallen fainting, vanquished; it was there I had spoken to her the supreme

words, that I had made to her the intoxicating avowal: "*You were in my house, while I sought you afar off*"; there that I had gathered from her lips the breath that had ravished my soul to the supreme heights of joy; there that I had drunk her first tears, that I had heard her sobs, that I had uttered the obscure question: "*It is too late, perhaps? Is it too late?*"

Only a few hours had passed, and all that was already so far! Only a few hours had passed, and already the happiness had faded away. Now with a new, but none the less dreadful signification, the question was repeated within me: "It is too late, perhaps? Is it too late?" And my exaltation grew; and that uncertain light, and that silent nightfall, and those suspicious rustlings in the already shadowy bushes, and all those deceptive phantasmagorias of the twilight had for my mind a fatal meaning. "If really it were too late? If really she knew herself to be doomed? If she already knew that she carried death in her bosom? Tired of living, tired of suffering, hoping nothing more from me, not daring to kill herself at once with a fire-arm or with poison, she had perhaps cultivated, has perhaps nourished her malady, has kept it secret in order to facilitate its progress, to permit it to take root, to render it incurable. She has wished to arrive slowly and in secret at her final liberation. While observing herself she has become familiar with the science of her malady, and now *she knows, she is sure*, that she will succumb; she knows, too, that love, that voluptuousness, that my kisses will precipitate the catastrophe. I return to her for good; an unhoped for happiness opens out before her; she loves me, she knows that I love her greatly; in one day the dream has become for us a reality. And it is then that there rises to her lips the word, "Death!" Confusedly I saw pass before me the cruel images that had tormented me during those two hours of waiting, on the morning of the surgical operation, when I seemed to have before my eyes, as clearly as the figures on an anatomical atlas, all the frightful ravages produced by maladies in the organisms of women. And there recurred to me another recollection still more distant, with an accompaniment of precise images: the darkened room, the open window, the waving curtains, the flickering candle-flame before the dim mirror, the sinister appearance of things, and she, Juliana, upright, leaning against a closet, convulsed, writhing as if she had swallowed poison.... And the accusing voice, the same voice, also repeated to me: "*It is for you, for you that she wanted to die. It is you, you, who have urged her on to death.*"

Seized by a blind fright, by a sort of panic, as if all these images had been veritable realities, I ran back to the house.

On raising my eyes, the house seemed without signs of life, the window openings and the balconies were filled with shadows.

"Juliana!" I cried, with supreme anguish, springing to the stairway, as if I feared I should not arrive soon enough to see her again.

What ailed me? What was this dementia?

I panted as I climbed the stairs in the semi-darkness. I rushed into the room.

"What is the matter?" asked Juliana, rising.

"Nothing, nothing. I thought you had called me. I have run a little. How are you feeling now?"

"I am so cold, Tullio, so cold! Feel my hands."

She stretched her hands out to me. They were icy.

"I am frozen all over like that."

"My God! Where did you get this terrible chill? What can I do to warm you up?"

"Do not worry, Tullio. This is not the first time. It lasts hours and hours. I can do nothing for it. I must wait until it passes away. But why is Federico so long? It is almost dark."

She sank back in the arm-chair, as if she had exhausted all her strength in pronouncing these words.

"I will close the window," I said, turning toward the balcony.

"No, no; leave it open. It is not the air that chills me. On the contrary, I need all the air I can get. Come here, nearer to me. Take this stool."

I knelt down. With a feeble gesture she passed her cold hand over my head and murmured:

"My poor Tullio!"

I broke out, incapable of containing myself:

"Oh! tell me, Juliana, my love, my life! In pity, tell me the truth. You are hiding something from me. Surely you have something you do not want to confess; there, in the centre of your forehead, there is a fixed idea, some sombre preoccupation that has not left you for an instant since we have been here, since we have been—happy. But are we truly happy? Are you, can you be happy? Tell the truth, Juliana. Why would you deceive me? Yes, it is true, you have been ill; you are still ill, it is true. But no, it is not that! There is *something else* that I do not understand, that I do not know of.... Tell me the truth, even if the truth must be to me annihilation. This morning when you sobbed, I asked you: *'Is it too late?'* And you answered me: 'No, no.' Then I believed your words. But might it not be too late for another motive? Could not something prevent you from enjoying the great happiness into which we have just entered? I mean something you know, that you already foresee? Tell me the truth."

I looked at her fixedly; and, as she remained silent, I ended by seeing nothing but her large eyes, extraordinarily large, deep and motionless. All else had disappeared. And I was compelled to close my eyes to dissipate the sensation of terror that these eyes caused in me. How long did this last? An hour? A second?

"I am ill," she said at last, with agonized slowness.

"Ill? But what's the matter?" I stammered, beside myself, convinced that, in her tone, I detected an avowal that corresponded with my suspicion. "What's the matter? Dangerously?"

I know not in what voice, I know not in what tone, I know not with what gesture I articulated the last question; I do not even know if it really and entirely left my lips, or if she heard it entirely.

"No, no, Tullio; it is not that. I meant, no—I meant that it is not my fault if I am a little strange. It is not my fault.... You must have patience with me; you must take me now as I am. Believe me, there is nothing more. I am concealing nothing from you. I shall be cured perhaps, later; yes, I shall be cured. You will be patient, will you not? You will be good. Come here, Tullio, my soul! You, too, it seems to me, are a little strange, a little suspicious. You have sudden fears; you turn white. Who knows what you suppose? Come, come here; give me a kiss ... another one ... another one.... That's right.... Embrace me, warm me up again.... There is Federico."

She spoke in a broken and rather low voice, with that inexpressible, caressing, tender, restless expression that she had already done a few hours before on the bench, to calm me and console me. I embraced her. In the wide and low arm-chair, she, so thin, made room for me at her side, and pressed close to me, shivering, and gathered up the end of her cloak to cover me with it. We were as if on a couch, entwined, breast to breast, our breaths mingling. And I thought: "If my breath, if my contact, could imbue her with all my heat!" And I made an illusory effort of will to bring about this transfusion.

"This evening," I whispered, "this evening, I will hold you better; you won't tremble, then..."

"Yes, yes."

"You'll see how nicely I'll hold you. I'll put you to sleep. All night long you will sleep on my heart."

"Yes, yes."

"I will watch over you; I will quench my thirst with your breath; I will read in your face the dreams you are dreaming. You will perhaps speak my name, dreaming."

"Yes, yes."

"*At that time*, on certain nights, you spoke in your dream. How charming you were! Ah! what a voice! You cannot know.... A voice that you could never have heard, that I alone know—I alone... And I will hear it again. Who knows what you will say? You will speak my name perhaps. How I love the movement of your mouth when it pronounces the *u* of my name! One could call it the outline of a kiss.... You know? I will prompt words into your ear that they may enter into your dream. Do you remember that *at that time*, on certain mornings, I divined

your dreams? Ah! you will see, dear soul; I will be more caressing than at that time, You will see how tender I will be in order to cure you. You need so much affection, poor soul!"

"Yes, yes," she repeated every moment, yieldingly, favoring thereby my last illusion, and also augmenting that sort of drowsy intoxication that arose from my own voice and the belief that my words were cradled there like a voluptuous song.

"Did you hear anything?" I asked suddenly; and I raised myself a little in order to hear better.

"What? Is it Federico?"

"No; listen."

We both listened, our eyes turned toward the garden. The garden was but a confused and violet-colored mass, touched here and there by the darkening light of the dying day. A zone of light persisted on the limit of the sky, a long, tricolored zone: below of a blood-red, then orange, then green, then a fading vegetable green. In the silence of the twilight a strong and limpid voice resounded, like the prelude of a flute.

The nightingale was singing.

"It is on the cypress," murmured Juliana.

We both listened, our eyes turned toward the edge of the horizon that paled beneath the impalpable ashy color of the evening. My soul was in suspense, as if it had expected from this language some high revelation of love. "What, then, is this poor creature at my side feeling? To what summit of despair is this poor soul raised?"

The nightingale was singing. At first, it was like an explosion of melodious joyfulness, a burst of smooth trills that rippled with the sound of pearls resounding on the crystals of musical glasses. First pause. Then arose a roll of marvellous agility, extraordinarily sustained, in which was mingled the energy that attempts a burst of courage, a defiance thrown to an unknown rival. Second pause. Then a theme on three notes, of an interrogative expression, unrolled the chain of its light variations, repeating five or six times the sweet question, modulated as if on a slender reed flute, on a pastoral pipe. Third pause. And the chant became an elegy, developed in a minor key, became softened like a sigh, weakened to a plaint, described the sorrow of a solitary lover, the vexation of desire, the waiting in vain, burst into a final appeal, unexpected, piercing like a cry of anguish, and died away. New pause, more prolonged. Then there were new tones, that did not seem to issue from the same throat, so humble, timid, tearful, were they, so much did they resemble the piping of newly hatched birds, the twittering of a little sparrow; then, with admirable flexibility, these innocent accents were transformed into a whirlwind of notes more and more hurried, that sparkled in trains

of trills, vibrated in dazzling roulades, softened into bold periods, descended, ascended, mounted to prodigious heights. The singer became intoxicated by his song. With pauses so brief that they scarcely permitted the notes to die away, his intoxication overflowed in a melody that varied without cease, passionate and soft, broken and vibrant, light and grave, interspersed now with feeble moans and plaintive supplications, now with abrupt lyric bursts, supreme adjurations. Even the garden seemed to be listening; the sky seemed to incline toward the venerable tree whose top sheltered the invisible poet who shed these torrents of poetry. The forest of flowers respired deeply and silently. At sunset several yellow streaks of light lingered on the horizon, and this last glance of daylight was sad, almost mournful. But a star appeared, palpitating and trembling like a drop of timorous dew.

"To-morrow," I murmured, almost unconsciously.

And that word, to me so full of promise, responded to an internal supplication.

To better listen, we had raised ourselves a little and we had remained several minutes in that position, attentive. Suddenly, I felt Juliana's head fall on my shoulder, heavily, like a thing without life.

"Juliana! Juliana!" I cried with fright.

By the movement I made, her head fell back, heavily, like a thing without life.

"Juliana!"

She did not hear. When I saw the cadaverous pallor of that face lit up by the last yellowish rays of light from the balcony, I was struck by a terrible thought. Distracted, allowing Juliana to fall back on the back of the arm-chair, inert, calling her ceaselessly by name, I began to open her corsage with contracted fingers, anxious to feel her heart.

My brother's jovial voice called out:

"Where are you, you lovers?"

X.

She had rapidly regained consciousness. Although scarcely able to stand, she wanted to immediately enter the carriage and go back to the Badiola.

And now, covered with our rugs, she sat back in her seat motionless, ex-

hausted, mute. My brother and I, from time to time, looked at her with uneasiness. The coachman whipped up his horses. Their rapid trot resounded on the road, bordered here and there by blossoming bushes, on that mild April evening, beneath a cloudless sky.

Every now and then, Federico and I asked: "How are you feeling, Juliana?"

She answered: "So, so. A little better."

"Are you cold?"

"Yes; a little."

She answered with a manifest effort. One would almost have said that our questions irritated her; so much so, that finally, as Federico persisted in engaging her in conversation, she said:

"Excuse me, Federico. It tires me to speak."

The hood had been lowered, and Juliana was in the shadow, invisible, buried beneath the covers. Twenty times I bent over her to look at her face, either with the hope that she was napping, or with the fear that she had collapsed from weakness. But each time, I felt the same sensation of surprise and of fear on noticing, in the dark, that her eyes were wide open and staring.

There was a long silence. Federico and I were also silent. The trot of the horses was not rapid enough to suit me. I wanted the coachman to make the horses gallop.

"Faster, Giovanni."

It was almost ten o'clock when we arrived at the Badiola.

My mother awaited us, very much worried by our delay. When she saw Juliana's condition, she said:

"I knew the fatigue would hurt her."

Juliana tried to reassure her.

"It is nothing, mother.... You will see, to-morrow morning I shall be well. I am just a little tired...."

But, on looking at her in the light, my mother cried out, alarmed:

"*Mio Dio!* your face frightens me. You can't stand on your feet. Edith, Cristina, quick, run upstairs and warm the bed. And you, Tullio, come; we will carry her."

Juliana resisted obstinately.

"No, no, mother; it is nothing, do not be frightened."

"I will go to Tussi with the carriage, and bring the doctor," suggested Federico. "I will be back in half an hour."

"No, Federico, no," cried Juliana almost violently, as if this proposition exasperated her. "I do not wish it. The doctor can do nothing. I know what I must do. I have everything upstairs. Let us go up, mother. Dear me! How easily you are alarmed! Let us go up. Let us go up."

It seemed as if she had suddenly recovered her strength. She made several steps without assistance. Going up the stairs, my mother and I supported her. But, in her room, she had an attack of convulsive vomiting that lasted several minutes. The women began to disrobe her.

"Go out, Tullio; leave the room, I beg of you," she said. "You may return later. Mother will remain with me. Do not be uneasy."

I went out. I remained in an adjoining room, seated on a divan, waiting. I heard the hurried movements of the maids; I was being consumed with impatience: "When may I return? When may I find myself again alone with her? I will watch there, I will pass the entire night at her bedside. In a few hours perhaps she will be calmer, she will feel better. I will stroke her hair, and perhaps succeed in lulling her to sleep. Who knows if, in that drowsiness which is neither wakefulness nor slumber, she might not say 'Come.' I have a strange confidence in the efficacy of my caresses. I hope yet that this night may have a delightful end." And, as always, in the midst of the anguish that the thoughts of Juliana's sufferings caused me, the sensual vision acquired determined contours, became a clear and persistent vision. "*White as her night-dress*, in the light of the lamp that burned behind the curtains of the alcove, she awoke after a first, very short slumber, looked at me with her half-closed eyes, languishing, and murmured: 'Go to sleep!'"

Federico entered.

"Well," he said affectionately, "it seems that it is nothing. I have spoken to Miss Edith on the stairway. Will you come down and take something? The table is set downstairs."

"No, I am not hungry now. Later on, perhaps.... I expect to be called."

"If I am not required, I will go."

"Go, Federico; I will come down very soon. Thanks."

I glanced after him as he withdrew, and once more the sight of my good brother inspired in me a feeling of confidence; again I felt my heart dilate.

Almost three minutes passed. The clock on the wall facing me ticked off the time with the beats of its pendulum. The hands pointed to a quarter to eleven. As I rose impatiently to go toward Juliana's room, my mother entered, agitated, and said in a low voice:

"She is quieter now. What she must have is rest. Poor child!"

"May I go in?"

"Yes; but don't disturb her."

As I made a motion to go cut, my mother recalled me.

"Tullio!"

"What, mother?"

She seemed to hesitate.

”Tell me ... have you seen the doctor since the time of the operation?”

”Yes, several times.... Why?”

”Did he speak about the danger——”

She hesitated and then added:

”About the danger Juliana might run by a new pregnancy?”

I had not spoken to the doctor, and I did not know what to answer. In my agitation I repeated:

”Why?”

She still hesitated.

”Have you not noticed that Juliana is pregnant?”

The blow was too sudden for me to be able at first to grasp the truth.

”Pregnant?” I stammered.

My mother took my hands

”Well, well, Tullio?”

”I did not know.”

”You frighten me. So the doctor——”

”Yes, the doctor——”

”Come, Tullio, sit down.”

She made me sit down on the divan. She looked at me with fear, waiting for me to speak. For several moments, although she was before my eyes, I ceased to see her. Then, suddenly, a brutal light burst in on my mind, and the drama was all clear to me.

Where did I find the strength to resist? What preserved my reason? Without doubt I drew from the very excess of my pain and horror the heroic sentiment that saved me.

I said:

”I did not know—Juliana told me nothing—I perceived nothing—it is a surprise—yes, the doctor thinks there is still some danger— That is why the news has made this impression on me— You know, Juliana is so weak now— However, the doctor did not say it was serious— The operation was a success—we will see—we will send for him, we will consult him——”

”Yes, that is indispensable.”

”But, are you sure, mother? Has Juliana told you? Or——”

”I noticed it myself. It is impossible to be mistaken. Up to within the last two or three days, Juliana denied it, or at least, pretended that she was not certain. Knowing how easily you are alarmed, she begged me to say nothing to you. But I wanted to tell you—you know Juliana: she takes so little care of her health! Just think. Since she lives here, instead of getting better she seems to be getting worse every day. Formerly, a week in the country sufficed to make a new woman of her, do you remember?”

"Yes, that is true."

"One can never take enough precautions. You must write immediately to Doctor Vebesti."

"Yes, at once."

As I felt incapable of controlling myself longer I arose, and added:

"I'll go to see her."

"Go; but let her rest to-night, let her remain quiet. I am going downstairs. I'll come up again."

"Thank you, mother."

I touched her forehead with my lips.

"Dear boy!" she murmured, as she withdrew.

I stopped on the threshold of the door opposite, turned around, and watched her gentle and still erect figure disappear.

I felt an indescribable sensation, similar, without doubt, to that which I should have felt had the entire house collapsed about me in an explosion. In me, about me, all fell, sank irresistibly into an abyss.

XI.

Who has not at times heard some unfortunate being say: "In one hour I lived ten years." It is something inconceivable. Well, I understand it. During that short interview with my mother, so peaceful apparently, had I not lived ten years? The acceleration of the inner life of man is the most prodigious and frightful phenomenon there is in the world.

What must be done? I was seized by frenzied desires to flee far away in the night, or to run to my room and lock myself in, to remain alone to contemplate my ruin, to review its extent. But I was able to resist. It was on that night that the superiority of my nature was revealed, was able to shake off every atrocious torture of my most virile faculties. And I thought: "It is absolutely necessary that none of my actions should seem singular or inexplicable, either to my mother or to my brother, or anyone else in this house."

I stopped before the door of Juliana's room, powerless to repress the physical trembling that shook me. But the sound of a footstep in the corridor determined me to resolutely enter.

Miss Edith emerged from the alcove, on tiptoe. She made me a sign to make

no noise, and said, in a low voice:

"She is going to sleep."

And she went out, softly closing the door behind her.

The lamp burned with a tranquil and even light, suspended from the centre of the ceiling. Across a seat was thrown the amaranthine cloak; on another, the black satin corset, the corset that, at the Lilacs, Juliana had removed during my brief absence; across another chair, the gray gown, the same that she had worn with so much distinction in the beautiful forest of flowering lilacs. The sight of these objects upset me so that I felt a new desire to flee. But I walked toward the alcove, and drew aside the curtains. I saw the bed; I saw the dark spot on the pillow made by the hair, but not the face; I saw the form of the body huddled up beneath the covers. In my mind the brutal truth presented itself with the most ignoble reality. "She has been possessed by another." And a series of odious physical visions passed before the eyes of my soul, those eyes that I had not the power to close. And these were, not only the visions of the things accomplished, but also those that must necessarily take place. I was forced to see, with inexorable precision, what was about to happen to Juliana—my Dream! my Ideal!

Who could have imagined a more cruel punishment? And all was true, all was *certain*!

When the pain exceeds the strength, one instinctively seeks in doubt a momentary extenuation of the intolerable suffering; one thinks: "Perhaps I am mistaken, perhaps my misfortune is not such as it appears to be, perhaps this excess of pain is groundless?" And to prolong the respite, one's perplexed intelligence is applied to gain a more exact idea of the reality. But I, I had not a single moment of doubt, I had not a single moment of incertitude.

It is impossible for me to explain the phenomenon that developed in my consciousness, which had become extraordinarily lucid. It seemed that, spontaneously, by a secret process realized in the dark sphere of the inner being, all the unperceived symptoms that had connection with the horrible thing were coördinated to form a logical idea, complete, rational, definite, irrefutable; and now, that idea manifested itself all at once, surged up in my consciousness with the rapidity of a fragment of cork which, no longer retained at the bottom of water by hidden bonds, floats to the surface, there to remain, insubmersible. Every symptom, every proof, was there, in perfect order. No effort was needed to find them, to choose them, to group them. Insignificant and distant facts were illuminated by a new light; fragments of recent life regained their color. The unaccustomed aversion of Juliana for flowers, for odors, her strange agitations, her ill-dissimulated nauseas, her sudden pallors, that sort of continual preoccupation visible between her eyebrows, the great fatigue indicated by certain positions; and besides, the

pages marked by the nail in the Russian book, the reproach of the old man to the Count Besoukhow, the supreme question of the little Princess Lisa, and that gesture with which Juliana had taken the book from my hands; and then the scenes at the Lilacs, the tears, the sobs, the ambiguous phrases, the sibylline smiles, the almost mournful ardors, the volubility of language, almost insane, the evocation of death—all these signs grouped themselves around my mother's words, were engraved in the centre of my soul.

My mother said: "*It is impossible to be mistaken.* Up to within two or three days ago, Juliana had denied it, or, at least, *pretended that she was not certain....* Knowing how easily you are alarmed, she begged me to say nothing to you." The truth could not be more evident. Henceforth, everything was certain!

I entered the alcove and approached the bed. The curtains fell behind me; the light became feebler. Anxiety suspended my respiration, and all my blood stood still in my arteries, when I came to the bedside and bent over to see more closely Juliana's head, almost hidden by the sheet. I do not know what would have occurred, at this moment, had she raised her face and spoken.

Was she asleep? The forehead only, as far as the eyebrows, was visible.

I remained there for several minutes, standing, expectant. But was she asleep? She was motionless, lying on her side. From the mouth, hidden by the sheet, not the slightest sound of respiration could be heard. The forehead only, as far as the eyebrows, was uncovered.

What countenance would I have shown had she perceived my presence? The hour was poorly chosen to interrogate her, for explanations. If she had suspected that I knew all, to what extremities might she not have been carried during the night? I was therefore constrained to simulate tenderness, I was compelled to affect perfect ignorance, to persist in the expression of sentiments that, a few hours ago, at the Lilacs, had been spoken in the most gentle words. "This evening, to-night, in your bed—you will see how kind I will be. I will put you to sleep. All night long you will sleep on my heart."

On looking around me distractedly, I discovered on the carpet the slender and polished shoes, on the back of a chair the long, ash-colored silken hose, the satin garters, another object of secret elegance, all things that my lover's eyes had already delighted in. And the jealousy of my senses gnawed me so furiously that it was a miracle that I restrained myself from throwing myself on Juliana, from awakening her, from reviling her with the absurd and coarse words which this sudden rage inspired in me.

I withdrew, tottering, and left the alcove. I thought, with blind fright: "How will it end?"

I was inclined to go away. "I will go down—I will tell my mother that Juliana is asleep, that her slumber is very calm; I will tell her that I need rest. I

will take refuge in my room. And to-morrow morning..." But I remained where I was, perplexed, incapable of crossing the threshold, assailed by a thousand fears. I turned again toward the alcove by an abrupt movement, as if I had felt a look fixed on me. It seemed to me that the curtains were waving; but I was mistaken. And yet, through the curtains, something like a magnetic shadow came and penetrated me, something against which I was without resistance. I reëntered the alcove with a shudder.

Juliana still lay in the same attitude. Was she asleep? The forehead alone, as far as the eyebrows, was uncovered.

I sat down near the bedside, and waited. I looked at that forehead, white as the sheet, delicate and pure as a host, that *sister's* forehead, which I had so many times religiously kissed, which my mother's lips had so many times touched. Not the slightest stain could be perceived on it. It seemed the same as it ever was. Yet, henceforth, nothing in the world could remove the stain which my soul's eyes saw on that white brow!

Certain words which I had spoken in the exaltation of intoxication recurred to my memory: "I will watch over you, I will read on your face the dreams that you will dream." I thought also: "She repeated at every moment: 'Yes, yes.'" I wondered: "What life does she lead internally? What are her projects? What resolutions has she made?" And I looked at her forehead. And, ceasing to consider my own pain, I applied all my powers to picture to myself her pain, to understand her pain.

Truly, her own despair must be frightful, ceaseless, limitless. My punishment was also her punishment, and perhaps more fearful punishment still for her than for me. Over there at the Lilacs, in the alley, on the bench, in the house, she had certainly felt the sincerity of my words, she had certainly read my sincerity in my face, she had believed in the greatness of my love.

"*You were in the house, while I sought you afar off*! Oh! tell me, is not this confession worth all your tears? Do you not wish you had shed even more, many more, so as to purchase this certitude?"

"Yes, many more."

That is what she had replied, with a sigh that, really, had appeared to me divine.

"*Yes, many more!*"

She would have liked to shed other tears, she would have liked to suffer another martyrdom as the price of this avowal! And, when she saw at her feet, more passionate than ever, the man so long lost and wept for, when she saw opening before her an unknown paradise, she had felt herself to be impure, she had the physical sensation of her impurity, she had held my head on her breast. Ah! it is truly incomprehensible why her tears have not burned my face, that I

have been able to drink them without being poisoned.

I relived our entire day in an instant; I saw again all the changing expressions, even the most furtive, that had appeared on Juliana's face since our arrival at the Lilacs; I understood them all. A great light illuminated me. Oh! when I spoke to her of the morrow, when I spoke to her of the future—what terrors that word *to-morrow*, coming from my lips, must have had! And to my memory recurred the short dialogue that we had had on the threshold of the balcony, facing the cypress. She had repeated in a very low voice, with a feeble sigh: "Die!" She had spoken of approaching death. She had asked: "What would you do if I died suddenly? If, for instance, I died *to-morrow*?" Later on, in our room, she had cried, pressing me close: "No, no, Tullio; we must not speak of the future. Think of to-day, of the passing hour!" By such actions, by such words, did she not betray a resolution of death, a tragic design? It was evident that she had resolved to kill herself, that she would kill herself, perhaps this very night even, before the inevitable *to-morrow*, since there was no other resource for her.

When the fright that the thought of this imminent peril caused me had subsided, I reflected: "What would have the gravest consequences, Juliana's death, or her preservation? Since the ruin is irremediable, and the abyss bottomless, an immediate catastrophe would, perhaps, be better than an indefinite continuation of the frightful drama." And, in imagination, I accompanied the phases of that new maternity, saw the new being procreated, the intruder who bore my name, who would be my heir, who would usurp my mother's caresses and those of my daughters, of my brother. "Assuredly, death only can interrupt the fatal course of these events. But would the suicide remain secret? By what means would Juliana take her life? If it were proved that death were voluntary, what would my mother and brother think? What a blow that would be to my mother! And Maria? And Natalia? And what would I do, myself?"

The truth is that I could not bring myself to conceive of my own existence without Juliana. I loved the poor creature even in her impurity. Excepting that sudden attack of anger which carnal jealousy had provoked in me, I had never yet felt against her any emotion whatever of hate, or of rancor, or of contempt. No thought of vengeance had crossed my soul. On the contrary, I felt a profound compassion for her. I accepted, since the beginning, all the responsibility of her fall. A proud and generous sentiment sustained me, exalted me: "She bent her head beneath my blows, she kept silent, she set me an example of virile courage, of heroic abnegation. Now, it is my turn. I must render her the same. I must save her, at any price." And this nobility of soul, this good impulse, came to me from her.

I drew closer to look at her. She still remained motionless in the same attitude, with her forehead uncovered. I thought: "Is she asleep?" And if, on the

contrary, she were pretending to be asleep, to remove every suspicion, to make believe that she is quiet, that she may be left alone? Assuredly, if it is her project not to live until the morrow, she is seeking by every means to favor its execution. She simulates slumber.

"If her sleep were real, she would not be so quiet, so calm, with such superexcited nerves as she has. I must shake her." But I hesitated. "If she were really asleep? Sometimes, after a great output of nerve force, even in the midst of the rudest moral anxieties, one sleeps a leaden slumber, like a syncope. Oh! that she may slumber until to-morrow! And to-morrow, that she may arise recovered, be strong enough to support the explanation that has become inevitable between us!" I looked fixedly at that brow, white as the sheet, and, on bending over a little more, I remarked that it was dotted with perspiration. A bead of perspiration glistened on the eyebrow. And that bead suggested to me the idea of the cold sweat that indicates the action of narcotic poisons. A sudden flash of suspicion came upon me. "Morphine!" Instinctively, my glance turned to the night table, on the other side of the bed, to look for the small bottle marked with the skull and cross-bones, familiar symbols of death.

There, on the table, were a water bottle, a glass, a candlestick, a handkerchief, several glistening pins; that was all. I made a rapid and complete examination of the alcove. Anguish choked my throat. "Juliana has morphine; she always has on hand a certain quantity of it in a liquid state for her injections. I am sure that she has had the idea of poisoning herself. Where has she hidden the little bottle?" Engraved in my mind I had the image of the small glass vial that I had seen in Juliana's hands, ornamented with the sinister label that pharmacists use, in order to indicate a toxic. My excited imagination suggested to me: "And if she has already drunk it? That sweat..." I trembled on my seat, and I felt the agitation of a rapid debate. "But when? How? She has not been left alone. It requires only an instant to empty a bottle. Yet, without doubt, she would have vomited.... And that attack of convulsive vomiting, just now, when she arrived at the house? Premeditating suicide, she had doubtless carried the morphine with her. Was it not possible that she had drunk it before arriving at the Badiola, in the carriage, in the dark? In fact, she had prevented Federico from going for the doctor." I understood but imperfectly the symptoms of morphine poisoning. In my ignorance, that white and moist brow, that perfect immobility, overwhelmed me. I was on the point of arousing her. "But if I am mistaken? She will awake, and what will I have to say to her?" It seemed to me that the first word, that the first look exchanged between us, must produce on me an extraordinary effect, of an unforeseen, unimaginable violence. It seemed to me that I would not have the power to control myself, to dissimulate, and that on looking at me she would divine immediately that I knew all. And then?

I strained my ear, hoping and fearing my mother's coming. And then (I would not have trembled so strongly on raising the edge of a shroud to see the face of a dead person), I slowly uncovered Juliana's face.

She opened her eyes.

"Ah! Is it you, Tullio?"

Her voice was natural. And I most unexpectedly could speak.

"Were you asleep?" I said, avoiding her eyes.

"Yes, I dozed off."

"Then I awoke you.... Forgive me. I wished to uncover your mouth. I feared that your breathing might be impeded—that the coverlid would suffocate you."

"Yes, that is true. I am warm now, too warm. Remove one of the coverings, please."

I rose to remove one of the covers. It is impossible for me to define the state of consciousness in which I accomplished these acts, in which I pronounced and heard these words, while present during these incidents, and which happened as naturally as if there had been no change, as if around us there had been no adultery, no disenchantment, remorse, jealousy, fear, death, every human atrocity.

"Is it very late?" she asked me.

"No; it is not yet midnight."

"Is mother in bed?"

"No, not yet."

After a pause:

"And you—are you not going to bed? You must be tired."

I knew not what to answer. Should I reply that I would remain? Ask her permission to stay? Repeat to her the tender words that I had spoken in the armchair, in *our* room, at the Lilacs? But, if I remained, how would *I* pass the night? There, on the chair, watching her, or else in the bed, near her? What attitude should I take? Should I be able to dissimulate to the end?

She went on:

"You had better go, Tullio—to-night.... I need nothing. All I want is rest. If you remain, it would not do me any good. You had better go, Tullio, to-night."

"But you might want something."

"No. And, besides, Cristina stays with me."

"I will lie on the sofa."

"Why should you upset yourself? You are very tired: that can be seen in your face. And, besides, if I knew you were there I could not sleep. Be good, Tullio! To-morrow morning, early, you may come and see me. We both need rest, now, complete rest."

Her voice was low and caressing, without any unusual intonation. Excepting her persistence in persuading me to retire, she exhibited no other indication

of the fatal preoccupation. She seemed crushed, but calm. From time to time she closed her eyes, as if slumber weighted down her eyelids. What should I do? Leave her? But it was precisely her calm that frightened me. Such a calm could only come to her from the fixity of her resolution. What to do? Everything considered, my very presence during the night would have been useless if she had prepared for suicide and provided herself with the means. She could, without any difficulty, have put her project into execution. Was that means really morphine? And where had she hidden that little vial? Beneath her pillow? In the drawer of the night table? How could I look for it? I should have to speak, to say unexpectedly: "I know that you want to kill yourself." But what a scene would follow! I could not have kept silent about the rest. And what a night that would have been!

So many perplexities exhausted my energy, dissolved it.

My nerves were unstrung. The physical fatigue rapidly increased. My entire organism arrived at that condition of extreme weakness in which the functions of the will are on the point of being suspended, in which the actions and reactions cease to correspond, or cease to accomplish their end. I felt myself incapable of resisting any longer, of combating, of accomplishing no matter what necessary act. The sensation of my weakness, the sensation of the fatality of what had happened and what was about to happen, still paralyzed me; my being seemed to be struck by a sudden torpor. I felt a blind desire to hide myself again from the last and obscure consciousness of my being. In short, my anguish led to this desperate thought: "Come what will, I, too, have the resource of death."

"Yes, Juliana," I said, "I will leave you in peace. Sleep. We will see one another to-morrow."

"You can scarcely keep your eyes open."

"No, it is true, I am very tired. Good-by; goodnight."

"Will you not give me a kiss, Tullio?"

A shudder of instinctive repugnance passed through my body. I hesitated.

At that moment my mother entered.

"What! you are awake?" she cried.

"Yes, but I'm going to sleep again immediately."

"I have been to see the children. Natalia is not asleep. She said: 'Has mamma come back?' She wanted to come..."

"Why did you not tell Edith to bring her to me? Is Edith already in bed?"

"No."

"Good night, Juliana," I interrupted.

I approached her, and bent over to kiss the cheek that she offered me, raising herself a little on her elbow.

"Good night, mother, I am going to bed. My eyes are closing with sleep."

"Won't you take something? Federico is still waiting for you down-stairs."

"No, mother; I do not care for anything. Good night."

I also kissed my mother's cheek, and I left hastily, without glancing at Juliana; I collected the little strength left me, and scarcely had I crossed the threshold than I began to run to my room, fearing to fall before I reached the door.

I threw myself on my bed face down. I was seized by that spasm which precedes great paroxysms of tears, when the suffocation of anguish is about to burst out, when the tension is about to be relaxed. But the spasm was protracted, and the tears did not come. It was horrible suffering. An enormous weight bore my members down, a weight that I felt, not at the surface, but within, as if my bones and muscles had become masses of lead. And my brain still thought on! And my consciousness still remained vigilant!

"No, I must not leave her. No, I must not agree to let her leave me thus. When my mother retires, she will kill herself—that is sure. Oh, the sound of her voice, when she expressed the desire to see Natalia!" A hallucination suddenly seized upon me. My mother left the chamber. Juliana sat up in bed, and listened intently. Then, certain at last of being alone, she took the bottle of morphine from the night table. She did not hesitate a second, but with a determined gesture emptied it at one gulp, covered herself again with the bedclothes, and lay on her back to await the end.... The imaginary vision of the cadaver acquired such an intensity that, like one demented, I arose. I made three or four turns in the room, hurt myself against the furniture, stumbled over the carpet, with terrified gestures. I opened a window.

The night was calm, filled with the monotonous and continuous croaking of frogs. The stars were twinkling. The Great Bear scintillated before me, very brightly. Time passed.

I remained for several minutes at the balcony, in contemplation, my eyes fixed on the great constellation that, to my troubled sight, seemed to come nearer. I did not really know what I expected. My mind wandered. I had a singular sensation of the space of that immense sky. Suddenly, during a sort of irresolute suspension, as if, in the depth of unconsciousness, some obscure effluvium had acted on my being, there spontaneously surged up in me the question that I had not as yet understood: "*What have you done to me?*" And the vision of the cadaver, for an instant forgotten, reappeared before my eyes.

My horror was such that, without knowing what I wished to do, I turned about, left the room precipitately, and directed my steps towards Juliana's room.

I met Miss Edith in the corridor.

"Where did you come from, Edith?" I asked.

I saw that my appearance stupefied her.

"I took Natalia to Signora, who wished to see her; but I had to leave her

there. It was impossible to make her go back to her own bed. She cried so hard that Signora consented to keep her with her. Let us hope that Maria will not waken up."

"Ah! so then..."

My heart beat so violently that I could not speak connectedly.

"Then Natalia is sleeping with her mother."

"Yes, signor."

"And Maria—let us go and see Maria."

Emotion choked me. That night, at least, Juliana was safe. It was impossible that she should think of dying, with her little girl by her side. By a miracle, the affectionate caprice of the child had saved the mother. "May God bless her!" Before looking at Maria, who was sleeping, I looked at the empty bed, that still retained the impress of the child's figure. I felt strange desires to kiss the pillow, to feel if the depression were still warm. Edith's presence embarrassed me. I turned toward Maria. I bent over her, holding my breath; I looked at her for a long time, I sought one by one the known resemblances she bore toward me, I almost counted the delicate veins that could be seen on her temple, cheek, and neck. She was sleeping on one side, her head thrown back, so as to display the whole of the neck beneath the raised chin. The teeth, fine as grains of pure rice, disclosed their whiteness through the half-closed mouth. The eyelashes, long like those of her mother, shed a shadow over the hollows of the eyes, that extended even to the cheek bones. The delicacy of a precious flower, an extreme finesse, distinguished these infantile traits, in which I *felt* my blood, refined, flow.

Had I ever, since the birth of these two creatures, felt for them a sensation so deep, so sweet, so sad?

I could scarcely tear myself away from there. I would have liked to sit down between the two little beds, and rest my head on the edge of the empty one, to await thus the *morrow*.

"Good night, Edith," I said, as I left.

My voice trembled, but it no longer trembled in the same manner.

As soon as I reached my room, I threw myself again face down on the bed. And, at last, I burst into distracted sobs.

XII.

When I awoke from the heavy and, so to speak, brute slumber that, at some moment during the night, had suddenly overwhelmed me, I could scarcely regain an exact idea of the reality.

But soon my mind, freed from the nocturnal exaltations, stood face to face with the cold, naked, implacable reality. What were my recent anguishes in comparison with the fright that invaded me then? One must live! And that had the same effect on me as if someone had presented me with a deep cup, saying: "If you wish to drink, if you wish to live to-day, you must drain into this cup, even to the last drop, the blood of your heart." A repugnance, a disgust, an indefinable repulsion, assailed the inmost part of my being. And yet I must live; I must, to-day too, accept life. But, above all, I must *act*.

The comparison that I made, to myself, between this actual awakening and that which I had dreamed and hoped for, the evening before at the Lilacs, contributed also to revolt me. "It is impossible," I thought, "that I can accept such a situation; it is impossible that I should rise, dress myself, leave this room, see Juliana again, speak to her, continue to dissimulate before my mother; that I should wait for a suitable moment for a definite understanding between us, that in this interview I should establish the conditions of our future relations. That is impossible. But what then? Destroy with one blow, and radically, all that was suffering in me. Deliver myself—free myself. *There is nothing else to be done*." And, on considering the facility of the act, on imagining the rapidity of its execution, the explosion of the firearm, the immediate effect of the ball, the darkness that would follow, I felt through my entire body a singular, agonized thrill, mingled, however, with a sensation of solace, almost of sweetness. "*There is nothing else to be done*." And, in spite of the torment that the anxiety of knowing gave me, I thought with relief that I should have nothing to know, that that anxiety even would instantaneously cease—that, in short, all would be at an end.

I heard a knock at the door, and my brother's voice cried:

"Are you not up yet, Tullio? May I come in?"

"Come in, Federico."

He entered.

"Do you know it is after nine o'clock?"

"I fell asleep very late, and I was very tired."

"How do you feel?"

"So, so."

"Mother is up. She told me that Juliana is feeling quite well. Shall I open your window? It is a wonderful day."

He opened the window. A wave of fresh air filled the room; the curtains swelled like two sails; outside could be seen the azure of the sky.

"Do you see?"

The bright light doubtless disclosed the signs of my distress on my face; for he added:

"Were you ill, too, last night?"

"I think I was a little feverish."

Federico looked at me with his clear blue eyes; and, at that moment, it seemed to me that I bore on my soul the entire burden of future lies and dissimulations. Oh! if he had known!

But, as usual, his presence put to flight the cowardice that commenced to crush me down. A false energy, like that communicated by a drop of cordial, restored my self-command to me. I thought: "How would he have acted in my place?" My past, my education, the very essence of my nature, contradicted every probability of a similar occurrence; but, at least, this much was certain: in case of a misfortune, similar or dissimilar, he would have displayed the conduct of a strong and forgiving man, he would have heroically faced the pain, he would have preferred to sacrifice himself rather than to sacrifice the other.

"Let me feel," said he, approaching.

He touched my forehead with his open palm, and felt my pulse.

"It has left you, it seems to me. But how unsteady your pulse is!"

"Let me get up, Federico; it is late."

"To-day, after noon, I am going to the Assoro woods. If you wish to come, I will have Orlando saddled for you. Do you remember the woods? How unfortunate that Juliana is not well! Otherwise we would have taken her with us. She could see the ricks on fire."

When he mentioned Juliana it seemed as if his voice became more affectionate, softer, and, so to speak, more fraternal. Oh! if he had known!

"Good-by, Tullio. I am going to work. When will you begin to help me?"

"This very day, to-morrow, whenever you wish."

He began to laugh.

"What enthusiasm! But that's enough; I will see you at work. Good-by, Tullio."

He went out with his light and free step, for he was always stimulated by the precept inscribed on the sun-dial: *Hora est benefaciendi.*

XIII.

It was ten o'clock when I left my room. On that April morning, the bright light that inundated the Badiola by the open windows and balconies made me timid. How could I wear my mask in such a light?

Before entering Juliana's apartment, I wished to see my mother.

"You rose late," she said, on seeing me. "How are you?"

"Very well."

"You are pale."

"I think I had a little fever in the night. But it is gone now."

"Have you seen Juliana?"

"Not yet."

"She wished to get up, the dear girl! She said that she no longer feels ill; but her face..."

"I am going to her."

"You must not neglect to write to the doctor. Do not listen to Juliana. Write this very day."

"Did you tell her ... that I *know*?"

"Yes, I told her that you *know*."

"I am going, mother."

I left her in front of her great walnut-wood closets perfumed with orris, in which two women were piling the beautiful washed linen, the pride of the Hermils. Maria, in the piano-room, was taking her lesson from Miss Edith, and the chromatic scales, rapid and even, succeeded one another. Pietro passed, the most faithful of the servants, white-haired, somewhat bent, bearing a tray of glasses that resounded because his arms trembled with age. The entire Badiola, bathed in air and light, had an aspect of tranquil joy. There was an atmosphere of goodness shed throughout—like the subtle and inextinguishable smile of the gods Lares.

Never before had that sensation, that smile, penetrated to my soul so deeply. And that great peace, that great goodness, enveloped the ignoble secret which Juliana and I were condemned to keep without dying of it!

"And now?" I thought, at the height of my anguish, wandering in the corridor as a lost stranger might have done, incapable of directing my steps toward the dreaded place, as if my body refused obedience to the impulsions imposed upon it by my will. "And now? She knows that I know the truth. Between us, henceforth, all dissimulation is useless. Necessity imposes upon us to face one another, to speak of the frightful thing. But it is impossible that this meeting should take place this morning. The consequences of it cannot be foreseen; and now, more than ever, it is necessary, absolutely necessary, that not one of our actions should seem singular or inexplicable, neither to my mother nor to my brother, nor to anyone else in this house. My agitation of last evening, my uneasiness, my

grief, can be explained by the preoccupation of the peril of Juliana's condition; but logically, in others' eyes, such preoccupation should make me more tender toward her, more zealous, more eager than ever. To-day, my prudence must be extreme. To-day, I must avoid a scene with Juliana, cost what it may. To-day, I must avoid any occasion of remaining with her *en tête-à-tête*. But I must also find, without delay, means to make her understand the feeling that determined my attitude in regard to her, the intention that directs my conduct. And if she persists in the will to kill herself? If she had only deferred its execution a few hours? If she were already watching for an opportune moment?"

That fear cut short my loitering, and forced me to action. I resembled one of those Oriental soldiers who are forced into battle by blows of a cudgel.

I directed my steps toward the piano-room. On seeing me, Maria interrupted her scales and ran toward me, light and joyous, as toward a liberator. She had the grace, the agility, the lightness, of winged creatures. I raised her in my arms to kiss her.

"Will you take me out?" she asked. "I am tired. Miss Edith has kept me here for an hour. I cannot stand any more. Take me out with you. Let us go for a walk before breakfast."

"Where?"

"Wherever you like."

"Let us go, then, and see mamma first."

"Yes; yesterday you were at the Lilacs, and we had to stay at the Badiola. It was you, you alone, who would not consent. Mamma was quite willing. Naughty papa! We should like to go there. Tell me how you amused yourselves."

The child prattled on like a bird, delightfully. The ceaseless chatter kept company with my anguish, while we were going toward Juliana's apartment. I hesitated; but Maria knocked at the door, crying:

"Mamma!"

Without suspecting my presence, Juliana came to open the door herself. She saw me. She started violently, as if she had seen a phantom, a spectre, some terrifying thing.

"Is it you?" she stammered, in a voice so low that I scarcely heard her.

And, while she spoke, her lips blanched. After the start, she became suddenly more rigid than a Hermes.

And there, on the threshold, we looked at each other, read each other's faces; for an instant, even our souls were fixed upon each other. All about us disappeared; between us, all was said, all was understood, everything was decided, in the space of one second.

What happened next? I do not know, I cannot remember. I remember that, for some time, I had an intermittent consciousness, so to speak, of what hap-

pened, with a succession of short eclipses. It was, it seemed to me, a phenomenon analogous to that which results from the enfeeblement of the voluntary attention in the case of certain patients. I lost the faculty of being attentive; I no longer saw, I no longer seized the sense of words, I no longer understood. Then, a moment later, I recovered that faculty, examined the things and persons about me, I became attentive and conscious.

Juliana was seated, and held Natalia on her knees. I, too, had taken a seat. And Maria ran from her to me, from me to her, incessantly, with endless prattle, provoking her sister, asking us a number of questions which we only answered by a nod of the head. That lively chatter broke our silence. In one of the fragments of the phrases that I noticed, Maria said to her sister:

"Ah! is it true that you slept with mamma last night?"

"Yes, because I am little."

"Oh! well, to-night it's my turn. Is it not, mamma? Take me in your bed to-night, mamma."

Juliana did not smile. She remained silent, and seemed absorbed. She had on her knees Natalia, whose shoulders were turned toward her, and whose arms were around her waist; her joined hands rested in the little girl's lap, whiter than the little white dress on which they reposed, taper, painful, so painful that they themselves revealed to me an immensity of sorrow. Juliana remained bent, and, as Natalia's head brushed her mouth, she seemed to press her lips to the child's curls; in such a manner that, when I glanced at her, I could not see the expression of her eyes, but saw only her lowered eyelids, somewhat reddened, and I was constantly agitated internally by this, as if through them I could distinguish the fixity of the pupils that they covered.

Was she waiting for me to say something? Were inexpressible words rising to those hidden lips?

When finally, by an effort, I conquered the condition of inertia in which extraordinary alternations of lucidity and darkness had succeeded each other, I said, in a tone of voice that I would have used, I believe, in continuing a conversation already begun, by adding new words to words already spoken—I said slowly:

"Mother wants me to send for Doctor Vebesti. I have promised to write. I will write."

She did not raise her eyelids; she remained mute. Maria, in her innocence, looked at her with surprise; then she looked at me, too.

I rose to go out.

"To-day, after lunch, I will go with Federico to the Assoro woods. Shall we see one another this evening on my return?"

She made no movement to answer. Then I repeated, in a voice that con-

veyed a thousand things understood:

"Shall we see one another this evening on my return?" From between her lips, hidden among Natalia's curls, came like a sigh:

"Yes."

XIV.

In the violence of my multiple and contrary agitations, in the first tumult of pain, beneath the menace of imminent perils, I had not yet had the leisure to think of the Other. Moreover, from the very first, I had not conceived even the shadow of a doubt of my former suspicion. In my mind, the Other had immediately taken the form of Filippo Arborio, and from the first outburst of carnal jealousy that had seized me in the alcove, it was his abominable image which was coupled with that of Juliana in a series of horrible visions.

Even now, while Federico and I trotted toward the forest, along the banks of the tortuous river, contemplated so painfully on the afternoon of Holy Saturday, the Other trotted beside us. Between my brother and me interposed the image of Filippo Arborio, revived by my hate, animated by my hate with life so intense that, on regarding it with a *sensation of reality*, I felt a physical spasm, something similar to the savage quivering that I had more than once felt on the duelling field, at the signal of attack, when face to face with an adversary.

My brother's presence extraordinarily increased my uneasiness. Compared with Federico, that man's face, so thin, so nervous, so feminine, grew smaller, became impoverished, seemed contemptible and ignoble to me. Beneath the influence of the new ideal of virile strength and simplicity that my brother's example inspired in me, I not only hated, but I despised that complicated and equivocal being, who yet belonged to my own race, and who had several particularities in his cerebral constitution in common with me, to which his works of art bore witness. I pictured to myself a type of one of those literary men, affected by the saddest maladies of the mind, a libertine, cruelly curious, hardened by the habit of cold analysis of the warmest and most spontaneous passions of the soul, accustomed to consider every human creature as a subject of pure psychological speculation, incapable of love, incapable of a generous action, of an abnegation, of a sacrifice, hardened in falsehood, enervated by disgust, lascivious, cynical, cowardly.

Such was the man who had seduced Juliana, but who had certainly not

loved her. Did not the very *manner* appear in the dedication written on the fly-leaf of *The Secret*, in that emphatic dedication, the only document known to me that bore on the relations between the romancer and my wife? To take by assault the "Ivory Tower," to corrupt a character whom public opinion declared to be incorruptible, to experiment with a method of seduction on so rare a subject, that was an enterprise, difficult but full of attraction, entirely worthy of the refined artist, the abstractor of physiological quintessence who had written *The True Catholic* and *Angelica Doni*.

The more I thought of it, the more the facts appeared to me in their ugliest crudity. Filippo Arborio had certainly made Juliana's acquaintance during one of those crises when the woman of whom people say, "She has a soul," after a long period of loneliness, feels herself overcome by poetical aspirations, by indefinable desires, vague languors—all those phenomena which are only the masks that disguise passion. Filippo Arborio, with his experience, had divined the special physical state of the woman whom he coveted, and had made use of the most appropriate and the surest method; that is to say, he had spoken of the ideal, of superior regions, of mystical alliance, while his thoughts were turned in more material channels. And Juliana, the "Ivory Tower," the great silent creature made of ductile gold and steel, the unique, had been captured by the old trick, had allowed herself to be taken in the old snare, had, she also, obeyed the old law as to the frailty of woman.

A horrible irony tortured my soul. I seemed to have, not in the mouth but in the heart, the convulsion caused by the herb that produces death by making one hysterical with laughter.

I spurred my horse and put him to a gallop on the steep bank of the river.

The bank was dangerous, with very precipitous bends, and made more menacing in some places by deep holes, obstructed in others by the branches of great gnarled trees, in still others traversed by enormous roots close to the ground. I was perfectly conscious of the peril to which I exposed myself; yet, instead of tightening the rein, I still urged the beast forward, not with the intention of facing death, but because I sought in danger a respite from my intolerable torture. I already knew the efficacy of such madness. Ten years before, when still very young and while an attaché of the embassy at Constantinople, in order to overcome an attack of grief caused by the recollection of a recent passion, I entered on horseback, one moonlight night, one of the Mussulman cemeteries crowded with tombs, and I rode on the incline of polished stones exposing myself a thousand times to the risk of a fatal fall. Death, mounted with me on the crupper, overshadowed every other care.

"Tullio! Tullio!" cried Federico after me. "Stop! Stop!"

I paid no attention to him. It is marvellous that a dozen times I escaped

crushing in my forehead against the horizontal branches. It is marvellous that a dozen times I prevented my horse from stumbling against the trunk of a tree. A dozen times, at difficult passages, I saw a certain fall into the river that glistened beneath my feet. But when I heard another gallop behind me, when I perceived Federico was following me with loosened rein, I became frightened for him, and I tightened the bit suddenly. The poor animal reared up, remained an instant upright as if to make a plunge into the river, and then came to a standstill, trembling.

"Are you mad?" cried Federico to me when he came up to me, very pale.

"Did I frighten you? Forgive me, I did not think there was any danger. It was to try the horse; and then I could not control him—he is a little hard in the mouth."

"Orlando hard in the mouth!"

"Don't you find him so?"

He looked at me fixedly, with an uneasy expression. I attempted a smile. His unusual pallor pained me and aroused my sympathy.

"I do not understand how you escaped breaking your head against a tree; I cannot imagine how it is you were not thrown."

"And you?"

To follow me, he had exposed himself to the same peril, perhaps to a still greater one; because his horse was heavier, and he had had to put him at his full speed for fear of not joining me in time. We both looked back at the distance just covered.

"It is a veritable miracle," he said. "To get out of the Assoro is almost impossible. Just look!"

We looked down at the deadly river that rolled beneath our feet. Deep, shining, rapid, full of whirlpools and gulfs, the Assoro ran between two chalky cliffs, with a silence that rendered it still more sinister. The country harmonized with that treacherous and menacing aspect. The sky, which early in the afternoon was covered with vapors, was now overcast with diffused reflections of the tangle of reddish brushwood that still survived to the spring. The dead leaves mingled with the growth of new leaves, the dried brambles with the green shoots, the dead with the newly born vegetation, in an inextricable, symbolic confusion. Above the agitated surface of the river, above that incongruous thicket, the sky blanched, faded away, seemed to dissolve.

"An unexpected fall, and I should have ceased to think, I should have ceased to suffer, I should have ceased to support the weight of my miserable flesh. But perhaps I should have dragged my brother with me down the precipice; and my brother's life is a model of nobleness, my brother is a Man. I escaped by a miracle, as he escaped by a miracle. My madness has made him run a supreme risk. With

him would have disappeared a world of beauty and of goodness. What is this fatality that condemns me to be harmful to those who love me?"

I looked at Federico. He had become thoughtful and grave. I did not dare question him, but I felt a poignant remorse at having grieved him. Of what was he thinking? On what reflections did his agitation feed? Perhaps he had divined that I was dissimulating suffering and that the sole cause which had driven me to my perilous race was the spur of some fixed idea.

We followed the path, one behind the other, step by step. Then we turned into a side-path that led through the bush, and, as it was wide enough, we trotted side by side, while our horses whinnied, bringing their nostrils together as if to exchange confidences, and mingling the froth from their bridles.

From time to time I glanced at Federico, and, seeing that he was still pensive, I thought: "Assuredly, if I were to reveal the truth to him, he would not believe me. He could not believe in Juliana's sin, in the sister's stain. Between his affection and that of my mother for Juliana, I really could not decide whose is the more profound. Had he not always kept on his table the two portraits of Juliana and our poor Constance, united as in a diptych for the same adoration? This morning even, how gentle his voice became in naming her!" Suddenly, by contrast, the infamous image reappeared, more hideous. The bared chest I caught a glimpse of in the dressing-room of the fencing-salon flitted now before my imagination. And on that face my hate worked just like nitric acid on the engraver's copper plate: the bitten characters became sharper and sharper.

Then, while I still felt in my blood the excitement produced by the ride, by the effect of that exuberance of physical courage, of that instinct of hereditary combativeness that, so often, surged up in me at the contact with other men, I felt that I would not have the strength to resist challenging Filippo Arborio. "I will go to Rome, I will find out all about him; I will incense him, no matter how; I will force him to fight. I will do everything to kill him or cripple him." I imagined the poltroon to myself.

There recurred to my memory a rather ridiculous retreat which he had not been able to prevent at the salle d'armes, when he received a thrust in the breast from the fencing-master. I also remembered his questioning me regarding my duel, that puerile curiosity of those who have never been on the field of honor. I recalled that, during my assault, he had kept his eyes fixed on me ceaselessly. The consciousness of my superiority, the certainty of vanquishing him, excited me. In my imagination, a thread of red blood furrowed that pale and disgusting flesh. And I saw him bleeding and inert on a mattress, with two doctors leaning over him.

How often I, the ideologist, the analyst, the sophist of an epoch of decadence, had prided myself on being the descendant of that Raymond Hermil of

Panedo who, at the Goulette, had accomplished prodigies of valor and of ferocity beneath the eyes of Charles the Fifth! The excessive development of my intelligence and of my many-souled state had not been able to modify the depths of my substance, in the deepest stratifications of which were preserved the imprint of every hereditary characteristic of my race. In my brother, whose organization was well balanced, thought was always associated with labor; in me thought predominated. I was, in short, a violent and a passionate person conscious of himself, in whom the hypertrophy of certain cerebral centres rendered impossible the coördination necessary to the normal state of the mind. I was able to contemplate my actions with perfect clear-sightedness, and yet I had every undisciplinable impulse of primitive natures. More than once had I been possessed by sudden criminal ideas; more than once I had been surprised by feeling the surging up of a cruel instinct within me.

"There are the charcoal-burners." said my brother to me, putting his horse at a trot.

The blows of the axe could be heard in the forest and the spirals of smoke could be seen rising between the trees. Federico interrogated the workmen as to the progress made in their labor, gave them advice, while examining their work with an experienced eye. Every one of them assumed a respectful attitude, and listened attentively. Around about, the labor seemed to become more eager, easier, lighter, and even the crackling of the fire more efficacious. Men ran right and left, throwing earth here and there wherever the smoke poured out in too great abundance, to stop up with clods the holes caused by the explosions; they ran, they shouted. With these rude voices mingled the guttural sounds of the wood-cutters. The surroundings resounded with the crash of some falling tree. During the few moments of our halt could be heard the whistling of blackbirds. And the great, motionless forest contemplated the wood-cutters, to whom its life served as food.

While my brother proceeded in his examination of the work, I withdrew, leaving to my horse the choice of the unfamiliar paths that led into the bush. Behind me the sounds decreased, the echoes died away. A heavy silence fell from the tree-tops. I thought: "What shall I do to regain courage? What will my life henceforth be? Can I continue to live in my mother's house with my secret? Can I associate my life with that of Federico? What man in all this world, what event could ever resuscitate in my soul a spark of faith?" The sounds of the workers away behind me; the solitude became complete, "To work, to accomplish good, to live for others! ... I *henceforth* recover in these things the true sense of life? And are there really only these things which, to the exclusion of individual happiness, permit of finding the true sense of life? The other day, while my brother was speaking, I believed I understood his remarks; I believed that the *doctrine of truth*

was revealed to me by his mouth. The doctrine of truth, according to my brother, is not in laws, not in precepts, but simply and solely in the interpretation that man gives to life. It seemed to me I had understood it fully. But, all at once, I now found myself fallen back among the shadows; I had become blind again. I no longer understood. What man in all the world, what event, could console me for all the good I had lost?" And the future seemed frightful and hopeless to me. The undefined image of the infant to be born grew, enlarged, like horrible and formless things one sees sometimes in a nightmare, and ended by enveloping everything. It was no longer a question of regret, of remorse, of an indestructible recollection, of no matter what inner bitterness; it now concerned a living being. My future was fettered to a being whose life was tenacious and malefic; it was shackled to a stranger, to an intruder, to an abominable creature, against whom not only my mind, but also my flesh, all my blood and every fibre, rose with a brutal, ferocious, implacable aversion, until death, beyond death. I thought: "Who could have imagined a worse torture for torturing the soul and the flesh at the same time?"

And it was just at the time that the nausea set in that I—who fed on dreams, who drank of the ideal—found the ingenuities of my adolescence, thought of nothing but of gathering flowers. Oh! those flowers, those heart-breaking flowers that I so timidly offered her. And, after a great intoxication, half-sentimental, half-sensual, I received the delightful news, from whom? from my mother! And after the news, I experience a feeling of generous exaltation, I accept in good faith a noble rôle, I sacrifice myself in silence, like one of Octave Feuillet's heroes! What heroism! The irony tortured my soul, bruised every fibre.... Then, for the second time, I conceived the mad idea of escaping from my fate.

I looked before me. Close at hand, between the tree-trunks, unreal like the illusion of a hallucination, shone the glistening Assoro. "Strange!" I thought, with a curious shudder. Up to this time I had not noticed that my horse, left to himself, had entered a path that led to the river. The Assoro seemed to have a fatal fascination for me.

I hesitated a moment between two things—to go on as far as the cliff, or return. Finally, I stopped, fascinated by the water and the guilty thought. I made my horse curvet.

A heavy oppressiveness succeeded the internal convulsion. It seemed to me that, all at once, my soul had become a poor, faded thing, a bruised, diminished, miserable thing. I became softened; I felt pity for myself, I felt pity for Juliana, I felt pity for every creature upon whom suffering had set its seal, that trembled under the embrace of life as some vanquished enemy in the power of some pitiless conqueror. "What are we? What do we know? What do we wish for? No one has ever obtained what he would like; no one will ever obtain what

he would like. We seek goodness, virtue, enthusiasm, the passion that will fill our soul, the faith that will calm our inquietudes, the inspiration that will give us courage, the work to which we consecrate ourselves, the cause for which we will joyfully die. And the result of so many efforts is an empty lassitude, the sensation of strength spent in pure loss, and of the flight of time." At that moment, life appeared to me like a distant vision, confused, strange, monstrous. Madness, imbecillity, poverty, blindness, every malady, every misfortune, the obscure and continuous agitation of unconscious atavic, bestial powers in the depths of our substance, the highest manifestations of the ever-unstable, fugitive mind necessarily subordinated to a physical condition, connected with the functions of an organ, instantaneous metamorphoses produced by an imperceptible cause, by a mere nothing, the infallible amount of egotism in the noblest actions, the inutility of so much moral energy directed toward an uncertain object, the futility of amours that we believe to be eternal, the frailty of virtue that we believe unshakable, the feebleness of the most robust wills, every shame, every misery, appeared before me in that instant. "How is it possible to live? How is it possible to love?"

The axes resounded in the forest; a short and savage cry accompanied every blow. Here and there, in the clearings, great piles of wood, in the form of truncated cones or of quadrangular pyramids, were smoking. Columns of smoke, thick and straight as the trunks of trees, arose in the quiet air. To me, everything was symbolical at that moment.

I turned my horse toward the neighboring charcoal-burner, where I had recognized Federico.

He had descended from his horse and was speaking to a tall old man with shaven chin.

"Ah! At last!" he cried, on seeing me. "I was afraid that you were lost."

"No, I was not far off."

"Let me introduce to you Giovanni di Scordio—a Man," he said, placing his hand on the old man's shoulder.

I looked at the being whom he so designated. A singularly sweet smile gathered around his withered mouth. I had never seen such sad eyes before under a human brow.

"Adieu, Giovanni, and keep up your courage!" added my brother in that voice which seemed, at certain moments, like certain liquors, to have the power of stimulating the vital tone. "As for us, Tullio, let us return to the Badiola. It is getting late. They will be waiting for us."

He remounted his horse. He again saluted the old man. On passing by the furnaces, he once more instructed the workmen concerning the operations of the coming night, on which the *great fire* was to take place. We then trotted off, side by side.

The blue sky slowly appeared over our heads. The veils of vapor floated away, dispersed, reformed, in such a manner that the azure seemed to pale progressively, as if through its limpidity a continuous milky wave was spread and extended. We were nearing the hour when, the evening before, at the Lilacs, I had contemplated with Juliana the undulating garden in its ideal light. Around us the brushwood began to be gilded. The invisible birds were warbling.

"Did you take good notice of that old man, Giovanni di Scordio?" asked Federico.

"Yes," I replied. "I do not think I shall ever forget his smile or his eyes."

"That old man is a saint," pursued Federico. "No man has worked or suffered so much as he has. He had fourteen sons, and all, one after the other, have left him, just as ripe fruit leaves the tree. His wife, a virago, is dead. He is left alone. His sons have despoiled and disowned him. He has experienced every human ingratitude. He has experienced the perversity, not of strangers, but of his own creations. Do you understand? His own blood has turned to venom in the beings for whom he had only love and affection, in the beings whom he has not ceased to love, whom he cannot curse, whom he will certainly bless at the hour of his death, even if they permit him to die in solitude. Is not such obstinacy of man in his goodness an extraordinary, an almost unbelievable thing? After so much suffering, his face still has the smile that you saw. *You will do well, Tullio, not to forget that smile.*"

XV.

The hour of trial was drawing near, the hour dreaded yet desired at the same time.

Juliana was ready. She had firmly opposed Maria's caprice; she wished to be alone in her room to await me.

"What shall I say to her? What will she say to me? What will be my attitude towards her?" All my prejudices, all my plans, were scattered. There remained to me only an intolerable anguish. Who could foresee the result of the meeting? I neither felt master of myself, nor of my words, nor of my acts. I only felt within me a fermentation of obscure thoughts that, at the slightest shock, would surge up. Never, as at that moment, had I had the clear and hopeless consciousness of the intestine discords that rent me, the perceptions of the irreconcilable elements

that warred at the depths of my being, that overthrew one another, that destroyed each other by turns in a perpetual conflict, rebellious to all restraint. To the dejection of my mind was added a particular agitation of my feelings produced by the images which, on that day, had ceaselessly tortured me. I knew that agitation well, I knew it but too well; I knew it was more certain than any other thing to stir up the muddy depths in man. I knew but too well that base concupiscence from which nothing can save us—that dreadful sexual fever which, for months, had held me chained to a despised and odious woman, Teresa Raffo. And now, the sensations of goodness, of pity, and of strength, that were necessary to me to enable me to support a meeting with Juliana and to persist in my original project, died away in me like moving mists over a swamp of mire.

It lacked but little of midnight when I left my room to go to Juliana's. Every sound had ceased. The Badiola reposed in profound silence. I listened intently, and it seemed to me I heard the calm respiration of my mother, of my brother, of my daughters, those innocent and spotless beings. I thought I saw the face of Maria again sleeping, as I had seen it the night before; I imagined I saw the other faces, with an expression of repose, of peace, of goodness on each. A sudden tenderness seized me. The feeling of happiness, experienced but for a moment the evening before, and then eclipsed, threw a great light over my mind. If nothing had happened, if I had remained under the illusion, what a night that would have been! I would have gone to Juliana as to a divine being. And what could I have wished sweeter than that silence to envelop the inquietude of my love? I traversed the room in which, the evening before, I had received from my mother's mouth the unexpected revelation. Again I heard the ticking of the clock that had marked the hour, and, I do not know why, that tick, tack, so invariably equal, increased my anguish. I do not know why, but I imagined I felt Juliana's anguish respond to mine through the space that still separated us, and that the palpitations of our hearts were accelerated in unison. I walked straight before me, without further stopping, without seeking to muffle the sound of my footfalls. I did not knock at the door; I opened it and entered. Juliana was standing, supporting herself with one hand on the corner of a table, motionless, more rigid than a Hermes.

I can still see everything. Nothing at that hour escaped me; nothing eluded my attention. The actual world had vanished. There subsisted but a fictitious world in the midst of which I panted with anguish, with oppressed heart, incapable of articulating a syllable, and yet singularly lucid, as if I had been a spectator at a theatre. On the table burned a candle, which lent a sort of visible reality to this semblance of scenic fiction, because the little, flickering flame seemed to shed about it that vague horror which the actors in a drama diffuse in the ambient air with their great gestures of despair or menace.

The strange sensation disappeared when, finally, powerless to longer support that silence and Juliana's marble-like immobility, I spoke the first words. There was nothing in my voice of the sound that I believed it would have when I would open my lips. Without wishing it, I spoke in a gentle, trembling, almost timid voice.

"Were you waiting for me?"

She kept her eyes cast down. Without raising them she answered:

"Yes."

I looked at her arm, as motionless as marble, which seemed to become more and more rigid upon the hand placed on the corner of the table. I feared that that fragile support, on which she leaned her entire weight, would yield from one moment to another, and that she would fall.

"You know why I came?" I continued, with extreme slowness, plucking the words from my heart, one by one.

She remained silent.

"Is it true?" I went on. "Is it true—what I have learned from my mother?"

She still remained silent. She seemed to be gathering all her strength. Strange! During that interval it did not seem absolutely impossible that she would answer:

"No."

She answered, and I heard less the sound of her words than I saw them outlined by her bloodless lips:

"It is true."

It was a ruder shock perhaps than that given me by my mother's words. Of course, I knew all, I had already lived twenty-four hours with my certitude; and yet this confirmation, so clear, so precise, crushed me to earth, as if it were the first time I had heard the revelation of the irreparable truth.

"It is true!" I repeated instinctively, speaking to myself, with a sensation analogous to that which I would have had, had I found myself living and conscious at the bottom of an abyss.

Then Juliana raised her eyes and fixed them on mine with a sort of spasmodic violence.

"Tullio," she said, "listen."

A choking stopped the voice in her throat.

"Listen. I know what I must do. I was prepared for anything to spare you this; but destiny willed that I live until now to suffer that most horrible thing, the thing of which I had a mad terror—ah! you understand me—a thousand times more than of death. Tullio, Tullio, your look——"

Another suffocation choked her at a moment when her voice had become so distressed in tone that it gave me the physical impression of the tearing out

of the most hidden fibres. I dropped into a seat, covered my face with my hands, and waited for her to continue.

"I should have died before now, I should have died long ago! Without doubt it would have been better if I had not come to the Badiola; it would have been better if at your return from Venice you had not come to me again. I would have been dead, and you would not have known this shame; you would have regretted me, perhaps you would always have cherished my memory. Perhaps I should always have remained your great love, your unique love, as you said yesterday.... I did not fear death, you know; I do not fear it. It is the thought of our two little daughters and of our mother that has made me postpone the execution from day to day. And that has been an agony, Tullio, a cruel agony, in which I have consumed, not one, but a thousand lives. And I am still alive!"

After a pause, she added:

"How is it possible that with such poor health I have so much resistance to pain? That also is a misfortune for me. Think of it! In consenting to accompany you here, I thought: 'It is certain that I shall become ill; directly I arrive I shall have to go to my bed, and I shall rise from it no more. They will think I died a natural death. Tullio will never know anything, will never suspect anything. Everything will be ended.' On the contrary, I am still alive, and you know all, and all is lost, without hope."

She spoke in a low voice, very feebly, and yet in as heart-breaking a tone as if it were a sharp and reiterated cry. I pressed my temples and felt them throbbing so violently that I was almost afraid, as if the arteries would burst the skin and their soft and warm membrane adhere, naked, to the cranial wall.

"My only preoccupation was to hide the truth from you, not for myself, but for you, for your good. You will never know what terrors have frozen me, what anguish has choked my throat. Since the day we arrived here, up to yesterday, you have hoped, you have dreamed, you have been almost happy. But my life, to me, in this blessed house, in contact with your mother, with my secret, can you imagine it? Yesterday, at the Lilacs, while we were at table, during that sweet chat which tortured me, you said to me: 'You knew nothing, you perceived nothing.' Oh! no, that is false; I knew all, I divined all; and, when I detected the affectionate look in your eyes, I felt my soul grow faint. Listen, Tullio. What I am going to say is the truth, the real truth. I am before you here as on my death-bed. It would be impossible for me to lie. Believe what I tell you. I do not care to exculpate myself, I do not dream of defending myself. Henceforth all is at an end. But I wish to tell you one thing, because it is true. You know what love I have had for you, since the day we first met. For years, for years, I was blindly devoted, and not only during the years of happiness, but also during the years of misery, when your love grew weary. You know it, Tullio. You could always do with me as you

wished. You have always found in me the friend, the sister, the wife, the mistress, ready to make no matter what sacrifice to please you. Do not believe, Tullio, do not believe that I recall my long devotion in order to accuse you. No, no. There is not in my soul a single drop of bitterness against you, do you hear? Not a single drop! But let me now remind you of a devotion and a tenderness that have lasted for so many years, let me speak to you of love, of the *uninterruptedness of my love*, without any intermission, do you understand me?—without one intermission. I believe that my passion for you has never been as ardent as during the last few weeks. Yesterday you told me many things. Ah! what could not I, too, tell of my life during these last few days! I knew all, I divined all; and I was compelled to avoid you. How many times have I been on the point of falling in your arms, of closing my eyes, and yielding myself entirely to you, in my moments of feebleness and extreme lassitude! The other morning, Saturday morning, when you came in with the flowers, it seemed to me as I looked at you that I saw the lover of the old days, because of the ardor that animated you, and your smile, and your amiability, and the light that shone in your eyes. And you showed me the scratches on your hands! Then I felt a sudden impulse to take those hands, to kiss them. Where did I get the strength to restrain myself? *I did not feel myself worthy.* And I saw in a flash all the happiness that you offered me with the flowering thorns, all the happiness that I must renounce forever. Ah! Tullio, my heart is proof against all trials, since it can be so crushed without breaking. I die hard."

She pronounced this last phrase in a deeper tone, with an indefinable accent of irony mingled with anger. I dared not raise my face to look at her. Her words caused me atrocious suffering, and yet I trembled every time she stopped. I feared that her strength would suddenly abandon her, that it would be impossible for her to continue. And I awaited from her mouth other confessions, other fragments of soul.

"It was a great, great mistake," she continued, "not to have died before you returned from Venice. But poor Maria, poor Natalia, could I abandon them?"

She hesitated an instant:

"Nor you either; I could not leave you in such a manner. I might have caused you remorse. You would have been the object of everybody's accusations. We could not have dissimulated with our mother. She would have asked you: 'Why should Juliana have wished to die?' She would have come to know the truth, which we have kept from her till now—poor saintly woman."

Emotion choked her utterance, her voice became hoarse, began to tremble, tearfully. I felt a lump rise in my throat, too.

"I thought of all that; and, when you wished to bring me here, I thought, too, that I was no longer worthy of her, that I was no longer worthy to receive her kisses on my forehead and be called her daughter. But you know how weak we

are, how easily we give way to the force of circumstances. I had no more hope; I knew that, outside of death, there remained no other refuge for me; I knew that, every day, the circle was closing in more. And yet I permitted the days to pass, one by one, without taking any resolution. Yet I had a sure means of death."

She stopped. Obeying a sudden impulse, I raised my eyes, and looked at her fixedly. She shuddered violently; and the pain which my look caused her was so apparent that I lowered my forehead, and resumed my first attitude.

Up to now she had been standing. She sat down. An interval of silence followed.

"Do you believe," she asked me, with a timid and unhappy air, "do you believe that the sin is great when the soul did not consent?"

That allusion to the *sin* sufficed to stir up in me instantly the dregs that had settled, and a sort of bitter acridity rose to my mouth. An involuntary sarcasm left my lips. I said, affecting a smile:

"Poor soul!"

That expression caused a look of such intense pain to appear on Juliana's face that I felt immediately the acute sting of repentance. I understood that it were impossible for me to have inflicted a more cruel blow, and that, at that moment, and against such a poor, submissive creature, irony was the worst of cowardices.

"Forgive me," she said.

She had the appearance of a woman smitten by death. And it seemed to me that her look had precisely the sad gentleness, almost infantile, that I had already seen on the wounded when they are placed on their biers.

"Forgive me. Yesterday, you, too, spoke of the soul. You think now: '*Women say those things to obtain forgiveness.*' But I do not seek to exculpate myself. I know that pardon is impossible, and that it is impossible to forget. I know there is no hope. You understand me? I only seek to excuse myself for having received your mother's kisses."

She still spoke in a low tone, very weak and yet heart-breaking, like a sharp and reiterated cry.

"I felt on my brow so heavy a weight of sorrows that, not for myself, Tullio, but for my pain, only for my pain, I let your mother kiss me then. I was unworthy of them; but my pain deserved them. You can forgive me."

I felt an impulse of kindness, of pity; but I did not yield to it. My eyes avoided hers, and I made enormous efforts not to writhe in convulsive spasms, not to yield to extravagant actions.

"Certain days, I deferred from hour to hour the execution of my project; the thought of this house, of what would afterwards happen in this house, took away my courage. See how I have ended by losing even the hope of being able

to hide the truth from you, of being able to spare you; for, from the first days, your mother guessed my condition. Do you remember the day when I was at the window and when the odor of the violets nauseated me? It was then that your mother noticed it. Imagine my terror! I thought: If I kill myself, he will learn the secret from his mother. And who knows how far the consequences of the sin I have committed will reach? Night and day I racked my soul to find a means of sparing you. On Sunday, when you asked me: 'Shall we go to the Lilacs on Tuesday?' I consented without reflecting, I abandoned myself to destiny, I trusted to chance. I was certain that that day would be my last, and this certitude exalted me, inspired me with a sort of dementia. But, Tullio, remember your words of yesterday, and tell me if, now, you appreciate my martyrdom. Do you appreciate it?"

She bent toward me as if to project her painful question into my soul, and she entwined her fingers convulsively.

"You had never spoken to me like that before, you had never spoken in such a voice. When, on the bench, you asked me: '*It is too late, perhaps?*' I looked at you, and your face frightened me. Could I reply: '*Yes, it is too late?*' Could I have broken your heart at one blow? What would have become of us? Then I determined to yield to one last intoxication, and I saw nothing more but my death and my passion."

Her voice had become strangely hoarse. I looked at her, and it seemed to me that I no longer recognized her, so transfigured was she. A convulsion contracted every line of her face; her lower lip trembled violently; her eyes burned with febrile ardor.

"Do you blame me?" she asked in a hoarse, distressed tone. "Do you despise me for what I did yesterday?"

She covered her face with her hands. Then, after a pause, she shook off her weakness with a resolute gesture. Her voice became stronger.

"Destiny has willed that I should live until now. Destiny has willed that you should learn the truth from your mother. From your mother! Yesterday evening, when you came into this room, you knew all and you said nothing, and, before your mother, you kissed the cheek I offered you. Before I die, permit me to kiss your hands. It is the only favor I implore of you. Now, I await your commands. I am ready for anything. Speak."

I said:

"It is necessary that you should live."

"Impossible, Tullio," she cried. "Impossible! Have you thought of what will happen if I live?"

"I have thought of it. It is necessary that you should live."

"What horror!"

And she started violently—an instinctive gesture of fright.

"Listen, Tullio. Henceforth you know everything; henceforth suicide can no longer serve me to hide my shame from you, nor keep me from appearing before you. You know all, and here we are together, and we can still look at one another, we can still speak to one another! The question is an entirely different one. I no longer seek to elude your vigilance in order to kill myself. On the contrary, I wish you to help me in disappearing in the most natural way possible; without awakening any suspicion around us. I have two poisons—morphine and corrosive sublimate. But perhaps poisons are useless; it is difficult to conceal poisoning. And it is necessary that my death should seem to be involuntary, caused by accident, by a mishap. You understand? It is the only way out of it. The secret will remain between us two."

She began to speak rapidly, firmly and deliberately, as if she argued in order to persuade me to consent to some desirable compact and not to a compact of complicity in the execution of an extravagant project. I let her go on. A sort of singular fascination rooted me to the spot—constrained me to look at and listen to the fragile and pale creature, possessed by such impetuous waves of moral energy.

"Listen, Tullio. I have an idea. Federico told me of your insane ride, of the danger that you incurred on the bank of the Assoro. He told me everything. I thought, trembling: 'Who knows what mental torture made him incur such peril?' Then, as I thought of it, it seemed to me that I understood. It was like a prophetic revelation. My soul seemed to see a vision of all the pain that awaited you, pain against which nothing could guard you, pain that would grow day by day, inconsolable, intolerable. Ah! Tullio, it is certain that you have already felt this pain, and that you also foresee your powerlessness to bear it. There is but one means of salvation for you, for me, for our souls, for our love. Yes, let me say it—our love; let me still believe in your words of yesterday; let me repeat that I love you now as I have never loved you before. And it is precisely for that, precisely because we love each other, that I must disappear from the world, that you must no longer see me."

An extraordinary moral elevation heightened her voice and entire person. A great thrill passed through me; a fugitive illusion seized upon my mind. For a moment, I really believed that my love and that of this woman were on an equal plane, of the same ideal, measureless height, freed from human misery, freed from all sin, irreproachable. I felt, for several moments, the same sensation that I had felt at the beginning, when the actual world had seemed to me to have completely vanished. Then, as always, the inevitable phenomena occurred: this state of consciousness ceased to be mine, it became objective, became a stranger to me.

"Listen," she went on, lowering her voice, as if she feared to be overheard. "I have told Federico that I have a great desire to revisit the woods, the charcoal-burners, the entire country. To-morrow morning, Federico will not have the leisure to accompany us because he must return to Casal Caldore. We two will go, alone. Federico has told me that I can ride Favilla. When we are on the cliff—I will do what you did this morning. An accident will happen. Federico told me it is impossible to be rescued from the Assoro. Will you?"

Although her speech was connected, she seemed a prey to a kind of delirium. An unaccustomed flush tinged her cheeks; her eyes had an extraordinary lustre.

The vision of the sinister river flashed rapidly through my mind.

She repeated, bending toward me:

"Will you?"

I arose, and took her hands. I wished to calm her fever. Immense pity oppressed me. My voice was gentle, grew kind, trembled with affectionate emotion.

"Poor Juliana! Do not torment yourself thus. You are suffering too much; your grief has deprived you of your reason, poor soul. You must be brave; you must not think of the things you have just said. Think of Maria, of Natalia. As for me, I have accepted the punishment. It is a punishment that I have well deserved for all the wrongs that I have done you. I accept it; I will bear it. But you must live. Promise me, Juliana, in the name of Maria, in the name of Natalia, in the name of the tenderness that you bear for my mother, in the name of all that I told you at the Lilacs, promise me that you will in no way seek to kill yourself."

She kept her head down. Then, all at once, freeing her hands, she seized mine, and began to kiss them furiously; and I felt on my skin the warmth of her mouth, the warmth of her tears. And, as I attempted to disengage myself, she fell from her seat on her knees, without freeing my hands, sobbing, showing me an agonized face over which the tears rolled in streams, in which the contraction of the mouth revealed the inexpressible spasm that convulsed her entire being.

And I, incapable of raising her, incapable of uttering a word, suffocated by a cruel attack of anguish, overcome by the violence of the spasm that contracted that poor, pallid mouth, forgetful of all rancor, of every pride, without any other sensation than that of the blind terror of life, without seeing in myself and in this crushed woman anything else than human suffering, the eternal human suffering, the disaster of inevitable infractions, the weight of brute flesh, the horror of pitiless fatalities that attach themselves to the very roots of our being and the infinite physical sorrow of our love, I fell also on my knees before her, by an instinctive desire to prostrate myself, to take the same humble attitude as this creature who suffered and who made me suffer. And I burst into sobs; and, once more, after so long a time, our tears mingled, burning tears, alas! but powerless

to change our destiny.

XVI.

Who will ever be able to describe in words the sensation of stupor and of desolate aridity which, in man, succeeds tears uselessly shed, paroxysms of useless hopelessness? Tears are a temporary phenomenon; each crisis ends in calm, every attack is brief; and, afterwards, man finds himself exhausted, his heart arid, more than ever convinced of his own impotence, corporeally stupid and sad, with the impassable reality before him.

I was the first to cease weeping; I was the first to open my eyes to the light; I was the first to notice my posture and Juliana's, and of the surrounding objects. We were still on our knees, one facing the other, on the carpet. A few sobs still shook her. The candle was burning on the table, and every now and then its tiny flame flickered and bent as if under the breath of a breeze. In the silence my ear perceived the slight sound of a watch which was somewhere in the room. Life rolled on; time passed. My soul was empty and solitary.

After the violence of the emotion had subsided, after the intoxication of the pain had become dissipated, our attitudes signified nothing any more, had no longer a *raison d'être.* I must rise, raise up Juliana, say something, definitely close this scene; but I felt for all this a strange repugnance. It seemed to me that I had become incapable of the slightest physical or moral effort. I was vexed at being there, at having to submit to these necessities, at meeting with these difficulties, at not having the strength to leave my position. And a sort of deep rancor against Juliana began to stir confusedly in the depths of my being.

I arose. I assisted her to arise. Each of the sobs that, from time to time, still shook her, increased in me this inexplicable rancor.

It is then quite true that certain germs of hate are dissimulated at the bottom of every sentiment which unites two human creatures; that is to say, which connects two egoisms? It is then quite true that these germs of inevitable hate disturb our most affectionate moments, our best impulses? All there is beautiful in the soul bears in itself a latent germ of corruption, is condemned to become corrupted.

I said (and I feared that involuntarily the tone of my voice was not sufficiently gentle):

"Be calm, Juliana. The moment has come to be courageous. Come, sit down. Be calm. Will you have a drink of water? Will you smell some salts? Answer!"

"Yes, give me a little water. You will find it in the alcove on the night table."

Her voice was still tearful; and she dried her face with a handkerchief, seated on a low divan, facing the large mirror of a closet. She had not ceased sobbing convulsively.

I entered the alcove to get the glass. I perceived the bed in the shadow. It was already made; a corner of the covers was raised and thrown back, a long white night-dress was laid close to the pillow. Immediately my subtle and keen sense of smell detected the slight perfume of the batiste, a faint odor of orris and violet, so familiar to me. The sight of the bed, the odor of the familiar perfume, disturbed me deeply. I hastened to pour out the water, and I left the alcove to take the glass to Juliana, who was waiting.

She swallowed a few mouthfuls, a little at a time, while I, standing before her, attentively observed the movement of her mouth.

"Thank you, Tullio," she said.

She gave me back the glass, still half full. As I was thirsty, I drank the water which remained. That mechanical action sufficed to increase my agitation. I sat down, in my turn, on the divan. And we remained silent, both absorbed in our reflections, separated only by a short distance.

The divan with our figures was reflected in the mirror of the closet. We could see each other's faces without looking at one another, but rather confusedly, because the light was feeble and vacillating. On the vague surface of the glass I intently examined Juliana's silhouette, which, in its immobility, gradually acquired a mysterious aspect, the disquieting fascination of certain women's portraits obscured by time, the intensity of fictitious life possessed by beings born of a hallucination. And, gradually, this distant image seemed to me more living than the real person. Gradually I saw in that image the caressing wife, the voluptuous woman, the mistress, the unfaithful one.

I closed my eyes. The Other rose up before me. One of my usual visions appeared.

I thought: "Up to now, she has made no direct allusion to her fall, to the circumstances of her fall. She has uttered only one significant phrase: 'Do you think the sin is grave *when the soul has not consented?*' And what did that mean? It was only one of those subtle distinctions to which one has usually recourse to excuse and extenuate one's treason and infamy. I suffered a nameless torture. The furious desire to know all racked my soul; the material visions exasperated me. The Other, since the instant in which he had risen in my thoughts, had not ceased for a moment to beset my mind. Was it Filippo Arborio? Had I guessed

correctly?"

Suddenly I turned toward Juliana. She looked at me. But the question choked in my throat. I lowered my eyes, bent my head, and with the same spasmodic resistance that I should have felt on plucking a fragment of my flesh from some part of my body, I dared to ask her:

"The name of *that man?*"

My voice, trembling and hoarse, frightened even myself.

At this unexpected demand, Juliana started, but remained silent.

"You do not answer?" I insisted, forcing myself to repress the anger that was on the point of invading me, that blind anger which, on the previous night, already had passed over my mind like a whirlwind.

"Ah! My God!" she moaned, despairingly; and she sank down in a heap on the divan, burying her face in the cushion. "My God! My God!"

But I wished to know; I wished, at any cost, to tear the avowal from her.

"Do you remember," I went on, "do you remember that morning when I entered your room unexpectedly, early in November? Do you remember? I entered without knowing why, perhaps because I heard you singing. You were singing the air from 'Orphée'; you were preparing to go out. Do you remember? I saw a book on your dressing-table, I opened it, I read on the fly-leaf a dedication. It was a novel, *The Secret.* Do you remember?"

She remained with her face buried in the cushion, and made no reply. I stooped over her. I trembled with a chill like that which precedes a fever. I added:

"It is perhaps he?"

She did not answer, but she raised her head with a motion of despair. She seemed distracted. She made a gesture as if about to throw herself on me, then stopped, crying:

"Have pity! Have pity! Let me die! What you are making me suffer is worse than a thousand deaths. I have borne everything, I am capable of bearing everything; but not that, no, I cannot, I cannot. If I live it will mean for us both a constant martyrdom—a martyrdom that will daily become more terrible. And you will begin to hate me, all your hate will be vented on me. I am sure of it, sure. I have already felt the hate in your voice. Have pity! Let me die!"

She seemed distracted. She had a furious desire to seize hold of me; but not daring she twisted her hands in an effort to control herself, her whole body convulsed. I seized her by the arms, and drew her toward me.

"So I am to know nothing?" I said to her, speaking almost on her mouth, now distracted myself, carried away by a cruel instinct that made my hands rough.

"I love you, I have always loved you, I have always been yours. I expiate

by this hell a moment's weakness—do you understand? *One moment's weakness*! That is the truth. Cannot you feel that it is the truth?"

Once more, overwhelmed by the weight of our misfortune, I clasped the poor trembling creature to my heart and silently kissed away her scalding tears.

XVII.

The external indications of Juliana's condition were not yet visible. The tie that bound the infant to the mother must be very frail. How was it that the violent emotions of the day at the Lilacs and of the following night had not sufficed to provoke a liberating crisis? Everything was against me, everything conspired against me. And my hate became more savage. To prevent the birth of the child, such was my secret design.

And I considered the future with a sort of divining clear-sightedness. Juliana would give birth to a boy, sole heir of our ancient name. The son who was not mine would grow up without accident; he would usurp the love of my mother and my brother; he would be caressed, adored; he would be preferred to Maria and to Natalia, my own creations. The force of habit would dull Juliana's remorse; she would abandon herself without restraint to her maternal feeling. And the son who was not mine would grow up under her protection, surrounded by her assiduous cares; he would become robust and handsome; he would become capricious like a little despot; he would reign in my house. By degrees these visions became particularized. Such or such an imaginary spectacle took the shape and motion of an actual scene; such or such a trait of that imaginary life was impressed so strongly in my consciousness that it retained there for some time the characteristics of an effective reality. The child's traits were modified to infinity; his acts, his gestures, were diversified without cease. At times I represented him to myself as being thin, pale, taciturn, with a large, heavy head bent on his chest; at other times I saw him all rosy, plump, gay, chattering, graceful and coaxing, particularly affectionate toward me, very good; at other times, on the contrary, he was nervous, bilious, a little spiteful, full of intelligence and evil instincts, rough with his sisters, cruel to animals, incapable of tenderness, undisciplinable. This last image ended by dominating all the others, eliminated them by becoming more lasting, fixed itself into a precise type, became animated with an intense chimerical life, ended by taking a name: the name that I had long since

chosen for the male heir, my father's name, Raymond.

That little perverse phantom was a direct emanation of my hate, and he bore against me a hostility equal to that I had for him. He was an enemy, an adversary, with whom I was about to begin a struggle. He was my victim, and I was his. I could not escape from him; he could not escape from me. We were both shut in as it were in a circle of iron.

He had gray eyes like Filippo Arborio. Among the various expressions of his face one struck me above all, in an imaginary scene that often arose before me. This scene is as follows: I entered a room filled with darkness, with strange silence. I thought I was alone there. All at once, on turning round, I perceived Raymond looking at me fixedly with his gray and wicked eyes. Suddenly the temptation to commit the crime assailed me so strongly that, so as not to throw myself on the malefic being, I took to flight.

XVIII.

Between Juliana and me the compact appeared concluded. She lived. We both continued to live, simulating and dissimulating. Like dipsomaniacs, we had two alternate lives: the one tranquil, made up entirely of gentle appearances, of filial tendernesses, pure affection, reciprocal complaisances; the other agitated, feverish, troubled, uncertain, hopeless, a prey to a fixed idea, forever pursued by a menace, precipitated toward an unknown catastrophe. There were rare moments when my soul, seeking to avoid so much misery, to free itself from the curse that enveloped it like a thousand tentacles, burst forth with an aspiration toward the highest ideal of goodness, a glimpse of which I had more than once had. My memory recalled to me the singular words of my brother at the entrance to Assoro forest on the subject of Giovanni di Scordio: "*You will do well, Tullio, not to forget that smile.*" And that smile on the old man's withered mouth acquired a profound significance, became extraordinarily luminous, exalted me like the revelation of a supreme verity.

Almost always, during these rare moments, I also saw another smile, that of Juliana lying ill on her pillows, that unexpected smile, which decreased, decreased, without disappearing. And the remembrance of the distant peaceful afternoon when I had intoxicated the poor invalid with deceptive transports, the recollection of the morning when she rose for the first time and when, in the

middle of the room, she had fallen into my arms, laughing and panting, the recollection of the truly divine gesture with which she had offered me love, indulgence, peace, dreams, forgetfulness, all that there is beautiful and all that there is good, caused me hopeless regrets and infinite remorse. The sweet and terrible question that André Bolkonsky had read on the dead face of the Princess Lisa, I read unceasingly on the still living face of Juliana. "What have you done to me?" No reproach had issued from her lips; she had not attempted to lessen the gravity of her sin, to interpose any one of my own infamies; she had been humble before her executioner; not a drop of bitterness had tinged her words. And yet her eyes repeated to me, "What have you done to me?"

A strange sacrificial ardor suddenly fired me, impelled me to take up my cross. The grandeur of the expiation seemed worthy of my courage. I felt in myself a superabundance of strength, a heroic soul, an inspired intelligence. On going toward the sorrowful sister, I thought: "I will find the kind words that will console her, I will find the fraternal tones that will alleviate her pain, that will clear her brow." But directly I entered her presence, I could no longer speak; my lips seemed sealed with an infrangible seal, all my being seemed stricken by a malefice. The internal light suddenly died out, as if extinguished by an icy wind of unknown origin. And in the shadows began to move vaguely that dull rancor which I had so often felt and which I was powerless to repress.

It was the symptom of an attack. I stammered a few incoherent words. I avoided Juliana's eyes, and I fled from the room.

XIX.

It is unbelievable how much energy she displayed in dissimulating before those who were ignorant of the facts. She still succeeded in smiling! My known anxiety for her health furnished me with a pretext that justified a certain sadness that I could not succeed in disguising. This anxiety, shared by my mother and by my brother, resulted in the coming event not being looked upon as cause for rejoicing, as the previous births had been, and everyone avoided making the usual allusions or predictions. I was grateful for that.

Finally, Dr. Vebesti arrived at the Badiola.

His visit reassured us. He said Juliana was very much run down; he noticed in her a slight nervous irritability, an impoverishment of the blood, a general dis-

turbance of the nutritive functions; but he affirmed that the progress of the gestation presented no notable anomaly, and that, when the general condition was improved, delivery could take place under normal conditions. Besides, he gave us to understand that he placed considerable confidence in Juliana's exceptional temperament, whose extraordinary power of resistance he had had occasion to test in the past. He prescribed careful hygiene and a reconstructive diet, approved of the stay at the Badiola, recommended regularity, moderate exercise, and tranquillity of mind.

"I count particularly on you," he said to me, seriously.

It was a disappointment to me. I had placed in him a hope of salvation, and, lo, I had lost it. Before his arrival, I nourished this hope: "If he would only declare it necessary, in order to preserve the mother, to sacrifice the still formless child! If he would only declare it necessary, in order to avoid a certain catastrophe at the completion of the term, to have recourse to extreme measures and suppress the child! Juliana would be saved, she would get well; and I too would be saved, I should feel as if reborn. It would be possible, I believe, to almost forget, or at least to be resigned. Time heals so many wounds, and work consoles so many sorrows! I could, I believe, gradually recover my peace, and turn over a new leaf, follow my brother's example, become better, become a man, live for others, embrace the new religion. I believe that my very sorrow could help me in regaining my dignity. The man to whom it is given to suffer more than others is also *worthy* of suffering more than others. Is not that a verse from my brother's evangel? There is, then, an election for pain. Giovanni di Scordio, for instance, is one of the elect. To possess such a smile is to possess a divine gift. I could, I believe, merit that gift." Such had been my hope. By a curious contradiction, I had hoped by my expiatory fervor to obtain a diminution of my punishment!

In fact, though I wished to be regenerated by my suffering, I was afraid to suffer, I had an atrocious fear of facing actual pain. My soul was already exhausted; although it had caught a glimpse of the true road and had been agitated by Christian aspirations, it stole away by an oblique path that led straight to the inevitable abyss.

While speaking with the doctor, when showing a slight incredulity at his reassuring predictions, by manifesting anxiety, I found the means of conveying my thoughts to him. I made him understand that I desired him, at any cost, to free Juliana from all danger, and that, if it were necessary, I would renounce this new offspring without regret. I begged him to speak to me frankly.

He reassured me a second time. He declared to me that, even in a hopeless case, he would not have recourse to extremes because, in the state that Juliana was in, a hemorrhage would be very dangerous. He repeated again that, above all, we must aid and stimulate the regeneration of the blood, reconstitute the

debilitated organism, contrive, by every means in our power, that the mother should arrive at the natural term of gestation with her strength restored, with a confident and tranquil mind. He concluded:

"I believe that your wife requires moral consolation more than anything else. I am an old friend. I know that she has suffered much. It depends on you to pacify her mind."

XX.

My mother redoubled her tenderness for Juliana. She let her know her cherished dream and her presentiment. It was a grandson whom she awaited, a little Raymond. She was sure, this time.

My brother, too, expected Raymond.

Maria and Natalia often asked their mother, and grandmother, and me, artless questions concerning their future companion.

Thus the domestic love, expressed by presages, wishes, and hopes, began to surround the invisible fruit, the being that was yet without form.

One day we were seated, Juliana and I, beneath the elms. My mother had just left us. During her affectionate chat, she had named Raymond; she had even brought again into use a pet name that called up distant memories of my dead father. Juliana and I answered her by a smile. She believed that we shared her dream, and she had left in order that we might go on dreaming undisturbed.

It was the calm and limpid hour that follows the sunset. Above our heads, the foliage was motionless. From time to time a flock of swallows rapidly cleft the air with a sound of beating wings, with piercing cries, as at the Lilacs.

Our eyes followed the sainted woman as long as she was visible; then we looked at one another, silently, in consternation. We remained for several minutes without breaking the silence, crushed by the immensity of our sorrow. And then, with a terrible effort of my entire being, making an abstraction of Juliana, I felt the little creature living alone at my side, as if, at that moment, no other creature existed near me, had existed around me. And it was not an illusory sensation, but a real and profound sensation. A thrill of horror ran through all my fibres; I started violently and fixed my eyes on my companion's face in order to dissipate the sensation. We looked at one another, without knowing what to say or do to combat the excess of our anguish. I saw in her face the reflection of my

distress, I divined my own physiognomy. My eyes turned instinctively toward her body; and I perceived on her face the same expression of terror exhibited by invalids afflicted by a monstrous infirmity, when one looks at the member deformed by an incurable malady.

After a pause, during which we both tried in vain to measure our suffering, she said, in a low voice:

"Have you thought that this may endure as long as we live?"

My lips remained closed; it was only within myself that was heard the determined answer:

"No, it will not last."

She went on:

"Remember that, with a single word, you can solve the difficulty and free yourself. I am ready. Remember."

I still remained silent, but I thought: "No, it is not you who must die."

She went on, in a voice that tearful tenderness rendered trembling:

"I cannot console you; there is consolation neither for you nor for me; there will never be any. Have you thought that someone will always be between us? If your mother's wish is granted— Think! Think!"

But my soul shuddered beneath the sinister light of a single idea. I said: "They all love him already."

I hesitated. I gave Juliana a rapid look. Then, suddenly, lowering my eyes, bending my head, I asked, in a voice that died away on my lips:

"And you, do you love him?"

"Oh! what a question!"

I could not restrain myself from persisting, although I suffered physically as if an open wound were being torn by nails.

"Do you love him?"

"No, no! I have a horror of him."

I felt an instinctive joy, as if I had obtained, by this confession, an assent to my secret idea, and a sort of complicity. But had Juliana answered me sincerely? Or had she told a falsehood out of pity for me?

I was assailed by a cruel and furious desire to persist, to make her confess fully, to penetrate to the very depths of her soul. But her appearance stopped me. I abstained. I now felt no bitterness toward her. I was now drawn toward her by an emotion of gratitude. It seemed to me that the horror she had shudderingly confessed separated her from the creature whom she was nourishing, and brought her closer to me. I felt a desire to make her understand these things, and increase her aversion to the infant to be born, as if against an irreconcilable enemy of us both.

I took her hand; I said to her:

”You have comforted me a little. I thank you. You understand——”

And I added, masking my homicidal intention by a Christian hope:

”There is a Providence. Who knows? The day of deliverance will come, perhaps. You understand me. Who knows? Pray to God.”

It was a presage of death for the infant to be born; it was a wish. And, by inducing Juliana to pray that it should come to pass, I was preparing her for the funereal event, I obtained from her a sort of moral complicity. I ended by thinking:

”If, as a result of my words, the suggestion of crime should come to her, and, gradually, become strong enough to actuate her? Certainly it is possible that she may convince herself of the dreadful necessity, that she may elevate herself to the thought of my deliverance, that she may experience a burst of savage energy, that she may accomplish the supreme sacrifice. Did she not repeat just now that she was still ready to die? But her death includes that of her child. Therefore, she is not restrained by any religious prejudice, by the fear of sinning; since she is ready to die, she is ready to commit a double crime, against herself and against maternity. On the other hand, she is convinced that her existence on earth is useful, even indispensable to the persons who love her and whom she loves; and she is also convinced that the existence of the son who is not mine will make an intolerable torture of our lives. She knows, too, that we could draw closer together, that we could, perhaps, in forgiveness and forgetfulness, regain some happiness, that we could hope from time the cure of the wound, if between her and me no intruder interposed. It suffices, then, that she should reflect on all that to rapidly convert a useless desire and an inefficacious prayer into a resolution and an act.” I meditated; she also meditated silently, her head lowered, without removing her hand from mine, while deep in the shadows of the great motionless elms.

What were her thoughts? Her brow still retained the pallor of death. With the fall of evening, was another shadow descending upon her, too?

I seemed to see Raymond. But no longer in the form of a perverse and treacherous gray-eyed child; but with the form of a miserable little body, soft and reddish, scarcely breathing, and which the slightest pressure would kill.

The bell at the Badiola sounded the first strokes of the Angelus. Juliana withdrew her hand from mine and made the sign of the cross.

XXI.

The fourth and fifth months passed and the gestation began to develop rapidly. Juliana's person, slender, supple, and flexible, enlarged and naturally conformed to her condition. She felt herself humiliated before me as by a disgraceful infirmity. A poignant suffering appeared on her face when she caught my eyes fixed on her heavy figure.

I felt overwhelmed, incapable of bearing any longer the weight of this miserable existence. Every morning, when I opened my eyes after an agitated slumber, I felt as if someone had given me a deep cup, saying: "If you wish to drink, if you wish to live to-day, you must shed into this cup the last drop of your heart's blood." At each awakening a repugnance, a disgust, an indefinable repulsion assailed me in the most secret recesses of my being. And yet I must live.

The days were cruelly long. Time scarcely passed: it fell drop by drop, lazily and heavily. And I still had the summer before me, part of the autumn, an eternity. I tried to imitate my brother, to aid him in the extensive agricultural labors that he had undertaken, to become enthusiastic with the fire of his faith. I remained on horseback for whole days, like a *buttero*; I tired myself out with manual labor, at some easy and monotonous employment; I sought to dull the point of my conscience by a prolonged contact with the men of the soil, simple and upright souls, those whom the moral precepts received from their ancestors prompted to perform their functions just as naturally as the corporeal organs performed theirs. Several times I went to visit Giovanni di Scordio, the hermit saint; I wished to hear his voice, I wished to interrogate him concerning his misfortunes, I wished to see once more his sad eyes and his sweet smile. But he hardly spoke; he was a little timid with me; he barely answered me by a few vague words; he did not love to speak of himself, he did not care to complain, he did not stop at the labor at which he was occupied. His hands, bony, dried, and sunburnt, that seemed as if cast in living bronze, were never idle, perhaps did not know fatigue. One day, I exclaimed:

"When will your hands ever rest?"

The good man looked down at his hands with a smile; he looked at the backs and then at the palms, turned them over and over in the sunlight. That look, that smile, that sunlight, that gesture, conferred on those great calloused hands a sovereign nobility. Hardened by the agricultural instruments, sanctified by the good they had shed, by the immense labor they had performed, those hands were now worthy of bearing the palm.

The old man crossed them on his breast, according to the Christian mortuary rites, and answered, without ceasing to smile:

"Very soon, signor, if it please God. When I am laid, in this fashion, in the

coffin. Amen!"

XXII.

Every remedy was tried in vain. Labor did not solace me, did not console me, because it was excessive, unequal, irregular, feverish, frequently interrupted by periods of unconquerable inertia and depression.

My brother warned me:

"You are not following the proper rule. You spend in one week six months' energy; then you let yourself fall back into indolence; then, without moderation, you recommence to exhaust yourself with fatigue. That is not what health demands. To be effective, your work must be calm, concordant, harmonic. Do you understand? We must prescribe a method for you. But you have the fault of all novices—excessive ardor. Later on you will be calmer."

My brother said:

"You have not yet found your equilibrium. You do not yet feel *terra firma* beneath your feet. But have no fear. Sooner or later, you will succeed in grasping the law. That will come to you unexpectedly, when you least expect it."

He said also:

"This time, Juliana will surely give you an heir—Raymond. I have already thought of the godfather. Giovanni di Scordio will hold your son at the baptismal font. He is the worthiest godfather you could possibly find for him. Giovanni will inspire him with goodness and strength. When Raymond is old enough to understand, we will speak to him of this noble old man. And your son will be what we could not have been, what we have not been able to be."

He often returned to this subject, he often pronounced the name of Raymond, he prayed for the child to be born his incarnate ideal of the human type—the Model. He did not know that every one of his words was for me like the thrust of a poniard which exasperated my hate, and rendered my despair more violent.

Everyone conspired against me unknowingly, everyone was constantly distressing me. When I approached one of my family, I felt anxious and fearful, as if I were compelled to remain near a person who, holding some terrible weapon, knew neither how to use it nor its danger. I was in continual expectation of being wounded. To enjoy a short truce, I was compelled to seek solitude

and flee far from my own; but in solitude I found myself face to face with my worst enemy, myself.

I felt that I was secretly going into a decline; it seemed to me that my life was ebbing away through every pore. At times there were reproduced in me conditions of soul that had belonged to the most obscure period of my past, henceforth so distant. At times I preserved only the intimate feeling of my own isolation amidst the inert phantoms of all things. For long hours, I had no other sensation but that of the continuous and crushing weight of life and of that of the slight throbbing of an artery in my head.

Then survened ironies, sarcasms against myself, sudden furious desires to rend and destroy, pitiless derisions, ferocious wickedness, an acute fermentation of the most abject dregs. It seemed to me that I no longer knew what indulgence, pity, tenderness, goodness meant. Every inner source of good was obstructed, dried up like fountains stricken by a malediction. And then I no longer saw in Juliana anything but the brutal fact, the pregnancy; I no longer saw in myself anything but the ridiculed person, the satirized husband, the stupid hero of the classic farce. The inner sarcasm spared none of my actions, none of Juliana's actions. The drama became metamorphosed for me into a bitter and farcical comedy. Nothing restrained me longer; every bond broke; a violent rupture took place. And I said to myself: "Why should I rest here and play this odious rôle? I will go away, go back into society, back to my early life, back to libertinism. I will close my eyes to everything. I will lose myself. What does it matter? I do not wish to be what I am, mire within mire. Phew!"

XXIII.

During one of these attacks I resolved to leave the Badiola, to depart for Rome, to go I knew not where.

I had a pretext ready. As we had not anticipated so long an absence, we had left the town house temporarily. It was urgent to regulate various affairs and take measures that our absence might be prolonged indefinitely.

I announced my departure. I persuaded my mother, brother, and Juliana that it was necessary; I promised to hurry and return in a few days. I made my preparations.

The evening before I left, late in the night, while I was strapping a valise, I

heard a knock at my door. I said:

"Come in!"

I was surprised to see Juliana.

"Ah! Is it you?"

I went forward to meet her. She was panting a little, fatigued perhaps by the stairs. I made her sit down. I offered her a cup of cold tea with a thin slice of lemon, a beverage that used to please her and that had been prepared for me. She scarcely wet her lips, and handed it back. Her eyes revealed her anxiety.

Finally she said timidly:

"So you are going?"

"Yes," I replied. "To-morrow morning, as you know."

Then followed a long interval of silence. Through the open windows entered a delicious coolness; the rays of the full moon lit up the house and garden; the choir of chirping crickets could be heard, like the sharp and indefinitely distant sound of a flute.

She asked me in a changed voice:

"When will you return? Tell me frankly."

"*I do not know*," I answered.

There was a new pause. A light breeze came in from time to time, and the curtains swelled; every breath carried into the room as far as us the voluptuousness of that summer night.

"Are you deserting me?"

There was such profound distress in her voice that my studied coolness suddenly gave way to regret and pity.

"No," I answered. "Don't be alarmed, Juliana. I need a little rest. I can stand it no longer. I must have breathing room."

"You are right," she answered.

"I think I shall soon come back, as I promised. I will write to you. You, too, will perhaps feel relief at not seeing me suffer."

"Relief," she said. "No, never."

A choking sob quivered in her voice. She added, immediately, in a tone of heart-breaking anguish:

"Tullio, Tullio, tell me the truth! Do you hate me? Tell me the truth!"

Her eyes interrogated me, more agonized even than her words. For an instant her very soul seemed fixed on me. And those poor eyes, wide open, that pure-looking brow, that contracted mouth, that emaciated chin, all that frail, unhappy face which contrasted with the lower ignominious deformity, and those hands, those frail, sorrowful hands that stretched toward me with such a supplicating gesture, pained me more than ever, moved me to pity and sympathy.

"Believe me, Juliana; believe me once for all. I feel no resentment toward

you, and I never shall. I do not forget that I am your debtor; I forget nothing. Have I not already proved it? Be reassured. Think now of your *deliverance*. And, besides, who knows? But, in any case, Juliana, I will not disappoint you. Let me go for the time being. Perhaps a few days' absence will do me good. I shall be calmer when I return. Calmness is very necessary for what is to follow. You will need all my assistance."

She said:

"Thank you. Do with me what you will."

A human chant now came to us through the darkness, covering the shrill sound of the rural concert—perhaps a choir of reapers in the moonlight on some distant field.

"Do you hear?" I said.

We listened. We felt the breath of the breeze. All the voluptuousness of the summer night filled my heart.

"Shall we go and sit down on the terrace?" I asked Juliana, gently.

She consented, and rose. We passed through an adjoining room, where there was no other light than that of the full moon. A great white wave, resembling immaterial milk, inundated the floor. As she preceded me to go out on the terrace, I could see her deformed shadow outlined in black in the light.

Ah! where was the slender and supple creature whom I had taken in my arms? Where was the lover I had found once more beneath the flowering lilacs, that April noon? In a second, my heart was invaded with every regret, with every desire, with every despair.

Juliana sat down and leaned her head on the iron of the balustrade. Her face, fully illuminated, was whiter than all its surroundings, whiter than the wall. Her eyes were half-closed. The eyelids cast a shadow on her cheek-bones that agitated me more than a look would have done.

How could I utter a word?

I turned toward the valley, and leaned on the balustrade, grasping the cold iron with my fingers. I saw beneath me an enormous heap of confused appearances, in which I noticed only the reflection of the Assoro. The chant came to us or was interrupted, as the breeze rose or fell, and, during the pauses, was again heard the shrill flute-sound, indefinitely distant. Never had a night appeared to me so full of sweetness and sorrow. From the extreme depth of my soul arose a

cry, piercing and yet not audible, towards the lost felicity.

XXIV.

Scarcely had I arrived in Rome, when I was sorry I had come. I found the city burning hot, on fire, almost deserted; and that frightened me. The house was silent as the tomb, and the familiar objects I knew so well presented an unusual and strange aspect; and that also frightened me. I felt a sensation of solitude, frightful solitude; and yet I did not go in search of friends, I did not wish to remember or meet anyone. But I began a search for the man whom I detested with an implacable hate, the search for Filippo Arborio.

I hoped to meet him in some public place. I went to the restaurant which I knew he frequented. I waited for him an entire evening, premeditating the way in which I would provoke him. Each time I heard a step of a new arrival, my heart gave a bound. But he did not come. I questioned the waiters. They had not seen him for a long time.

I went to the salle d'armes. The rooms were empty, bathed in the greenish shadow made by the closed blinds, filled with that peculiar odor which rises from wooden floors when they are sprinkled. The maestro, deserted by his pupils, greeted me with the greatest demonstrations of amiability. I listened attentively to the minute details of the last assault; then I asked him for news of several of my friends who frequented the salle; finally I asked him about Filippo Arborio.

"He has not been in Rome for four or five months," replied the maestro. "I have heard that he has a very serious and almost incurable nervous malady. I heard it from Galiffa. But that's all I know about it."

He added:

"In fact, he was very, very weak. He only took a few lessons from me. He was afraid to fence; he could not bear to see the point of a sword before his eyes."

"Is Galiffa still in Rome?"

"No, he is at Rimini."

Shortly after I went away.

This unexpected news startled me. "If it were only true," I thought. And I took pleasure in imagining that it was one of those terrible maladies of the spinal cord or of the cerebral substance that reduce a man to the lowest degradations, to idiocy, to the most pitiful forms of madness, and finally to death. The knowledge

I had gained from scientific books, the recollections of a visit I had paid to an insane asylum, the images, still more precise, that I retained of a special case of one of my friends, Spinelli, repassed through my memory in a crowd. And once more I saw poor Spinelli seated in his big red-leather arm-chair, the color of clay, every line of his face paralyzed, his mouth drawn and gaping, full of saliva and stammering incomprehensibly; again I saw the gesture he made every little while to receive in his handkerchief that inexhaustible saliva that ran down the corners of his mouth; again I saw the blond, thin, and sorrowful face of the sister adjusting a napkin beneath the invalid's chin as on a baby, and introducing into his stomach, with the pharyngeal sound, the nourishment he was no longer capable of swallowing.

"So much the better," I thought. "If I had fought a duel with so celebrated an adversary, if I had wounded him seriously, if I had killed him, the fact would certainly not pass unnoticed; it would be in every mouth, it would get into the papers, and perhaps the true cause of the duel would also be found out. This providential malady, on the contrary, spares me all danger, all annoyance, all gossip. I may well renounce a sanguinary joy, a punishment inflicted by my own hand (and, besides, am I sure of the result?), since I know that disease paralyzes and saps the power of the man I detest. But is the news true? Perhaps it is only a temporary illness?" A happy idea struck me. I jumped into a cab and drove to the office of his publisher. During the drive I mentally pictured to myself—with a sincere wish that he might be stricken by them—the two cerebral diseases most terrible for a man of letters, for an artist in language, for a stylist, aphasia and agraphia. And an imaginary vision presented their symptoms to me.

I entered the office. At first I could distinguish nothing, my eyes still blinded by the outer light. But I heard a nasal voice questioning me in a strange tone:

"What can I do for signor?"

I perceived behind the desk a person of uncertain age, a dry, pallid, fair man, a sort of an albino. I turned toward him, mentioned the titles of several works. I bought a few, then I inquired for the last novel by Filippo Arborio. The albino handed me *The Secret*. I feigned to be a fanatical admirer of the novelist.

"Is this really his last?"

"Yes, signor. A month or two ago, we announced a new novel by him: *Turris Eburnea*."

"*Turris Eburnea!*"

My heart throbbed.

"But I do not think we can publish it."

"Why not?"

"The author is very ill."

"Ill? What's the matter?"

"A progressive paralysis of the medulla oblongata," replied the albino, separating the terrible words, with a certain scientific affectation.

"Oh! The same illness that Spinelli had! So it is serious?"

"Very serious," said the albino sententiously. "Signor knows that there is no cure for that form of paralysis."

"But it is still only in its earliest stage?"

"Yes; but there is no doubt as to its nature. The last time he came here I could already detect that he had difficulty in articulating certain words."

"Ah! you heard him?"

"Yes, signor. His pronunciation was already indefinite, and vacillating."

I encouraged the albino by the extreme and, so to speak, admiring attention that I paid to him. I believe that he would voluntarily have acquainted me with the words that had been pronounced with such difficulty by the illustrious novelist.

"And where is he now?"

"He is at Naples. The doctors are treating him with electricity."

"Electric treatment!" I repeated with artless stupor, an affectation of ignorance, so as to please the albino's vanity and thus prolong the conversation.

It is true that in the shop, narrow and long like a corridor, there flowed a draught of cool air that favored chatting. The place was shaded. A clerk slept peacefully in a chair, his chin on his bosom, in the shadow of a terrestrial globe. Nobody entered.

There was something ridiculous about the bookseller. His sallow face, his shrivelled mouth, and nasal twang amused me, and in the quiet of the bookshop it was very agreeable to hear the confirmation of the incurable malady of a man abhorred.

"Have the doctors no hope of curing him?" I said, to stimulate the albino.

"Impossible."

"Let us hope it is possible, for the sake of literature."

"Impossible."

"But it seems to me that, in progressive paralysis, there are cases that have been cured."

"No, signor, no. He may live two, three, four years yet, but he cannot be cured."

"It seems to me, however——"

I do not know from whence came this lightness of heart that made me make sport of the narrator of this news, this curious complaisance to relish the cruelty of my sentiment. But I certainly found pleasure in it. And the albino, piqued by my contradictions, climbed, without further argument, up a small wooden ladder leaning against the high shelves. Thin as he was, he resembled one of those vagabond cats, fleshless and hairless, that crouch on the edge of a roof. As

he reached the top, his head brushed against a cord stretched from one corner of the shop to the other, and which served as a resting place for flies. A cloud of the insects swarmed around his head with a furious buzzing. He came down, holding a book in his hand—the authority which declared in favor of death. The implacable flies descended with him.

He showed me the title. It was a special work on pathology.

"Signor will see."

He turned over the leaves. As the book was not cut, he separated the leaves with his finger, and, lowering his whitish eyes, read inside: "*The prognosis of progressive bulbar paralysis is unfavorable.*" He added:

"Is signor convinced now?"

"Yes, but what a misfortune! Such a talented man!"

The flies could not be quieted. They were buzzing in a provoking manner. They attacked the albino, me, and the assistant who was sleeping under the terrestrial globe.

"How old *was he*?" I asked, involuntarily erring about the tense of the verb, as if I referred to a dead man.

"Who, signor?"

"Filippo Arborio."

"Thirty-five, I believe."

"So young!"

I felt a strange desire to laugh, a puerile desire to laugh in the albino's face, and to leave him. It was a very singular excitation, rather convulsive, never before felt, indefinable. My mind was shaken by something similar to the strange and uncontrollable hilarity that seizes one at times in the surprising incoherences of a dream. The book was still open and lay on the bench, and I bent over it to examine a vignette that represented a human face contorted by a grimace, atrocious and grotesque: "*Hemiatrophy of the left face.*" The implacable flies still buzzed ceaselessly.

"Have you not received the manuscript of *Turris Eburnea* yet?" I asked.

"No, signor. We have announced the book; but the title is all that exists."

"Only the title?"

"Yes, signor. And, in fact, we have stopped announcing the book."

"Thank you. Please send these books to my house sometime to-day."

I gave my address and left.

On the pavement, I felt a strange sensation of bewilderment. It seemed to me as if I had left behind me a fragment of an artificial, false, factitious life. What I had done, what I had said, what I had felt, and the albino's face, his voice, his gestures, all seemed unreal, took on the appearance of a dream, the character of an impression, received, not from contact with the reality, but from a book

recently read. I entered the cab again and returned home. The vague sensation faded away. I began to calmly reflect. I assured myself that all was real, indisputable. Spontaneously visions of the sick man formed before me, copied on those furnished me by my recollections of poor Spinelli. And I was seized by new curiosity. "Suppose I go to Naples to see him?" I pictured to myself the pitiful spectacle of that intellectual man, degraded by disease, stammering like an idiot. I no longer felt any joy; all the exaltation of my hate had fallen; a profound sadness overwhelmed me. In fact, the ruin of this man had no influence on my own position, did not repair my own ruin. There was nothing changed, neither in me, nor in my actual situation, nor in my previsions of the future.

And I thought of the title of the book announced by Filippo Arborio: *Turris Eburnea.* Doubts pressed in a crowd in my mind. Did that dedication refer to an accidental encounter? Or rather, on the contrary, had the writer had the intention of creating a literary type after the image of Juliana Hermil, of relating his recent and personal adventure? The torturing problem presented itself anew. What had been the progressive incidents of this adventure, from the beginning to its close?

And I thought I could hear the words uttered by Juliana that unforgettable night: "I love you, I have always loved you, I have always been yours; I expiate by this hell one moment's weakness, you understand? *One moment's weakness.* It is the truth. Do you not feel that it is the truth?"

Alas! how often we believe we feel the truth in a voice that lies. Nothing can guard us from being thus duped. But if what I had felt in Juliana's voice was the pure truth, then, had she really been taken during a physical languor, in my very house? Had she submitted with a sort of unconsciousness? And, on awakening, had she felt only horror and disgust at the irreparable act, and had she banished that man, had she never seen him again?

This supposition, in fact, was in nowise contradicted by appearances; and appearances even supported the supposition that, for a long time, the rupture between Juliana and him was complete and definite.

"In my own house!" I repeated. And, in this house, silent as a tomb, in these deserted and close rooms, I was followed by the obsession of the vision.

XXV.

What should I do? Stay longer in Rome until madness seized my brain, in

the midst of this furnace, during the heat of the dog-days? Go to the seaside, to the mountains, seek oblivion in society, at the fashionable summer resorts? Reawaken in myself the old-time voluptuousness, go in quest of another Teresa Raffo, any sort of frivolity?

Two or three times I dwelt on the remembrance of the *Biondissima*, although she had entirely passed from my heart, and even, for a long time, from my memory. "Where could she be? Is she still with Eugenio Egano? What would be my sensations on seeing her again?" It was only vain curiosity. I perceived that my sole, profound, unconquerable desire was to go back there, to my house of sorrow, to my torture.

I took the necessary measures with the greatest care. I paid a visit to Dr. Vebesti, and wired to the Badiola that I was on the way home.

Impatience devoured me; acute anxiety urged me on, as if I were to encounter new and extraordinary things. The journey appeared interminable. Stretched on the cushions, oppressed by the heat, suffocated by the dust that penetrated through the interstices of the railway carriage, I thought of the approaching events, I considered the future possibilities, I essayed to read the great darkness. The *father* was mortally tainted. What could be expected of the son?

XXVI.

There was nothing new at the Badiola. My absence had been very short. They celebrated my return. Juliana's first look expressed infinite gratitude.

"You have done well to return so quickly," said my mother with a smile. "Juliana could not get any rest. Now, we hope you will not leave us again. Apropos, did you think of that lace? No? What a memory you have!"

As soon as I was alone with Juliana, she said:

"I did not dare hope you would return so quickly. How grateful I am!"

In her attitude, in her voice, there were timidity, humility, tenderness. Never had I been so struck by the contrast between her face and the rest of her person. On that face there was, continually visible to me, a special expression of sorrow that expressed the constant revolt of this woman against the shame that had fallen upon her. That expression never left her under any circumstance; it could be visibly seen through the diversity of other fugitive expressions which, no matter how strong, could not efface it; it was fixed and adherent, and it moved

me to pity, and took from me my anger.

"What did you do while I was away?" I asked her.

"Waited for you. And you?"

"Nothing. I wanted to return."

"To see me?" she asked, timid and humble.

"Yes, for your sake."

She half-closed her eyes, and the light of a smile trembled on her face. I felt that I had never been loved as at that instant.

After a pause, she said, regarding me with humid eyes:

"Thank you."

The tone, the sentiment expressed, recalled to me another "*thank you*," that she had said at another time, the morning of her convalescence, the morning of my first crime.

XXVII.

Thus I recommenced at the Badiola my invariably sad life, unrelieved by any notable incident, the hours dragging along on the sun-dial, and the feeling of desolation aggravated by the heavy monotony of the chirp of the crickets in the elms. *Hora est benefaciendi!*

And, in my mind, there alternated the usual effervescences, the usual inertias, sarcasms, the usual vain aspirations, contradictory crises, abundance and dryness. And, more than once, reflecting on that gray, neutral, ordinary fluid, and omnipotent thing called life, I thought: "Who knows? Man is, above all, an animal who adapts himself. There is neither turpitude nor pain to which, in the end, he does not accustom himself. Perhaps in the long run I shall also become used to it. Who knows?"

I sterilized myself by dint of irony. "Who knows if Filippo Arborio's son will not be, so to say, *my very picture*. Then the arrangement would only be easier." I thought of the cynical laugh that had been provoked in me one day when, in the presence of a married couple, I had heard them refer to a baby who, I knew for a certainty, was the fruit of adultery, as, "It's just like his father!" And in reality the resemblance was striking, from the influence of that mysterious law known to physiologists' as "*heredity by influence*." Often a woman married a second time, brings into the world, some years after the death of her first husband, sons who

have every feature of the dead husband, and who do not resemble at all their real father.

"It is possible, therefore, that Raymond resemble me, and appear to be a veritable Hermil," I thought. "It might happen that I am warmly congratulated upon having so vigorously impressed upon the heir the seal of my race! And suppose my mother's and brother's expectations are not fulfilled? Suppose Juliana gives birth to a third daughter?"

That probability calmed me. It seemed to me I should feel less repulsion for a new daughter, and that, perhaps, I might even succeed in tolerating her. With time she would leave my house, take another name, enter another family.

Meantime, the nearer the term approached, the more my irritation increased. I was weary of constantly debating with myself in the same fruitless agitation, amidst the same fears and perplexities. I should have liked events to be precipitated, a catastrophe of some sort to occur. No matter what catastrophe was preferable to this agony.

One day my brother asked Juliana:

"How long will it be yet?"

She answered:

"Another month."

We were in September. Summer was drawing to a close. We were approaching the autumnal equinox, the most charming period of the year, the season that bears in itself a sort of aerial intoxication emanating from the ripe grapes. The enchantment gradually penetrated me, soothed my soul, at times inspired in me a desire for furious tendernesses or delicate expansions. Maria and Natalia passed long hours with me, alone with me, either in my apartment or out in the surrounding country. I had never loved them before with a love so deep, so anxious. From their eyes, softly impregnated with scarcely conscious thoughts, there at times descended on my soul a ray of peace.

XXVIII.

One day I was seeking Juliana throughout the Badiola. It was in the early afternoon. As I found her neither in her room nor anywhere else, I entered my mother's room. The doors were open; neither sound nor voice was heard; the light curtains waved at the windows; through the open bay-windows were

glimpses of the verdure of the elms. Between the brightly colored walls all breathed of peace and repose.

I advanced cautiously toward the sanctuary. I walked softly, in order not to disturb my mother, in case she were dozing. I parted the curtains, and, without crossing the threshold, I leaned forward and looked in. I heard, in fact, the breathing of a person sleeping; I saw my mother, who was sleeping in an arm-chair in a corner of the window; I saw Juliana's hair above the back of another arm-chair. I entered.

They were seated facing each other, and between them was a low table bearing a basket full of miniature bonnets. My mother still held between her fingers one of these caps in which glittered a needle. Slumber had overtaken her during the activity of her work. She was sleeping, her chin on her bosom; perhaps she was dreaming. The needle was only half-full of white cotton; but, in her dream, perhaps she was sewing with a more precious thread.

Juliana was sleeping also; but her head had fallen back on the chair, and her arms were stretched out on the supports. In the gentleness of her slumber her features were relaxed; but her mouth retained a line of distress, a shadow of affliction; half closed, it permitted a glimpse of her bloodless gums; but at the beginning of the nose, between the eyebrows, there was a small furrow, deepened by great sorrow. And her forehead was moist; a drop of perspiration slowly rolled down her temple. And her hands, whiter than the muslin from under which they extended, seemed, by their position alone, to indicate an immense lassitude. What struck me most was less her moral expression than the appearance of her person. I meditated without considering this expression, and even Juliana herself had no part in my thoughts; and, anew, I felt only the little creature living beside me, as if, at that moment, no other creature existed around me. And, again, this was not an illusory sensation, but a real and profound one. Fear ran through every fibre of my being.

I averted my eyes; and I again saw between her fingers the bonnet in which glittered the needle, I again saw all those light laces in the basket, all those rose-colored and blue ribbons that trembled at the breath of the breeze. My heart was so strongly oppressed that I thought I should faint. What tendernesses the hands of my mother, lost in her dream, revealed, those hands placed on the pretty, white thing destined to cover the head of the child who was not my own!

I remained there several minutes. This place was the true sanctuary of the house, the Holy of Holies. On one wall hung my father's portrait, whom Federico greatly resembled; on another that of Constance, who resembled Maria a little. The two faces, living in that superior existence in which the recollections of those who have loved them have placed them, had magnetic eyes, eyes that seemed to see everywhere. Other relics of the two dead loved ones sanctified this retreat.

In one corner, on a pedestal, closed in between plates of glass and covered with black crape, there was the death mask moulded on the corpse of the man whom my mother had loved with a passion stronger than death. And yet this room had nothing lugubrious about it. There reigned in it a sovereign peace, that, from thence, seemed to propagate through the entire house, as life propagates from the heart, by a rhythmic expansion.

XXIX.

I recall the walk I made to the Lilacs, with Maria, Natalia, and Miss Edith, on a rather misty morning. And the recollection of it is also rather misty, veiled, indistinct like that of a long dream, torturing yet sweet.

The garden no longer had its myriad of bluish grapes nor its exquisite forest of flowers, nor its triple perfume, harmonious as music, nor its gayety, nor the continuous cries of its swallows. It was enlivened only by the voices and gambols of the two innocent girls. Already many of the swallows had departed, and the rest were about to go. We had arrived in time to see the last flock.

All the nests were abandoned, deserted, lifeless. Many were broken, and on the clayey debris trembled poor little feathers. The last flock, gathered on the roof, in the gutters, were still waiting for a few dispersed companions. The emigrants stood on a row on the edge of the eaves-board, some presenting the beak and others the back, so that the little forked tails and the white breasts alternated. And while waiting, they filled the silent air with their calls. And, from minute to minute, by twos, by threes, the laggards arrived. The hour of departure was at hand. The calls ceased. The fading sunlight fell on the closed house, on the empty nests. Nothing could be sadder than those poor little dead feathers which, here and there, fluttered, held prisoners in the clay.

As if raised up by a sudden gust of wind, by a storm the flock rose up with a great fluttering of wings, ascended into the air like a water-spout, remained for a moment directly above the house; then, without hesitation, as if they had before them a clearly traced path, they took their way in a compact mass, flew off, melted away in the sky, and finally disappeared.

Maria and Natalia, mounted on a bench, stood up on tiptoe to watch the fugitives as long as possible, and, stretching out their arms, they cried:

"Good-by, good-by, good-by, little swallows!"

Of all the rest I retain only an indistinct recollection, like that of a dream.

Maria wished to enter the house. I opened the door myself. It was here, on these three steps, that Juliana had followed me, furtively, light as a shadow, and had embraced me, and had whispered: "Go in, go in!" In the vestibule, the nest still hung among the grotesques of the ceiling. "Now I am yours, altogether, entirely!" she had murmured, without releasing my neck; and by a sinuous movement she had thrown herself on my breast and had met my mouth. The vestibule was silent—the staircases were silent; silence reigned throughout the house. It was here that I had heard the low and distant hum, like that retained by certain shells in the depths of their folds. But now, the silence resembled that of a tomb. And this place was the sepulchre of my happiness.

Maria and Natalia prattled on without cease, did not stop asking me questions, showed themselves curious about everything, went and opened the drawers of the dressing-table, the closets. Miss Edith followed them, watchful.

"Look, see what I have found," cried Maria, running toward me.

At the bottom of a drawer she had found a bouquet of lavender and a glove. It was one of Juliana's gloves, spotted with black at the finger-tips; on the inside, near the hem, it bore the following still visible inscription: "*The Mulberries, January 27, 1880. Souvenir*!" Like a flash, my memory represented clearly to me the episode of the mulberries, one of the happiest episodes of our first felicity, a fragment of the idyll.

"Is it one of mamma's gloves?" asked Maria. "Give it to me, give it to me. I want to take it to her myself."

Of all the rest I have but an indistinct recollection, like a dream.

Calisto, the old care-taker, came to speak to me. He told me a thousand things, and I understood almost nothing of what he said. Several times he repeated the wish:

"A boy, a fine boy, and may God bless him! A fine boy!"

When we were outside, Calisto closed the doors.

"And those nests, those happy nests?" he said, shaking his handsome white head.

"They must not be touched, Calisto."

Every nest was deserted, empty, lifeless. Their last habitants had left them. A languorous kiss from the setting sun touched the closed house, the solitary nests, and there could be nothing sadder than those poor little dead feathers that,

here and there, trembled, prisoners in the clay.

XXX.

The term approached. The first half of October had passed. Doctor Vebesti had been notified.

My anxiety increased hourly, became intolerable. I was frequently assailed by attacks of madness similar to that which had seized me on the banks of the Assoro. I fled far from the Badiola, remained long hours on horseback, I compelled Orlando to jump hedges and trenches, I forced him into perilous paths at a gallop. Then the poor animal and I returned, streaming, tired, but always safely.

Doctor Vebesti arrived. Everybody at the Badiola breathed a sigh of relief. Confidence and hope reappeared. Juliana alone was unnerved, and more than once I detected in her eyes the passage of a sinister thought, the sombre light of a fixed idea, the horror of a lugubrious presentiment.

The pains of childbirth began; they lasted an entire day, with a few periods of suspension, at times stronger, sometimes weaker, at times bearable, and sometimes agonizing. She remained standing, leaning on a table, her back against a closet, clenching her teeth so as not to cry out; or else she sat in an arm-chair and remained in it, almost motionless, her face buried in her hands, uttering at times a suppressed groan; or else she ceaselessly changed her place, going from one corner to another, stopping here and there to convulsively twist between her fingers the first object at hand. The sight of her suffering tortured me. I could not stand it. I left the room, went out for a few minutes; then I returned, almost in spite of myself, as if drawn by a magnetic attraction; and I forced myself to watch her suffering, without power to speak one comforting word to her.

"Tullio, Tullio! What a horrible thing! Oh! what a horrible thing. I have never suffered so much, never, never!"

Night fell. My mother, Miss Edith, and the doctor had gone down to the dining-room. Juliana and I were alone. The lamps had not yet been brought in. October's purplish twilight entered the room; from time to time the wind shook the windows.

"Help me, Tullio, help me!" she cried, in the bewilderment of the spasm, her arms stretched toward me, looking at me with dilated eyes, whose whites were of an extraordinary whiteness in the darkness that made her face livid.

”Tell me, tell me, what can I do to help you?” I stammered, distracted, not knowing what to do, caressing the hair on her temples with a gesture in which I would have liked to impart a supernatural power. ”Tell me, tell me, what shall I do?”

She stopped complaining; she looked at me, listened to me, as if forgetful of her pain, as if seized by surprise, stupefied, no doubt, by the sound of my voice, by the expression of my bewilderment and anguish, by the trembling of my fingers on her hair, by the distressed tenderness of that inefficacious gesture.

”You love me, don’t you?” she said, without ceasing to look at me, as if not to lose the slightest sign of my emotion. ”You forgive everything?”

And, becoming exalted again, she cried:

”You must love me! You must love me very much now, because to-morrow I shall not be here, because I shall die to-night; to-night, perhaps, I shall be dead. And you would be sorry for not having loved me, for not having pardoned me. Oh! yes, you would be sorry.”

She seemed so sure of dying that a sudden terror froze me.

”You must love me! Perhaps you do not believe what I told you one night; perhaps you do not believe me yet; but you will surely believe me when I am gone. Then the light will enter your soul, then you will understand the truth; and you will repent not having loved me enough, not having forgiven me.”

Sobs choked her utterance.

”Do you know why I’m sorry to die? Because I die without your knowing how much I have loved you, how much I loved you *after*, especially— Oh! what a punishment! Do I deserve such an end?”

She hid her face in her hands. But immediately uncovered it, and, very pale, looked at me. An idea still more terrible seemed to have crushed her.

”Suppose I died,” she stammered; ”and while dying *gave life*——”

”Hush!”

”You understand——”

”Be silent, Juliana!”

I was more affected than she. Terror had overwhelmed me, and left me without even the power to emit a single word of consolation, to combat these imaginations of death with a single vivifying word. I, too, was sure of the atrocious end. In the violet darkness my eyes met Juliana’s; and on that poor drawn face I thought I noticed symptoms of the death agony, symptoms of a dissolution that had already begun and that was inevitable. She could not repress a sort of shriek that resembled nothing human, and she clutched my arm convulsively.

”Help me, Tullio, help me!”

She clasped me hard, very hard, yet not hard enough. I should have liked to feel her nails penetrate my flesh, from a furious desire for physical torture

that would put me in touch with her torture. Her forehead pressed against my shoulder, she continued to moan. Its note was that which renders the voice unrecognizable in the excess of corporeal suffering, the note that brings suffering man to the level of the suffering beast—the instinctive lamentation of all flesh in pain, whether animal or human.

From time to time she recovered her speech sufficiently to repeat:

"Help me!"

And she imparted to me the violent shocks of her great pain. A flood of hate mounted from the deepest roots of my being, rose even to my hands in a homicidal impulse. That impulse came before its time; but the vision of the crime already consummated lit up my inner consciousness like a flash. "You shall not live!"

"Ah! Tullio, Tullio! Suffocate me! Kill me! I cannot stand it, I cannot stand it, you hear; no, I cannot stand it, I do not want to suffer any longer."

She cried savagely, looking around her wildly as if seeking something or someone from whom she could obtain the aid I was powerless to render her.

"Calm yourself, Juliana; calm yourself. Perhaps the time has come! Be brave! Take this chair. Be brave, my dear soul! A little more patience! See, I am near you. Do not be afraid."

I ran to the bell. "The doctor! the doctor! Tell him to come immediately."

Juliana ceased her lamentations. All at once she seemed to cease suffering, or at least to be unconscious of her condition, in the abstraction of other thoughts. It was evident that she was meditating something. I scarcely had time to remark this instantaneous change.

"Listen, Tullio. Suppose I become delirious...."

"What do you mean?"

"Suppose later, when fever sets in, I become delirious; suppose I die raving——"

"Well?"

Her voice had such accents of terror, her reticences were so sad, that I began to tremble like a leaf, seized by a sort of panic, still without understanding what she meant.

"Well?"

"They will be all there; they will be around me.... You understand? You understand? One word would be enough. One never knows what one says when delirious. You should..."

At that moment my mother, the doctor, and the midwife arrived.

"Ah! doctor," sighed Juliana, "I thought I was dying."

"Nonsense!" said the doctor in a reassuring voice. "There is no danger. Everything will be all right."

And he looked at me.

"Your husband," he went on, smiling, "looks worse than you do."

And he showed me the door, saying:

"Go! You can be of no assistance here."

I glanced at my mother's eyes. She seemed restless, anxious, compassionate.

"Yes, Tullio," she said. "It will be better for you to go. Federico is downstairs waiting for you."

I looked at Juliana. Without concerning herself with the others present, she fixed on me her large eyes, which were animated with an extraordinary brilliancy. They expressed all the passion of a despairing soul.

"I will not leave the adjoining room," I declared resolutely, without removing my gaze from Juliana.

As I turned to go out I noticed the midwife disposing the pillows on the bed of pain, on the bed of misery, and I shuddered as if from a breath of death.

XXXI.

It was between four and five o'clock in the morning. The pains had lasted until then, with a few intermissions of relief. I was lying on the lounge in the adjoining room, and about three o'clock sleep had overcome me unexpectedly. Cristina awoke me; she told me that Juliana wished to see me.

My eyes still heavy from sleep, I started to my feet.

"Was I asleep? What has happened?"

"Do not be alarmed, signor. Nothing has happened. The pains are easier. Come and see her."

I entered, and my eyes immediately sought Juliana.

She was supported by pillows, pale as her night-dress, almost lifeless. Her eyes at once met mine, because they were turned toward the door, in the expectation of my coming. Her eyes appeared larger, deeper, hollower, surrounded by a wider, dark shadow.

"You see," she said in an exhausted voice, "it is still the same."

Her gaze did not leave me. Her eyes spoke, like those of the Princess Lisa: "I hoped you would help me; but you do not help me, either."

"Where is the doctor?" I asked my mother, who seemed sad and preoccu-

pied.

She pointed to a door. I opened it, and passed through. I saw the doctor near a table busy with his preparations.

"Well," I asked him abruptly, "how is it?"

"Nothing serious so far."

"And all these preparations?"

"To be on the safe side."

"But how long will it last?"

"It is nearly over."

"Please speak frankly. Do you expect any complication?"

"At present there are no serious symptoms. Have confidence in me, and be calm. I have noticed that your presence greatly excites your wife. During the short period of the final pains, she needs all the strength she has. It is absolutely necessary that you go away. Promise me to do this. You may return when I call you."

A moan reached us.

"The pains are beginning again," he said. "The crisis has come. So be calm."

He went toward the door. I followed him. We both went up to Juliana. She seized my arm, and her clutch was like a bite. Had she so much strength left?

"Be brave! be brave! This is the last. All will be well. Is it not so, doctor?" I stammered.

"Yes, yes. There is no time to lose. Let your husband leave the room, signora."

She looked at the doctor and me with dilated eyes. She released my arm.

"Courage!" I repeated, choking.

I kissed her forehead, moist with perspiration, and turned to leave.

"Ah! Tullio!" she cried, behind me.

That heart-breaking cry signified: "I shall never see you again."

I made a movement as if about to return to her.

"Leave the room!" ordered the doctor imperiously.

I obeyed him. Some one shut the door behind me. I remained several minutes outside, listening; but my knees trembled; the beating of my heart dominated every other sound. I threw myself on the sofa, put my handkerchief between my teeth, buried my face in a cushion. I, too, suffered physical torture, similar to what an amputation, slowly and badly done, must be.

I could not make a step. Several minutes passed—an incalculable time. Thoughts and images furrowed my brain like sudden flashes. "Is he born? Suppose she is dead? Suppose they are both dead, mother and child? No, no! It is certain that she is dead and that he lives. But I hear no wailing. Why?" I conquered the terror that held me, and sprang to the door. I opened it and entered.

I immediately heard the doctor's voice shouting at me roughly:

"Do not come in! Do not disturb her! Do you want to kill her?"

Juliana looked like a dead woman. She was whiter than her pillow and motionless. My mother bent over her to place a compress in position. The doctor, calmly and methodically, was preparing an internal lotion. His face looked anxious, but his hands did not tremble. A basin of boiling water was steaming in a corner. Cristina was pouring water from a pitcher into a second basin, in which she held a thermometer. Another woman carried into an adjoining room a package of cotton. In the air was an odor of ammonia and of vinegar.

The slightest details of that scene, taken in at one glance, were impressed on me indelibly.

"Fifty degrees, mind," said the doctor, turning toward Cristina.

As I heard no wailing I looked about me. *Some one* was missing in the room.

"Where's the baby?" I asked, trembling.

"He's there, in the other room," replied the doctor. "Go and see him, and stay there."

I pointed to Juliana with a gesture of despair.

"Have no fear. Hand me the water, Cristina."

I entered the other room. My ears caught a feeble wail, scarcely perceptible. I saw on a layer of cotton a reddish-looking little body, violet-colored in spots, and whose back and the soles of the feet were being rubbed by the midwife's dry hands.

"Come here, signor, come and see him," said the midwife, continuing the friction. "Come and see what a fine boy he is. He did not breathe at first, but now all danger is passed. Look at the fine boy!"

She turned the baby round, putting him on his back.

"Look!"

She raised the baby and shook him up and down. The wailing became a little stronger.

But in my eyes was a strange sparkle that prevented me from seeing well. In all my being I felt some strange obtuse feeling, that removed from me the exact perception of all these real and coarse things.

"Look!" repeated the midwife again, replacing the wailing child on the cotton.

He was crying vigorously now. He breathed, he lived! I bent over that little palpitating body. I stooped to see him better, to examine him, to recognize the odious resemblance. But the little puffed-up face, still somewhat livid, with protruding eyeballs, swollen mouth, wandering chin—that deformed visage had almost nothing human about it, and inspired me with nothing but disgust.

"He wasn't breathing when he was born, did you say?"

I stammered.

"No, signor. A slight apoplexy."

She spoke without any intermission of the cares she was giving the infant.

"Julia, give me the linen."

And, while swathing the infant, she added:

"There is nothing to fear on his account. God bless him!"

Her expert hands took hold of the little soft head as if to mould it. The infant's wails increased in strength. He cried louder and louder, as if to prove that he was really alive, as if to provoke me and exasperate me.

"He is living, he is living. But the mother?"

Abruptly I re-entered the other room, beside myself.

"Tullio!"

It was Juliana's voice, as feeble as that of a dying woman.

XXXII.

The patient was now lying on her bed in the alcove. It was broad daylight.

I was seated at her bedside. I looked at her silently, sorrowfully. She was not asleep, but extreme weakness prevented all movement, removed all expression of life, made her seem inanimate. I made an instinctive movement to touch her, because I thought she had become cold as ice. But I was restrained by the fear of disturbing her. More than once during my continuous contemplation, beneath the shock of some sudden fear, I made a movement to rise and fetch the doctor. As I meditated I rolled between my fingers a little tuft of cotton which I carefully picked apart, and, from time to time, impelled by an invincible restlessness, I placed it with infinite precautions near Juliana's lips. The waving of the threads showed me the strength of her respiration.

She was stretched on her back, and a low pillow supported her head. In the frame formed by her chestnut hair, which was loosely caught up, the lines of her face seemed more refined than usual; showed more perfectly the waxy tones. Her night-dress was fastened at the neck and tight at her wrists, and her hands lay flat on the cover, so white that they were only distinguished from the linen by the azure of their veins. A supernatural goodness emanated from this poor creature, so pallid and motionless—a goodness that penetrated all my being, that filled my heart. And one would have thought that she was still repeating: "What

have you done to me?" Her colorless mouth, with its depressed angles, revealing a mortal lassitude; that arid mouth, twisted by so many convulsions, martyrized by so many cries, seemed constantly repeating: "What have you done to me?"

I examined the emaciation of her body, that scarcely formed a relief on the surface of the bed. Since the event had taken place, since finally the *other life* had been separated from her life forever, I no longer felt rise in me the least instinctive movement of repulsion, not the least sudden shade of anger, nothing that could affect my tenderness and pity. I no longer felt, on seeing her, anything but an effusion of immense tenderness and pity for the best and most unfortunate of human creatures. All my soul now hung on those poor lips which, from one moment to another, might render up their last sigh. As I looked at her pale face I thought with profound sincerity: "How happy I should be could I transfuse half of my own blood into her veins!"

I heard the light ticking of a clock placed on the night-table; I felt that fugitive time was slipping by, and I thought: "He is alive!" The flight of time caused me singular anxiety, very different from that which I had felt on other occasions—indefinable.

I thought: "He lives, and has a tenacious hold on life. At the time of his birth he was not breathing. When I saw him he still had the signs of asphyxia all over his body. If the care of the midwife had not saved him he would be now nothing but a little, livid cadaver, a harmless, negligible, and perhaps forgettable thing. I should only have Juliana's cure to think of, and I would not leave this room again. I would be the most assiduous and most gentle of nurses. I would succeed in realizing the transfusion of life, in accomplishing the miracle by the power of love. It would be impossible for her not to get well. She would resuscitate gradually, be regenerated with new blood. She would appear a new creature, freed from all impurity. We would both feel purified, worthy of each other, after so long and so painful an expiation. The illness, the convalescence would relegate the sad memories to an indefinite distance. And I would try to efface from her soul even the shadow of remembrance; I would try to procure for her perfect oblivion in love. After this great trial, every other human love would seem frivolous by comparison with ours." I exalted myself in the almost mystic splendor of this dream of the future, whilst, beneath my fixed gaze, Juliana's visage took on a sort of immateriality, an expression of supernatural goodness; as if she were already removed from the world; as if the presence of death had left behind in her being only a pure, spiritual essence. The mute question no longer struck me like a wound, no longer seemed terrifying to me: "What have you done to me?" I replied: "Have you not become, through my instrumentality, *the sister of Pain*? Has not suffering elevated your soul to a vertiginous height, from which it has been given you to see the world in an extraordinary light? Do you not owe to

me the revelation of the supreme truth? What matters our errors, our falls, our sins, if we have succeeded in tearing the veil from our eyes, if we have succeeded in setting at liberty what there is lowest in our miserable substance? We will obtain the highest joy to which the elect of earth can aspire—the consciousness of a re-birth."

I became exalted. The alcove was silent, the darkness full of mystery. Juliana's face acquired for me a superhuman aspect, and there was a solemnity in my contemplation, for I felt in the air the presence of invisible death. All my soul was suspended on those pallid lips, which, from one moment to another, might render their last breath. And those lips were contracted, emitted a groan. The painful contraction changed the lines of the face, persisted for several moments. The wrinkles in the forehead deepened, the skin of the eyelids trembled lightly, a white line appeared between the lashes.

I bent over the invalid. She opened her eyes, and immediately closed them. She did not appear to see me; her eyes showed no sign of recognition. One would have thought she was blind. Had an anemic amaurosis supervened? Had she been suddenly struck by blindness?

I heard some one enter the room. God grant it is the doctor. I left the alcove, and saw the doctor, my mother, and the midwife, who had entered quietly. Cristina followed them.

"Is she quiet?" inquired the doctor in a low voice.

"She's moaning. Who knows what she is still suffering?"

"Has she spoken?"

"No."

"She must not be disturbed in the least; remember that."

"Just now she opened her eyes for a moment. She did not seem to see anything."

The doctor entered the alcove, after having made a sign for us to remain where we were. My mother said to me:

"Come. It is time to renew the compresses. Come quickly. Let us go and see little Raymond. Federico is downstairs."

She took my hand. I let myself be led.

"He has fallen asleep," she continued. "He sleeps quietly. The wet-nurse will arrive this evening."

However sad and anxious she was when speaking of Juliana, she had a smile in her eyes when speaking of the infant. Her entire face was lit up by tenderness.

By the doctor's orders, a room distant from that occupied by the invalid had been selected for Raymond—a large, airy room, containing a thousand souvenirs of our childhood. Directly I entered I saw Federico, Maria, and Natalia grouped around the cradle and attentively contemplating the little sleeper. Fed-

erico turned and asked:

"How is Juliana?"

"Bad."

"Isn't she resting?"

"She is suffering."

In spite of myself, I answered almost harshly. A sort of aridity had suddenly invaded my soul. My only sensation was an indomitable aversion against the intruder, an impatience of the torture which people inflicted on me without knowing it. In spite of my efforts, I could not feint. Thus, we were all around the cradle—I, my mother, Federico, Maria, and Natalia—contemplating Raymond's slumber.

He was bound in the swaddling-clothes, and his head was covered with a cap trimmed with laces and ribbons. His face appeared less swollen, but still red, and the cheeks shone like the skin of a wound recently healed. A little saliva rolled from the corners of the closed mouth; the eyelids, without lashes, puffed up at the edges, covered the projecting eyeballs; the root of the nose, yet formless, was marked by a bruise.

"Whom does he resemble?" said my mother. "I cannot find any resemblance."

"He is too young," said Federico. "We must wait a few days."

Two or three times my mother looked at me and then looked at the infant, as if to compare the faces.

"No," she said. "I think he resembles Juliana most."

"At present," I interrupted, "he resembles no one. He is horrible."

"Horrible? How can you say so? He is perfectly beautiful. Look at that mass of hair."

With her fingers she gently raised the cap, disclosing the still soft skull, on which were seen several brown hairs.

"Let me touch them, grandmamma," begged Maria, stretching out her hand toward her brother's head.

"No, no. Do you wish to wake him?"

The skull had the appearance of wax somewhat softened by heat, and it seemed as if the slightest touch would leave a mark on it. My mother covered it again, and then bent over to kiss the forehead with infinite gentleness.

"Me, too, grandmother!" begged Maria.

"Yes, but gently."

The cradle was too high.

"Lift me," said Maria to Federico.

Federico raised her up in his arms, and I saw the beautiful rosy mouth of my daughter get ready to kiss before she succeeded in touching the forehead. I

saw her long locks play on the whiteness of the clothes.

Federico looked at me. But I did not smile.

"Me, too! Me, too!"

Natalia now clung to the edge of the cradle.

"Gently!"

Federico raised her too. And again I saw the long locks play on the whiteness of the bed linen, in the movement she made in bending over. This spectacle had petrified me, and my look certainly expressed my emotion. These kisses from lips so dear to me had not removed from the intruder his repugnant aspect; they had, on the contrary, rendered him more odious to me. I felt it would be impossible for me to touch that strange flesh, to make any gesture resembling paternal love. My mother observed me with uneasiness.

"You do not kiss him?" she asked.

"No, mother, no. He has done too much harm to Juliana. I cannot forgive him...."

I recoiled with an instinctive movement, a movement of manifest disgust. My mother remained for a moment stupefied, speechless.

"What are you saying, Tullio? Is it this poor baby's fault? Be just!"

Assuredly my mother had remarked the sincerity of my aversion. I could not succeed in restraining myself. All my nerves rebelled.

"Impossible now! Impossible! Let me be, mother. It will pass."

My tone was resolute. I trembled all over. There was a lump in my throat; the muscles of my face contracted. After so many hours of violent tension my entire being required relaxation. I believe that a great burst of sobs would have done me good, but the lump in my throat was too firm.

"You grieve me greatly, Tullio," said my mother.

"So you exact that I kiss him?" I burst out, beside myself.

And I approached the cradle, bent over the infant and kissed him.

The child awoke. He began to wail, feebly at first, then with increasing fury. I observed that the skin of his face took on a more reddish tint and wrinkled beneath the effort, while his whitish tongue trembled in his wide-open mouth. Although I was at the height of exasperation, I recognized the error committed. I felt the gaze of Federico, Maria, and Natalia fixed upon me.

"Forgive me, mother," I stammered. "I no longer know what I am doing; I am not in my right senses. Forgive me."

She had taken the infant from the cradle, and held it in her arms, without succeeding in quieting it. The wails went through me, overwhelmed me.

"Let us go out, Federico."

I left hastily. Federico followed me.

"Juliana is very ill. I cannot understand how any one can think of anything

else but her now," I said, as if to justify myself. "You have not seen her. She looks as if she were dying."

XXXIII.

For several days Juliana hovered between life and death. Her weakness was so great that the slightest effort was followed by exhaustion. She was compelled to remain constantly on her back, without the slightest movement. The least attempt to raise herself provoked symptoms of cerebral anemia. Nothing could be found to overcome the nauseas that seized her, to lift the weight that crushed down on her chest, to remove the buzzing that she heard without cease.

I remained day and night at her bedside, always on the watch, sustained by an indefatigable energy that surprised even myself. I employed all the strength of my own life in sustaining that life which was threatened with extinction. It seemed to me that, from the other side of the bed, death was watching, ready to profit by an opportune moment to ravish his prey. At times I had the real sensation that I was becoming transfused in the debilitated body of the invalid, that I communicated to her a little of my strength, that I imparted an impulse to her exhausted heart. Never did the miseries of illness inspire in me the least repugnance, the slightest disgust; never did any material object offend the delicacy of my senses. My senses, overexcited, were attentive only in perceiving the least changes in the condition of the invalid. Before she spoke a word, before she made a sign, I divined her desires, her wants, the degree of her suffering. By divination, without the physician having to make any suggestion, I had succeeded in being able to discover new and ingenious means of relieving one of her pains, of calming one of her attacks. I alone could persuade her to eat and to sleep. I resorted to every stratagem, to prayers and caresses to make her swallow her medicine. I pressed her so much that finally, incapable of further resistance, she had to submit to a salutary effort to triumph over the nausea. And there was nothing sweeter to me than the imperceptible smile with which she submitted to my will. Her slightest acts of obedience put my heart into a profound commotion. When she said, in her feeble voice: "Is this right? Am I good?" I felt my throat choke, my eyes become veiled.

She often complained of a painful and incessant throbbing at the temples. Then I would pass my finger-tips over her brow to appease the pain. I caressed

her hair very softly to lull her to sleep. When I perceived that she was asleep her respiration gave me the illusory sensation that I was solaced, as if the benefit of the slumber were extended even to me. In presence of this slumber I felt a sort of religious emotion. I was invaded by a vague fervor. I felt a desire to believe in the existence of some superior being, omnispective, omnipotent, in order to address my Prayers to him. There arose spontaneously from the depths of my soul the preludes of prayer according to the Christian formula. Sometimes the inner eloquence exalted me even to the summit of the true faith. Within me there awoke all the mystic tendencies transmitted to me by a long line of Catholic ancestors.

While my inner orisons were unfolding I contemplated the sleeper. She was still as pale as her night-dress. The transparency of her skin would have enabled me to count the veins on her cheeks, on her chin, on her neck. I watched her as if I had had the hope of seeing the beneficial effects of that repose, the slow diffusion of new blood engendered by the nourishment, the first premonitory signs of cure. I would have liked, by some supernatural faculty, to be present at the mysterious restorative elaboration which was taking place in that enfeebled body. And I persisted in hoping: "When she awakes she will feel stronger."

She seemed to feel a great relief when she held my hand in her own icy hands. Sometimes she took my hand and put it on the pillow, pressed her cheek against it with a childlike gesture, and gradually dozed off in that position. So as not to awaken her, I exerted all my strength to keep for a long, long time my arm in this one position, which was torture.

Once she said:

"Why don't you sleep here with me? You never sleep."

And she forced me to lay my head on her pillow.

"Let us go to sleep!"

I pretended I was going to sleep, to set her a good example. But when I opened my eyes I encountered hers wide open and fixed on me.

"Well!" I cried. "What are you doing?"

"And you?" she replied.

In her eyes there was an expression of such tender goodness that I felt my heart melt. I extended my mouth and kissed her eyelids.

She wished to kiss me the same way. Then she repeated:

"Let us go to sleep now!"

Thus, a veil of oblivion sometimes descended over our misfortune.

Often her poor feet were frozen. I felt them beneath the covers, and they seemed to me like marble. She herself said:

"They are dead."

They were so emaciated and so small that I could almost hold them in my

hand. They inspired me with a great pity. I warmed some linen at the fire to put on them, and did not tire of giving them attention. I would have liked to warm them with my breath, to cover them with kisses. With this new pity there mingled the distant recollections of love—recollections of the happy time when, by a habit that almost resembled a vow, I reserved for myself exclusively the privilege of putting on her shoes in the morning and taking them off at night with my own hands, while on my knees before her.

One day, after long vigils, I was so fatigued that an irresistible slumber seized me just at the moment when I had my hands beneath the cover holding the little dead feet in the warm cloth. My head sank forward, and I went to sleep in that attitude.

When I awoke I saw my mother, my brother, and the doctor, who were smiling. I was embarrassed.

"Poor boy! He is tired out," said my mother, stroking my hair with one of her most tender gestures.

Juliana said:

"Take him away, mother! Take him away, Federico!"

"No, no, I am not tired," I repeated; "I am not tired."

The doctor announced his departure. He declared that the invalid was out of danger and on the road to recovery. But it was necessary, by all means possible, to continue to excite the regeneration of blood. His colleague, Jemma de Tussi, with whom he had consulted and found of the same opinion, would continue the same treatment. He had less confidence in remedies than in the rigorous observation of the various hygienic rules and of diet that he had prescribed.

"In truth," he added, pointing to me, "I could not wish for a more intelligent, more vigilant, or more devoted nurse. He has done miracles, and he will do more. I shall go away perfectly easy."

It seemed to me that my heart leaped into my throat and was suffocating me. The unexpected praise of that serious man, in my mother's and brother's presence, caused me profound emotion. It was an extraordinary reward for me.

I looked at Juliana, and I saw that her eyes were full of tears. And beneath my look she burst out all at once into sobs. I made a superhuman effort to contain myself, but could not succeed. It seemed to me that my soul was melted. In my bosom I felt all the virtues in the world collected together in that unforgettable

hour.

XXXIV.

Juliana regained strength day by day, but slowly. My assiduity did not wane. I even took advantage of the remarks made by Dr. Vebesti to redouble my vigilance, to permit no one to replace me, to oppose my mother and brother, who advised me to rest. My body from now on became accustomed to the severe discipline, and scarcely ever felt fatigue. My entire life was enclosed between the walls of that room, in the intimacy of that alcove, in the circle where the invalid breathed.

As she required absolute quiet, as she was ordered to speak little so as to avoid fatigue, I exercised my ingenuity in keeping from her bedside even the members of her family. The alcove remained therefore isolated from the rest of the house. For hours and hours we—Juliana and I—were alone. And, crushed as she was by her illness, attentive as I was in my pious duty, we were at times able to forget our misfortune, to lose the sense of reality, to retain no other consciousness but that of our immense love. At times it seemed to me that beyond the curtains nothing existed any longer, so great was the concentration of my entire being on the invalid. Nothing occurred to recall the frightful thing to me. I saw before me a suffering sister, and my sole care was to relieve her pain.

Too often these veils of forgetfulness were brutally rent asunder. My mother spoke of Raymond. The curtains opened to give passage to the intruder.

My mother carried him in her arms. I was present, and I felt that I must have become pale, as all my blood flowed back to my heart. And Juliana, what sensation did she feel?

I looked at that reddish face, the size of a man's fist, half hidden by the bonnet trimmings, and with a fierce aversion that annihilated every other emotion in my soul, I thought: "What shall I do to deliver myself of you? Why were you not born dead?" My hate was boundless. It was instinctive, blind, invincible—I might say, carnal; for it seemed to me that it had its seat in my flesh, that it surged through all my fibres, through all my nerves, through all my veins. Nothing could conquer it, nothing could destroy it. It sufficed that the intruder were present, at no matter what hour, no matter under what circumstances, for there to be immediately induced in me a sort of annihilating rage, for me to fall beneath

the empire of a single and unique passion: my hate against him.

My mother said to Juliana:

"Look! How he has already changed in a few days! He resembles you more than Tullio, but he bears very little resemblance to either of you. He is still too little. We shall see later. Do you want to kiss him?"

She put the child's forehead to the invalid's lips. What sensation did Juliana feel?

The infant began to cry. I had the courage to say to my mother without bitterness:

"Take him away, please. Juliana needs quiet, and these shocks do her great harm."

My mother left the alcove. The wails died away, but continued to cause me the same sensation of painful laceration, the same desire to run and strangle him so as not to hear them. We heard them for some time while he was being carried away. When they finally ceased, the silence seemed horrible to me; it fell on me like an avalanche, it crushed me. But, instead of dwelling on my pain, I thought immediately that Juliana required assistance.

"Ah! Tullio, Tullio, it is not possible..."

"Be silent, Juliana! Be silent, if you love me! I beseech you, be silent!"

My voice, my gesture, was supplicating. All the irritation of my hate had fallen. I suffered only on account of her suffering; I feared only the distress caused the invalid, the shock she had received from that fragile life.

"If you love me you must think of nothing but your cure. Look at me! I think only of you; I suffer only for you. You must not torment yourself. You must abandon yourself entirely to my tenderness, in order to get well..."

In her feeble and trembling voice she answered:

"But who knows what you secretly feel in your heart? Poor soul!"

"No, no, Juliana, do not torment yourself! I suffer only for you and because I see you suffer. I forget all when I see you smile. When you feel well, I am happy. You must get well therefore if you love me; you must be quiet, obedient, patient. When you are well, when you are stronger, then ... *who knows*? God is good."

She murmured:

"My God! have pity on us!"

"In what manner?" I thought. "In causing the Intruder to die?" So, then, we both wished his death. The mother herself saw no other alternative than the destruction of her child. Yes, that was the only alternative. And my memory recalled the brief dialogue that, on one now distant evening, we had had beneath the elms; it recalled the painful confession. "But does she still hate him, now he is born? Can she feel a sincere aversion against the flesh of her flesh? Does she pray God sincerely to take from her the fruit of her own entrails?" I again recalled

the wild hope that I had conceived, as if in a flash, on the tragic night. "Suppose the idea of crime should occur to her and gradually become strong enough to influence her."

And I looked at her hands stretched out on the cloth, so pale that they were distinguishable from the sheets only by the azure of their veins.

XXXV.

Now that the invalid's condition was improving daily, a strange sorrow oppressed me. At the bottom of my heart, I did not see the sad days of the alcove pass by without a vague regret. Those mornings, those evenings, those nights, however desolate they were, had their grave sweetness. Every day my labor of charity seemed more beautiful. An abundance of love inundated my soul and submerged at times my sombre thoughts, procured for me at times forgetfulness of the frightful thing, awoke in me some consolatory illusion, some indefinite dream. Shut up in that alcove, I felt at times a sensation similar to that felt in the shadows of lonely chapels: I felt as if in a refuge from the violences of life, from opportunities for sinning. At times it seemed to me that the light curtains separated me from an abyss. I was assailed by sudden and unknown fears. Around me, in the night, I heard the silence of the entire house, and with the eyes of my soul I saw, in the corner of a distant room, by the side of a lighted lamp, the cradle in which slept the intruder, my mother's joy—my heir. A great shudder of horror ran through me, and I remained for a long time influenced by fright, under the sinister light of this single thought. The curtains separated me from an abyss.

But, now that Juliana's condition improved daily, excuses failed me for prolonging her isolation, and by degrees the routine of domestic life invaded the peaceful room. My mother, my brother, Maria, Natalia, Miss Edith, entered more frequently, remained longer. Raymond imposed himself upon the maternal tenderness. It was no longer possible to avoid it, either for Juliana or for me. We had to be lavish with kisses and smiles. We had to feint and artfully dissimulate, to endure the refined cruelties that chance brought to us, to be tortured by slow fire.

Nourished with healthy and substantial milk, surrounded by infinite care, Raymond gradually lost his first repulsive appearance and commenced to grow. He grew whiter, acquired a more clearly defined form, and now kept his gray

eyes wide open. But all his movements were odious to me, from the sucking of his lips when applied to the breast to the uncertain movements of his little hands. I could never discover anything attractive in him. I never had a thought of him that was not hateful. When I was obliged to touch him, when my mother brought him to me for a kiss, there ran over my entire skin the same thrill of horror which contact with an unclean animal would have caused me. Every fibre in me revolted, and the violence that I did myself threw me into despair.

Every day brought its new torture, and my mother was my grand inquisitor. Once, on unexpectedly entering the room, and parting the curtains of the alcove, I perceived the infant lying on the bed by Juliana's side. Nobody was present. We three were there together without witnesses. The infant slept peacefully, bound up in its swaddling-clothes.

"It was mother who left him here," stammered Juliana.

I fled like a madman.

Another time Cristina called me. I followed her into the room containing the cradle. My mother was there, with the baby on her knees.

The child was moving its limbs and arms, turning its eyes from one side to the other, burying its fingers in its gaping mouth. At the wrists, at the ankles, behind the knees on the lower abdomen, the flesh swelled out in little cushions and was covered with rice powder. My mother's hands caressed the little members with delight, pointing out to me every detail, expatiating on the skin which a recent bath had polished and made lustrous. The infant seemed to be enjoying it.

"Feel here, feel how solid he is already!" she said, inviting me to touch him.

I was obliged to touch him.

"See how heavy he is!"

I was obliged to lift him, to feel that warm and flaccid little body palpitate between my hands, which were seized by a trembling that was not due to tenderness.

"The love, the love, the love of his grandmother!" repeated my mother, tickling the chin of the infant, who did not yet know how to laugh.

The dear gray head, that had already bent over two blessed cradles before for the same caresses, and much whiter now, bent unconsciously over another's child, over the intruder. I imagined that she had not shown herself as tender toward Maria, toward Natalia, toward the true creatures of my blood.

She wished to swathe him herself. She made the sign of the cross on the abdomen.

"But you are not yet a Christian!"

And turning toward me, she said:

"The time has come to fix the baptismal day."

XXXVI.

Dr. Jemma, chevalier of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem, a handsome, cheerful old man, brought a bouquet of white chrysanthemums as an offering to Juliana.

"Oh! my favorite flowers!" said Juliana. "Thank you."

She took the bouquet, gazed on it for a long time, buried her tapering fingers in it; and there was a sad analogy between her pallor and that of the autumn flowers. They were chrysanthemums as large as full-blown roses, tufted, heavy; they had the color of a sickly, bloodless, almost lifeless skin, the livid whiteness noticeable on the cheeks of beggars benumbed by cold. A few were imperceptibly veined with violet, others were slightly tinged with yellow, with exquisite tones.

"Take them," she said to me. "Put them in water."

It was in the morning; it was in November. We had just passed the anniversary of the fatal day which these flowers recalled.

"*Que ferai-je sans Eurydice?*"

While I was putting the white chrysanthemums into a vase the air from "Orpheus" sang in my memory. There reappeared in my mind certain fragments of the singular scene that had taken place the year previous, and I saw Juliana again in that warm and golden light, in that suave perfume, in the midst of all those objects bearing the imprint of feminine grace, to which the phantom of the ancient melody seemed to impart the palpitation of a secret life, to spread the shadow of I know not what mystery. Had not these flowers awakened in her also some remembrance?

A mortal sorrow weighed on my soul—the sorrow of an inconsolable lover. The Other presented himself before me, and his eyes were as gray as those of the intruder.

The doctor said to me from the alcove:

"You may open the window. It is well to have the room well aired, to have plenty of sunlight enter."

"Oh, yes, yes, open it!" cried the invalid.

I opened it. At this moment my mother entered, together with the wet-nurse, who had Raymond in her arms. I remained between the curtains, and

leaned against the balustrade and looked out on the landscape. Behind me I heard the familiar voices.

We had arrived at the end of November. Already the summer of the Dead had passed. A great vacuous light extended over the humid country, over the noble and peaceful profile of the hillsides. It seemed that through the confused tops of the olive plants a silvery vapor was circulating. Here and there several threads of smoke whitened in the sun. The breeze bore, at intervals, the light rustling of falling leaves. The rest was only peace and silence.

"Why," I thought, "did she sing that morning? Why, on hearing her, did I feel so agitated?" She seemed to me another woman. Was she then in love with him? To what condition of her soul did that unusual effusion correspond? She sang because she loved. Perhaps I am mistaken. But I shall never know the truth.

It was no longer the jealous agitation of the senses, but a more noble affliction that arose from the depths of my soul. I thought: "What remembrance has she retained of him? Has that remembrance often tormented her? The son is a living bond. She finds in Raymond something of the man to whom she has belonged; she will find more precise resemblances. It is impossible that she should forget Raymond's father, and perhaps she has him constantly before her eyes. What would she feel if she knew he were doomed?"

And I stopped to imagine the progress of the paralysis, and to form an inner picture of that man's condition based on that furnished me by the recollection of poor Spinelli. I saw him once more seated in his large red leather armchair, of a clayey pallor, with every line of his visage drawn, his mouth distorted and gaping, full of saliva and stammering incomprehensibly. I once more saw the gesture he made every moment to gather in his handkerchief that ever-flowing saliva which rolled down the corners of his mouth.

"Tullio!"

It was my mother's voice. I turned and walked toward the alcove.

Juliana lay on her back, dejected and silent.

"It's all arranged. The baptism takes place the day after to-morrow," said my mother. "The doctor believes that Juliana must remain in bed for some time yet."

"How do you think she is, doctor?" I asked.

"It seems to me that there is a slight pause in her progress," replied he, shaking his fine white head. "I find her very feeble. We must increase the alimentation, force it a little."

Juliana interrupted him, looking at me the while with a very wan smile:

"He examined my heart."

"Well?" I asked, turning abruptly toward the old man.

I thought I saw a shadow pass over his forehead.

”It is a perfectly healthy heart,” he hastened to answer. ”It only needs blood ... and quiet. Come! Come! Be brave! How is your appetite to-day?”

The invalid made a movement of the lips expressive of disgust. Her eyes were fixed on the open window, through which entered the warm sunlight.

”It is cold to-day, is it not?” she asked timidly, putting her hands beneath the bed-covers.

One could see that she was shivering.

XXXVII.

The following day Federico and I paid a visit to Giovanni di Scordio. It was the last afternoon of November. We went on foot, crossing the tilled fields.

We walked along silent and thoughtful. The sun slowly set on the horizon. An impalpable golden dust floated above our heads in the quiet air. The humid earth had a vigorous, brown color, an aspect of tranquil energy, and, so to speak, a peaceful consciousness of its virtue. From the furrows mounted a visible breath, like that exhaled from the nostrils of cattle. Beneath the soft light the white objects took on an extraordinary whiteness, a snowlike purity. A cow in the distance, a plowman’s shirt, a stretched sheet, the walls of a farm-house, shone like under the light of the full moon.

”You are sad,” said Federico to me, gently.

”Yes, I am sad. I have no hope left.”

There was another long silence. Flocks of birds rose from the bushes with a fluttering of wings. The deadened tinkling of the little bells of a distant troop reached us.

”Of what are you hopeless?” asked my brother in the same kind way.

”Of Juliana’s health, and also of mine.”

He remained silent; he did not speak a single word of consolation. Perhaps he was feeling internally the pressure of pain.

”I have a presentiment,” I went on, ”that Juliana will never leave her bed.”

He remained silent. We passed along a path bordered by trees, and the fallen leaves crackled beneath our feet, and at the places where there were no leaves, the soil had a hollow sound, as if mined by subterranean cavities.

”When she is dead,” I added, ”what will become of me?”

A sudden fear came upon me, a sort of panicky terror; and I looked at my

brother, who remained silent, with a frown on his face. I looked about me at the mute desolation of the day. Never before, so clearly as then, had I had the sensation of the frightful emptiness of life.

"No, no, Tullio," said my brother. "Juliana *cannot die*."

It was a vain assertion, without any value in face of the fiat of Destiny. And yet he had pronounced these words with a simplicity that gave me a shock, so extraordinary did they appear to me. Thus, at times, children suddenly say things that go straight to the heart, and as if a prophetic voice spoke through their unconscious lips.

"Can you read the future?" I asked him, without a shadow of irony.

"No, but I have that presentiment, and I believe it."

Once more my brother had inspired confidence in me; once more, thanks to him, I felt a slight relaxation of the iron band that wounded my heart. But it was only a short respite. During the remainder of our walk he spoke to me of Raymond.

When we were near the place inhabited by Giovanni di Scordio, Federico perceived the tall figure of the old man in a field.

"Look at him! He is sowing. We bring him the invitation at a solemn hour."

We approached. My inner trembling was as strong as if I were on the point of committing a profanation. Was I not, in fact, about to profane a beautiful and great thing? Was I not about to solicit the spiritual paternity of that venerable old man for the child of adultery?

"See, what a noble figure!" cried Federico, stooping and pointing to the sower. "He has only a man's stature, and yet he looks like a giant."

In order to watch him we stopped behind a tree at the edge of the field. Giovanni, attentive to his labor, had not yet perceived us.

He walked straight before him in the field, with measured slowness. His head was covered by a green and black woolen cap, with two ear-laps that hung down his cheeks, in the ancient Phrygian fashion. A little white bag, full of seed and attached to his neck by a leather thong, hung before him at the waist. With his left hand he held the bag open, while with his right he took out the seed and scattered it. His gesture was sweeping, vigorous, and sure, cadenced with an equal rhythm. The seed, flying from his hand, flashed an instant in the air with golden scintillations and fell in an equal rain on the humid furrows. The sower advanced slowly, burying his naked feet in the earth, which yielded beneath his steps, his head high in the sanctity of the light. His entire person was simple, sacred, and grand.

We entered the field.

"My respects to you, Giovanni," cried Federico, going forward to meet the old man. "Blessed be your seed! Blessed be your future bread!"

”My respects to you,” I repeated in my turn.

The old man left his work and uncovered his head.

”Giovanni, you must cover yourself, if you wish us to remain covered,” said Federico.

The old man put on his cap, smiling, confused, almost intimidated. He asked with a modest air:

”To what do I owe so much honor?”

I answered in a voice which I forced to be firm:

”I came to beg you to hold my son at the baptism.”

The old man looked at me with surprise; then he looked at my brother. His confusion increased. He murmured:

”You do me too much honor!”

”Well, what is your answer?”

”I am at your orders. May God reward you for the honor you have done me to-day! May God be praised for the joy that he has accorded me in my old age! May the benedictions of heaven descend on your son!”

”Thank you, Giovanni.”

I gave him my hand. And I saw his profound and sad eyes become moist from tenderness. My heart swelled with acute anguish.

The old man asked me:

”What name will you give him?’

”Raymond.”

”The name of your father of sacred memory. He was a man, and you resemble him.”

My brother said:

”Do you sow alone?”

”Alone, yes. I sow it and I reap it.”

He showed the harrow, and the pickaxe that glittered on the brown earth. All around could be seen the still uncovered seed, the germs of future grain.

My brother said:

”Continue. We will leave you to your work. You will come to-morrow morning to the Badiola. Farewell, Giovanni. May God bless your work!”

We clasped that unwearied hand, sanctified by the seed it scattered, by the good it had shed. The old man made a movement to accompany us as far as the road; but he stopped and said, not without hesitation:

”Grant me one favor, I pray you.”

”Speak out, Giovanni.”

He opened the bag suspended from his neck.

”Take a handful of seed and throw it on my furrows.”

I plunged my hand first into the wheat, took as much as I could, and scat-

tered it. My brother did the same.

"And now, heed what I tell you," continued Giovanni di Scordio in an agitated voice, contemplating the seeded ground. "God grant that my godson be as good as the bread raised from this seed! Amen!"

XXXVIII.

The following morning the baptismal ceremony took place without festivity or pomp, on account of Juliana's condition. My mother, my brother, Maria, Natalia, Miss Edith, the midwife, the wet-nurse, and the Chevalier Jemma were present. I remained by the invalid's bedside.

A heavy somnolence weighed upon her. She scarcely breathed through her half-open mouth, as pale as the palest flowers that blossom in the shade. Darkness reigned in the alcove. On looking at her, I thought: "Can I not save her? I have succeeded in banishing death so far; but death seems to be returning. If there is no change quickly, she will certainly die. So long as I succeeded in keeping Raymond away from her, so long as I succeeded by tenderness in causing her a partial illusion and forgetfulness, she seemed desirous of getting well. But when she sees her son, when the torture begins again, she grows worse from day to day, she loses more blood than if the hemorrhage still continued. I witness her agony. She no longer hears me, no longer obeys me as she did before. Who will be the cause of her death? *He*. It is he, most assuredly, he who will kill her." A flood of hate mounted from the deepest depths of my being, and I felt it even invade my hands with a homicidal impulse. I saw the little malefic being who was growing fat on milk, who prospered in peace, removed from all danger, in the midst of infinite cares. "My mother loves him better than she loves Juliana. My mother is more concerned about him than she is about the poor dying creature. Oh! I will make away with him, at any cost. I must!" And the vision of the crime already consummated passed over me like a flash: the vision of the little dead body in swaddling-clothes, the little innocent corpse in its coffin. "The baptism shall be his viaticum. Giovanni's arms will carry him."

A sudden curiosity seized me. The painful spectacle attracted me. Juliana was still slumbering. I cautiously left the alcove; I left the room; I called Cristina and left her on guard; then, with rapid step, I walked toward the gallery, suffocated by anguish.

The small door was open. I perceived a man kneeling before the railing; and I recognized Pietro, the faithful old servant who was with us at my birth and was present at my baptism. He arose, not without pain.

"Stay, stay, Pietro!" I said in a low voice, placing my hand on his shoulder to make him kneel again. And I knelt down near him, and leaned my head against the railing, and looked below into the chapel. I saw everything with perfect clearness; I heard the formulas of the ritual.

The ceremony had already begun. I learned from Pietro that the infant had already received the salt. The officiant was the priest of Tussi, Don Gregorio Artese. He was at that moment reciting the Credo with the sponsor, the one in a loud voice, the other repeating in low tones. Giovanni held the infant with his right arm, the arm which the evening before had sowed the wheat. His left hand was laid on the white ribbons and laces. And those bony hands, dry and brown, which seemed as if cast in living bronze—those hands, hardened by the instruments of agriculture, sanctified by the good they had done, by the immense labor that they had accomplished, and now occupied in holding that little child, had such charming delicacy and timidity that I could not remove my gaze from them. Raymond did not cry, but his mouth moved ceaselessly, full of a liquid froth that ran down his chin on to the embroidered bib.

After the exorcism the priest wet his finger with saliva and touched the little pink ears, pronouncing the miraculous word:

"*Ephpheta.*"

Then he touched the nostrils, saying:

"*In odorem sanctitatis...*"

Then he dipped his thumb in the oil of the catechumens, and while Giovanni held the child on its back, he administered the unction in form of a cross on the chest; and when Giovanni turned the child on its stomach, he administered the unction between the shoulder blades, in form of a cross, saying:

"*Ego te linio oleo salutis in Christo Jesu Domino Nostro...*"

Then, with a small tuft of cotton, he wiped off the unction.

Then he removed the violet veil, the color of mourning and of sorrow, and put on the white stole, in token of joy, in order to announce that the original sin was about to be removed. And he addressed Raymond by his name, putting to him the three solemn questions, which the sponsor answered:

"*Credo, credo, credo.*"

The chapel was singularly sonorous. A ray of sunlight, entering by one of the high oval windows, fell upon the marble paving stones covering the deep sepulchres where several of my ancestors reposed in peace. My mother and brother stood behind Giovanni, side by side. Maria and Natalia stood on tiptoe to catch a view of the child, inquisitive, smiling from time to time, whispering to

each other. These whisperings caused Giovanni to turn partially around, with an indulgent gesture indicating all the ineffable tenderness which the old man bore children and that overflowed from his big heart.

"*Raymunde, vis baptizari?*" asked the officiant.

"*Volo*," responded the sponsor, repeating the word that had been prompted to him.

The clerk presented the silver basin, in which shone the baptismal water. My mother removed the infant's hood, while the sponsor extended the child on its stomach in order to receive the ablution. The round head, on which I could distinguish the whitish eruptions of the milk-crust, hung above the basin. And the priest, after having taken some water from a little vase, poured it three times on the child's head, each time making the sign of the cross.

"*Ego te baptize in nomine Patris, et Filii, et Spiritus Sancti.*"

Raymond began to wail violently, and louder still when his head was being dried. And, when Giovanni raised him up, I saw that his face was reddened by the afflux of blood and by his efforts, and winkled by the contractions of the mouth. And, as usual, the wailings caused me the same sensation of painful laceration, the same exasperation of anger. Nothing in him irritated me more than that voice, than that obstinate wailing which for the first time had struck me so cruel a blow on that lugubrious October morning. It was an intolerable shock to my nerves.

The priest dipped his thumb into the consecrated oil and anointed the neophyte's forehead, reciting the ritual, which rose above the wailings. Then he put on the white robe, symbol of Innocence.

"*Accipe vestem candidam.*"

Then he handed the blessed taper to the sponsor.

"*Accipe lampadem ardentem.*"

The Innocent became quiet. His eyes were fixed on the little flame that trembled at the tip of the long colored candle. Giovanni di Scordio bore the newly made Christian on his right arm, and with his left hand he held the symbol of the divine fire, in a simple and grave attitude, regarding the priest who recited the litany. He towered above all those present by a full head. All round there was no whiteness as pure as the whiteness of his hair, not even the Innocent's robe.

"*Vade in pace, et Dominus sit tecum.*"

"*Amen.*"

My mother took the Innocent from the old man's arms, pressed him against her bosom, and kissed him. My brother kissed him too. All the spectators kissed him in turn.

Near me Pietro was still on his knees weeping. Overcome, distracted, I rose abruptly, went out, crossed the corridors rapidly, and entered Juliana's room unannounced.

Cristina asked with fear, lowering her voice:

"What has happened, signor?"

"Nothing, nothing. Is she awake?"

"No, signor. I think she is asleep."

I parted the curtains and softly entered the alcove. At first I perceived nothing in the darkness but the whiteness of the pillow. I approached, and bent over. Juliana's eyes were wide open and were gazing at me fixedly. Perhaps she divined all my anguish from my aspect; but she said not a word. She closed her eyes again, as if never to open them.

XXXIX.

From that day began the last and vertiginous period of the lucid madness which was to lead me to the crime. From that day commenced the premeditation of the easiest and surest means of causing the Innocent's death.

It was a cold, ingenious, incessant premeditation, that absorbed all my inner faculties. The fixed idea possessed me absolutely with inconceivable power and tenacity. All my being labored in a supreme crisis; and the fixed, clear, rigid idea directed me, without deviation, toward the goal as if I were gliding along over steel rails. My perspicacity seemed to be trebled. Nothing escaped me, within me or about me. There was not a single minute of relaxation in my circumspection. I said nothing, I did nothing, that could awaken suspicion or cause surprise. I simulated, I dissimulated, ceaselessly, and not only with my mother, my brother, and all the others who knew nothing, but even with Juliana.

With Juliana I affected resignation, appeasement, at times even a sort of forgetfulness. I studied to avoid the slightest allusions to the intruder. I sought by every means to encourage her, to inspire her with confidence, to cause her to observe the directions that must bring her back to health. I multiplied my zealous endeavors. I wanted to feel for her a tenderness so profound, so forgetful of the past, that it would permit her to again find the freshest and purest savor in life. I felt again the sensation that my being was becoming transfused into the body of the invalid, that I was communicating to her some of my strength, that I imparted an impulse to her exhausted heart. It was I, it seemed, who, from day to day, forced her to live and breathed into her an artificial vigor, while waiting the tragic and liberating hour. I repeated to myself: "To-morrow!" and to-morrow

came, passed, disappeared, without the hour having sounded. I again repeated: "To-morrow!"

I was convinced that the mother's health depended on the child's death. I was convinced that, after the suppression of the intruder, she would be cured. I thought: "It would be impossible for her not to get well. She would resuscitate gradually, be regenerated with new blood. She would appear a new creature, freed from all impurity. We would both feel purified, worthy of each other, after so long and so painful an expiation. The illness, the convalescence, would relegate the sad memories to an indefinite distance. And I would try to efface from her soul even the shadow of the recollection; I would try to cause her perfect oblivion in love. After this great trial, every other human love would seem frivolous by comparison with ours." The vision of the future burned me with impatience; the incertitude became intolerable to me; the crime appeared to me exempt from horror. I bitterly reproached myself for the perplexities which an excess of prudence kept me in; but no light had yet illumined my brain. I had not succeeded in finding a *sure means*.

Raymond must appear to have died a natural death. The doctor himself must not have a glimmer of suspicion. Of the various methods I examined, not one seemed to me satisfactory, practicable. And yet, while I awaited the revealing flash, the divine inspiration, I felt myself attracted by a strange fascination toward the victim.

Frequently I unexpectedly entered the nurse's room with so strong a palpitation that I feared she would hear my heart-beats. Her name was Anna. She was a woman from Montegorgo Pausula, of a grand race of robust mountaineers. She was dressed after the fashion of her country—a red petticoat with a thousand straight and symmetrical folds, a black corsage embroidered with gold, with two long sleeves through which her arms were rarely passed. Her head arose bistre-like above her very white chemise; but the whiteness of her eyes and teeth exceeded in intensity the snowy whiteness of the fabric. Her eyes, brilliant like enamel, remained almost always motionless, without revery, without thought. The mouth was large, half-open, taciturn, illuminated by a row of even and well-set teeth. The hair, so black that it seemed to have a violet reflection, was parted on a low forehead, and terminated in two tresses that were rolled up behind the ears like the horns of a ram. She was almost constantly seated, with the nursing child in her arms, in a sculptured attitude, neither sad nor joyous.

I entered. Usually the room was dark. I saw the white spot made by Raymond's dresses on the arm of that bronzed and powerful woman, who fixed on me her eyes like those of an inanimate idol, without a word and without a smile.

Sometimes I stopped and watched the nursing infant sucking at the rounded breast, which was of a singularly light tone in comparison with the

face, and crossed by blue veins. He sucked, sometimes gently, sometimes vigorously, sometimes without appetite, sometimes with sudden avidity. The soft cheek followed the movement of the lips, the throat palpitated with every aspiration, the nose almost disappeared beneath the pressure of the swollen breast. I imagined seeing the good spread through that tender body with that inflow of fresh, healthy, and substantial milk. I imagined that at every new swallow the vitality of the intruder became more tenacious, more resistant, more malefic. I felt a dull chagrin at noticing that he was growing and bore no indication of weakness, except those whitish crusts, light and inoffensive. I thought: "Have not all the agitations, all the sufferings of the mother, while she was bearing him, done him some harm? Or has he really some organic vice that is not yet manifest, but which, in the end, could develop and cause his death?"

One day, when I found him undressed in his cradle, I surmounted my repugnance; I felt him, I examined him from head to foot, I applied my ear to his chest to listen to his heart beat. He drew up his little limbs, then forcibly extended them; he waved his hands, all covered with dimples and folds; he buried in his mouth his fingers terminated by minute nails. Folds of flesh accumulated around the wrists, at the ankles, behind the knees, on the thighs, at the groins, on the lower abdomen.

Several times also I watched him while he slept. I looked at him for a long time, thinking and re-thinking of the means, made absent-minded by the inner vision of the little corpse in swaddling-clothes stretched in the coffin, amidst the wreaths of white chrysanthemums, between four lighted candles. He slept very peacefully; he lay on his back, his fist closed over his thumb. At times his moist lips made a movement as of sucking. If the innocence of that slumber went to my heart, if the unconscious act of those lips softened me, I said to myself, as if to make my resolution firm: "He *must* die!" And I represented to myself the sufferings already endured for him—the recent sufferings, those that were preparing—and how much affection he usurped to the detriment of my own children, and Juliana's agony, and all the menaces that the mysterious tempest suspended over our heads concealed. In that way I rekindled my homicidal will, I confirmed the sentence of the sleeper. In a corner, in the dark, the guardian was seated, the woman from Montegorgo, taciturn, motionless, like an idol; and the whiteness of her eyes, the whiteness of her teeth, rivalled in brilliancy the large golden

circles in her ears.

XL.

One evening—it was the 14th of December—I was returning to the Badiola with Federico, when we perceived before us, in the avenue, a man whom we recognized to be Giovanni di Scordio.

"Giovanni!" cried my brother.

The old man stopped. We approached.

"Good evening, Giovanni. What brings you here?"

The old man smiled, timid, embarrassed, as if we had detected him doing wrong.

"I came," he stammered, "I came to ask about my godson."

He was very much ashamed. One would have thought that he was asking pardon for his temerity.

"You wish to see him?" asked Federico, in a low voice, certain of having understood the sweet and sad sentiment which stirred the heart of the deserted grandfather.

"No, no—I only came to ask——"

"Don't you wish to see him?"

"No—yes— It would perhaps be too much trouble—just now."

"Come," said Federico, taking him by the hand like a child. "Come and see him."

We entered. We went up to the nursery.

My mother was there. She smiled kindly at Giovanni, and cautioned us to make no noise.

"He is asleep," she said.

And, turning toward me, she added with uneasiness:

"He coughed a little to-day."

The news agitated me, and my agitation was so manifest that my mother thought she reassured me by adding:

"Only very little, you know—a mere nothing."

Already Federico and the old man had approached the cradle, and by the light of the lamp they looked at the little sleeper. The old man had bent over, and around him there was no whiteness as pure as the whiteness of his hair.

"Kiss him," whispered Federico.

He rose, looked at my mother and at me with an indefinite look; then he passed his hand over his mouth, over his chin, which had not been freshly shaven.

And in a low tone he said to my brother, with whom he was less ceremonious:

"If I kiss him my beard will prick him, and certainly awaken him."

My brother, who saw that the poor, forsaken old man was dying with desire to kiss the child, encouraged him with a gesture. And then that great hoary head bent over the cradle, softly, softly, softly.

XLI.

When my mother and I were alone in the room, in front of the cradle in which Raymond still slept with the kiss on his forehead, she said to me, very much moved:

"Poor old man! Do you know that he comes here almost every evening? He hides himself in the garden. I heard it from Pietro, who has seen him wandering around the house. The day of the baptism he had the window of this room pointed out to him, doubtless so that he might come and look at it. Poor old man! How sorry I am for him!"

I listened to Raymond's breathing. It did not seem to me to be changed. His slumber was tranquil.

I said: "So he coughed to-day?"

"Yes, a little, Tullio. But do not let that worry you."

"Perhaps he has taken cold?"

"It seems impossible that he should have taken cold, with so many precautions."

A flash passed through my brain. A great internal trembling assailed me suddenly. All at once my mother's presence became insupportable. I was agitated, I was discountenanced, I feared I would betray myself. The inner idea threw out such flashes that fear overtook me: "Something must show on my face." This fear was vain; but I could not command myself. I made a step forward and bent over the cradle.

My mother perceived something; but she interpreted it in my favor, for she added:

"How frightened you are! Don't you hear how calm his breathing is? Don't you see how peaceful his sleep is?"

But, in spite of the words she spoke, there was anxiety in her voice, and she did not succeed in hiding her apprehension from me.

"You are right, it is nothing," I answered, doing myself violence. "Do you remain here?"

"Yes, until Anna returns."

I left the room. I went to Juliana. She expected me. All was ready for her dinner, which I habitually took with her so that the invalid's meal should be less sad and that my example and my pleading should persuade her to eat. In my acts, in my words, I showed myself unusually exalted. I was a prey to a strange superexcitation of which I had an exact consciousness; but, although capable of watching myself, I was not able to moderate it. Contrary to my habit, I drank two or three glasses of the wine prescribed for Juliana. I also wished her to take more than usual.

"You feel a little better, do you not?"

"Yes."

"If you are good I promise you that you shall get up for Christmas—in ten days more. You can regain your strength in ten days, if you want to. Drink a little more, Juliana."

She looked at me with surprise mingled with curiosity, making an effort to give me her entire attention. Perhaps she was already tired, perhaps her eyelids began to feel heavy. The raised position was again beginning to cause in her the symptoms of cerebral anemia. She moistened her lips with the wine that I handed her.

"Tell me," I continued, "where would you like to pass your convalescence?"

She smiled feebly.

"At the seaside? Shall I write to Aric to find us a villa? If only the Ginosa villa were free! Do you remember it?"

She smiled feebly again.

"You are tired? Perhaps my voice tires you?"

I perceived that she was on the point of losing consciousness. I supported her, I removed the pillows that raised her, and put her at her ease by lowering her head; helped her with the usual remedies. Very soon she seemed to come to, for she murmured, as if in a dream:

"Yes, yes, let us go."

XLII.

A strange anxiety harassed me. Sometimes it was like a sort of keen pleasure, a kind of confused joy; sometimes it was like an exasperating impatience and unbearable frenzy; sometimes it was a desire to see some one, to search for some one, to speak, to unbosom myself. At times it was a desire for solitude, a desire to run and shut myself up in some place where I would be alone with myself, where I could look into my soul clearly, where I could follow the development of my idea, examine and study the details of the approaching event, make my preparations. These divers and extraordinary impulses, and still other impulses, innumerable, indefinable, inexplicable, succeeded each other impetuously in my soul with an extraordinary acceleration of my inner life.

The flash that had traversed my brain, that ray of sinister light, seemed all at once to have illuminated a pre-existent state of consciousness, seemed to have awakened a deep layer of my memory. I felt that it was a *recollection.* But, despite several efforts that I made, I could not recover the origin of this recollection or discover its nature. Without doubt *I remembered.* Was it the remembrance of something read long ago? Had I found in some book the description of a similar case? Or had some one told me the particulars as having occurred in actual life? Or was that sensation of *remembrance* illusory; was it only the effect of a mysterious association of ideas? What is certain is, that the means, it seemed to me, had been suggested to me by some strange person. It seemed to me that, all at once, some one had relieved me of all my perplexities by saying: "*This is how it must be done—what the other did in your place.*" Who was *that other*? I must certainly have known him in some manner. But, in spite of all my efforts, I could not separate him from myself, render him objective. It is impossible for me to define with exactness the singular state of consciousness in which I found myself. I had the complete notion of a fact in all the circumstances of its development; in other words, I had the notion of a series of acts by which a man had succeeded in putting a certain project in execution. But that man, my predecessor, was unknown to me, and I could not associate with that notion the images relative thereto without putting myself in that man's place. It was therefore I whom I saw accomplishing the special acts already accomplished by another, imitating

the conduct assumed by another in a case similar to mine. The feeling of the initial spontaneity was lacking.

When I left Juliana's room, I passed a few minutes in uncertitude, wandering aimlessly along the corridors. I met no one. I walked toward the nursery; I listened at the door; I heard my mother speaking in a low voice; I went away.

Perhaps she had not left the cradle? Had the infant had a more serious attack of coughing? I well knew the bronchial catarrh to which new-born babes are subject, that terrible malady, with its insidious progress. I remembered the danger that Maria had run in her third month; I remembered all the symptoms. At the beginning Maria had sneezed several times, coughed lightly; she had shown a strong tendency to sleep. "Who knows?" I thought. "*The good God* may perhaps intervene in time, and I may be saved." I retraced my steps; I listened again; I heard my mother's voice again; I entered.

"Well, how is Raymond?" I asked, without dissimulating my emotion.

"He is doing well. He is quiet; he has not coughed again; his breathing is regular and temperature normal. Look! he has taken the breast."

In fact, my mother seemed to be reassured, tranquillized.

Anna, seated on the bed, was nursing the infant, who drank eagerly, and, at times, during the aspiration, his lips made a slight noise. Anna's face was bent down, her eyes fixed on the carpet, motionless as bronze.

The little flickering lamp-flame threw reflections and shadows on her red petticoat.

"Is it not too warm here?" I said, because I felt a slight suffocation.

The room really was very hot. In a corner, over a red-hot fire, some swaddling-clothes had been placed to warm. The hissing of boiling water could also be heard. From time to time the windows were rattled by the whistling, howling wind.

"Do you hear how furious the wind is?" murmured my mother.

I became inattentive to all other sounds. I listened to the wind with anxious interest. Several shudders ran through my bones, as if a stream of cold had penetrated me. I walked toward the window. On opening the inner shutters my fingers trembled. I leaned my forehead against the icy glass and looked out, but the mist suddenly produced by my breath prevented my seeing anything. I raised my eyes, and saw through the upper window the scintillation of the starry sky.

"It is a clear night," I said, leaving the window.

Within me I had a vision of the homicidal night, clear as a diamond, while my eyes wandered toward Raymond, who was still feeding.

"Has Juliana eaten anything this evening?" asked my mother of me in an affectionate tone.

"Yes," I answered rather harshly.

And I thought:

"This whole evening you have not found a minute's time to go and see her! It is not the first time that you neglect her. You have given your heart to Raymond."

XLIII.

The following morning Dr. Jemma examined the child and declared that he was perfectly healthy. He attached no importance whatever to the cough noticed by my mother. Then, smiling at the excess of cares and anxiety, he recommended caution during the very cold days, advised extreme prudence in washing and bathing.

I was present while he spoke of those things before Juliana, and two or three times my eyes met hers, in fugitive flashes.

So, then, *Providence* would not come to my aid. I must act; I must profit by an opportune moment, hasten the event. I made up my mind. I waited for the evening to commit the crime resolved upon.

I gathered together all that yet remained of my energy; I sharpened my perspicacity; I studied all my words, all my acts. I said nothing, I did nothing that could awaken suspicion, provoke surprise. My circumspection did not relax for a second. Not for a moment did I feel a sentimental weakness. My inner sensibility was compressed, suffocated, and my mind concentrated every useful faculty to prepare the way for the solution of a material problem that was expressed as follows: to succeed at evening, to remain alone with the intruder for several minutes, under certain precise conditions of security.

In the course of the day I entered the nursery several times. Anna was always at her post, an impassable guardian. If I addressed a few questions to her, she answered in monosyllables. Her voice was guttural, of singular quality. Her silence and inertia irritated me.

As a rule, she did not go out except at meal-time; and then, as a rule, she was replaced by my mother or by Miss Edith, or by Cristina, or by some other of the maid-servants. In the last case I could easily rid myself of the witness by giving an order. But there always remained the danger that some one would unexpectedly come at the critical moment. Moreover, I was at the mercy of chance, since I was not able to select the substitute myself. That evening, as on several evenings

past, it would probably be my mother. However, it seemed to me impossible to indefinitely prolong my espionage and anguish, to keep watch endlessly, to live in this continual expectation of the fatal hour.

While I was in this perplexity Miss Edith entered with Maria and Natalia: two little graces animated by a run in the open air, enveloped in their sable fur mantles, with their hoods over their heads, gloved hands, and cheeks rosy from the cold. When they perceived me, they came rushing towards me joyously, and for several minutes the room was full of their chatter.

"The mountaineers have come," cried Maria. "The nine days' prayers begin this evening in the chapel. If you saw the manger that Pietro has made! You know, grandmother has promised us a Christmas-tree. Didn't she, Miss Edith? We must put it in mamma's room. Mamma will be well by Christmas, won't she? Oh! do try and make her well!"

Natalia had stopped to look at Raymond, and, from time to time, she laughingly made a face at the infant, who ceaselessly moved his limbs as if to free himself from his bandages. A caprice seized her:

"I want to take him in my arms!"

She noisily insisted on having him. She put forth all her strength to carry her burden, and her face grew serious as if she were playing at being mother with her doll.

"My turn now!" cried Maria.

The odious little brother passed from one to the other without crying. But suddenly, while Maria walked around with him under the watchful eyes of Miss Edith, he lost his equilibrium and was about to slip from the hands that held him. Edith caught him, took him, gave him back to the nurse, who seemed profoundly absorbed, far from all persons and surrounding things.

Following my secret thought, I said:

"So it's to-night that the nine days' prayers begin?"

"Yes, to-night."

I looked at Anna, who seemed startled out of her torpor, and paid unusual attention to the conversation.

"How many mountaineers came?"

"Five," answered Maria, who appeared to be minutely informed about everything. "Two bagpipes, two flageolets, and one fife."

"They come from the mountains," I said, turning toward Anna. "Perhaps one of them is from Montegorgo."

The nurse's eyes had lost their enamel-like hardness, had become animated, had acquired a humid and sad lustre. Her entire face visibly expressed extraordinary emotion. Then I understood that she was suffering, and that her malady

was homesickness.

XLIV.

Evening approached. I went down to the chapel, and saw the preparations for the nine days' prayers: the manger, the flowers, the candles of virgin wax. I went out without knowing why; I looked up at the window of Raymond's room. I walked up and down the lawn with rapid steps in the hope of overcoming my convulsive trembling, the acute chill that penetrated my bones, the spasm that contracted my empty stomach.

It was a freezingly cold evening. A greenish lividity spread over the distant horizon, and at the bottom of the valley, where flowed the tortuous Assoro. The river glistened, solitary.

A sudden fright seized me. I thought: "Am I afraid?"

It seemed to me that an invisible witness was watching my soul. I felt the same uneasiness that is caused at times by a fixed and magnetic look. I thought: "Am I afraid? Of what? Of accomplishing the act, or of being discovered?"

I was frightened by the great trees, by the immensity of the sky, at the reflections of the Assoro, at all the confused voices of the fields. The Angelus sounded. I re-entered, or, rather, I rushed in, as if some one were at my heels.

I met my mother in the corridor, which had not yet been lighted.

"Where were you, Tullio?"

"I was out. I took a walk."

"Juliana is waiting for you."

"When do the nine days' prayers begin?"

"At six o'clock."

It was a quarter-past five. I had before me three-quarters of an hour. I must pay attention.

"I will go to her, mother."

After a few steps I called her back.

"Has not Federico returned?"

"No."

I went up to Juliana's room. She was waiting for me. Cristina was laying the small table.

"Where have you been so long?" asked the poor invalid, with a shade of

reproach in her voice.

"I was downstairs with Maria and Natalia. I went to the chapel."

"Yes, to-night the nine days' prayers begin," she murmured sadly, with a discouraged air.

"Perhaps you will hear the music here?"

She remained pensive for several minutes. I thought she looked very sad, one of those languishing sadnesses which indicate that the heart is swollen with tears, that the eyes desire to weep.

"Of what are you thinking?" I asked.

"I am thinking of my first Christmas at the Badiola. Do you remember it?"

She was full of affection; and she solicited my tenderness, abandoned herself to me to be caressed, that I might soothe her heart and drink her tears. But I thought anxiously: "I must take care not to favor this disposition and permit myself to be circumvented. Time passes. If I give way, I shall not be able to leave her. If she cries, I shall not be able to go away. I must control myself. Time is passing. Who will stay with Raymond? Surely it will not be my mother. It will be the nurse, no doubt. All the others will be in the chapel. I will keep Cristina here. There will not be the slightest danger. The occasion is as favorable as it can be. In twenty minutes I must be free."

I avoided exciting the invalid; I feigned not to understand her; I did not reply to her effusions; I sought to turn her attention to material things. I acted in such a manner that Cristina did not leave us alone as on other evenings. I busied myself with the dinner with excessive zeal.

"Why don't you dine with me this evening?" she asked me.

"I can't eat anything just now; I don't feel very well. You eat a little, please."

In spite of my efforts, I could not succeed in entirely dissimulating the anxiety that devoured me. Several times she looked at me, with the manifest intention of penetrating my thoughts. Then, all at once, she became gloomy, taciturn. She scarcely touched anything, scarcely moistened her lips. Then I summoned all my courage, in order to withdraw. I feigned having heard the roll of a carriage. I listened. I said:

"No doubt Federico has returned. I must see him at once. You will excuse me if I go downstairs a moment? Cristina will stay with you."

I saw her face change, as if she was about to burst into sobs. But without waiting for her consent, I left hastily; and I took care to order Cristina to remain until my return.

Once outside, I was compelled to stop to conquer the suffocation of anguish. I thought: "If I cannot manage to control my nervousness all is lost." I listened intently, but heard nothing except the murmur of my arteries. I walked along the corridor as far as the stairway without meeting any one. The house was

silent. I thought: "They are all in the chapel already, even the servants. There is nothing to fear." I waited another two or three minutes, to recover myself. Vague ideas passed through my head, insignificant, foreign to the deed I was about to perform. I mechanically counted the rails of the banister.

"It is surely Anna who is with him. Raymond's room is not far from the chapel. The music will proclaim the beginning of the nine days' prayer."

I walked toward the door. As I reached it I heard the prelude of the bagpipes. I entered without hesitation. I had guessed correctly.

Anna was standing near her chair, in so eager an attitude that I immediately guessed that she had sprung to her feet on hearing the bagpipes of her mountains, the prelude of the ancient pastoral.

"Is he asleep?" I asked.

She nodded her head.

The sounds continued, muffled by the distance, soft as in a dream, rather shrill, sustained, prolonged. The clear tones of the flageolets modulated the simple and unforgettable melody to the accompaniment of the pipes.

"You may go, too," I said to her. "I will stay here. When did he fall asleep?"

"Just now."

"You can go."

Her eyes sparkled.

"I can go?"

"Yes, I will stay."

I opened the door for her myself and closed it behind her. I ran toward the cradle on tiptoe; I bent over to have a better view. The Innocent was asleep in his swaddling-clothes, his little fists closed over his thumbs. Through the tissue of his eyelids the iris of his gray eyes was visible. But I felt no blind burst of hate or anger rise from the depth of my soul. My aversion toward him was less impetuous than in the past. I no longer felt that impulse which more than once had run through me to the tips of my hands, and made them ready for any criminal violence, no matter what. I solely obeyed the impulse of a cold and lucid will; I had a perfect consciousness of my actions.

I returned to the door, I opened it, assured myself that the corridor was deserted. I ran to the window. I recalled what I had heard my mother say; the suspicion crossed my mind that Giovanni di Scordio might be below on the lawn. I opened the window with infinite precautions. A blast of icy air came in. I bent over the sill. I saw no one; I heard only the musical undulations of the nine days' prayers. I drew back, approached the cradle; I conquered my repugnance by a violent effort, repressed my anguish. I took the infant up very gently; I held him away from my heart, that beat tumultuously; I bore him to the window; I exposed him to the air that was to make him perish.

I did not for a moment lose my presence of mind; not one of my senses was dulled. I saw the stars of the sky, scintillating as if, in the superior regions, a blast of wind had shaken them; I saw the movements, illusory but terrifying, which the flickering lamp-light threw among the folds of the curtains; I distinctly heard the refrain of the pastorale, the distant barking of a dog. A shudder on the part of the infant made me start. He awoke.

I thought: "Now he is going to cry. How long a time has passed? A minute, perhaps, or not even a minute. Will so short an impression suffice to cause his death? Has he received his death-blow?" The infant waved his arms, twisted his mouth, opened it. It was a little time before he began to wail, which seemed to me changed, more pitiful, more quivering; but it was perhaps because it did not resound in the same medium as usual, and because I had always heard him in a closed place. That pitiful, quivering wail filled me with fright, caused me a sudden fright. I ran to the cradle, in which I replaced the child. I returned to close the window, but before closing it I bent over the sill and peered out into the dark. I saw nothing but the stars. I closed the window. Seized as I was by terror, I avoided making any noise. Behind me, the infant cried, cried louder. "Am I saved?" I ran to the door, I looked into the corridor, I listened. The corridor was deserted; all that could be heard was the slow undulation of the music.

"So I am saved. Who could have seen me?" Then I thought again of Giovanni di Scordio, and, looking at the window, I again felt anxiety. "But no, there was no one below. I looked twice." I went back to the cradle, arranged the infant's body, covered him carefully, assured myself that everything was in its place. Contact with him made me feel an unconquerable repugnance. He cried, cried. What could I do to quiet him? I waited.

But the continual wailing in that large, solitary room, that inarticulate plaint of the ignorant victim, rent me so atrociously that, incapable of longer resistance, I arose in order to relieve my torture. I walked out into the corridor; I half-closed the door behind me; I remained outside on the watch. The child's voice barely reached me, mingling with the slow undulation of the music. The sounds continued, muffled by the distance, soft as in a dream, somewhat shrill, sustained, prolonged. The clear tones of the flageolets modulated the simple melody to the accompaniment of the pipes. The pastorale filled the large, peaceful house, reached perhaps even the most distant rooms. Did Juliana hear it? What did Juliana think, what did she feel? Was she crying?

I knew not why, but there entered into my soul this certitude: "She is crying." And the certitude gave birth to an intense vision that engendered a real and profound sensation. The thoughts and visions that passed through my brain were incoherent, fragmentary, absurd. The fear of madness invaded me. I asked myself: "How much time has passed?" And I noticed that I had entirely lost all

notion of time.

The music ceased. I thought: "The prayers are over. Anna will come upstairs. My mother will come perhaps. Raymond is no longer crying!" I re-entered the room; I looked about me to assure myself that there remained no trace of my crime. I approached the cradle, not without a vague fear of finding the child lifeless. He was sleeping, lying on his back, his little fists closed over his thumbs. "He is asleep! It is unbelievable. One would think nothing had happened." What I had done began to acquire the unreality of a dream. I experienced a sudden blank of thoughts, an empty interval during those moments of waiting. When I heard the nurse's heavy step in the corridor, I went forward to meet her. My mother was not with her. I said to her, without looking in her face:

"He is still asleep."

And I rapidly withdrew. I was saved!

XLV.

From that moment my mind was dazed by a sort of stupid inertia, perhaps because I was exhausted, incapable of a new effort. My consciousness lost its terrible lucidity, my attention became relaxed, my curiosity was no longer equal to the importance of the events that were developing. In fact, my recollections were confused, scarce, composed of indistinct images.

In the evening I returned to the alcove. I saw Juliana again; I remained for some time at her bedside. I felt too fatigued to speak. Looking straight into her eyes, I asked her:

"Have you been crying?"

She answered:

"No."

But she was sadder than before. She had become white as her night-dress. I asked her:

"What ails you?"

She answered:

"Nothing. And you?"

"I do not feel well. I have a headache!"

An immense lassitude overwhelmed me; every limb weighed me down. I leaned my head on a corner of the pillow; I remained several minutes in that

position, beneath the weight of an indefinable sorrow. I felt a shock on hearing Juliana's voice saying:

"You are hiding something from me."

"No, no. Why?"

"Because I *feel* that you are hiding something from me."

"No, no; you are mistaken."

"I am mistaken."

She relapsed into silence. I leaned my head again on the corner of the pillow. Several minutes later she said to me suddenly:

"You go and see *him* often."

I rose to look at her, seized by fear.

"You go to see him voluntarily," she added. "I know it. To-day..."

"Well?"

"That frightens me and makes me anxious. I know you. You torment yourself; you go there to torment yourself, to rack your heart. I know you. I am afraid. No, no, you are not resigned; you cannot be resigned. Do not deceive me, Tullio. This evening, just now, you were there...."

"How do you know?"

"I know it; I *feel* it."

My blood froze.

"Do you want my mother to suspect? Do you want her to notice my aversion?"

We spoke in low tones. She, too, had an absent-minded air. And I thought: "There is my mother; she is coming, all upset, crying: 'Raymond is dying!'"

It was Maria and Natalia who entered with Miss Edith. The alcove was enlivened by their chatter. They spoke of the chapel, of the manger, of the candles, the bagpipes, giving a thousand details.

I left Juliana to go back to my room, under the pretext of a headache.

When I was on my bed fatigue overcame me almost immediately. I slept profoundly for hours.

Daylight found me calm, in a state of strange indifference, inexplicable indifference. Nobody had come to interrupt my sleep; consequently nothing extraordinary had happened. The events of the evening before appeared to me unreal and very distant. I felt an enormous blank between my actual and my former being, between what I was and what I had been. There was a discontinuity between the past and present periods of my psychical life.

And I did not make the slightest effort to recover myself, to understand the strange phenomenon. I felt a repugnance for every kind of activity; I sought to keep myself in that sort of factitious apathy which covered the obscure development of all my preceding agitations; I avoided examining myself, in order not to

awaken things that appeared dead, that seemed no longer to belong to my actual existence. I resembled those invalids who, having lost all sensibility in half of their body, imagine they have a corpse beside them.

But Federico came and knocked at my door. What news did he bring? His presence gave me a shock.

"We did not see one another yesterday evening," he said. "I came back rather late. How do you feel?"

"Neither well nor ill."

"You had a headache, they told me?"

"Yes, that is why I went to bed early."

"Ah! when shall we see the end of all our anxieties? You are not well, Juliana is still confined to her bed, and now mother is very much frightened because Raymond coughed during the night."

"He coughed?"

"Yes. No doubt it is only a slight cold; but mother exaggerates, as usual."

"Has the doctor been?"

"Not yet. But you seem more disturbed than mother."

"You know where infants are concerned fear is justifiable. A trifle suffices..."

He looked at me with his limpid, blue eyes, and I feared to meet them.

When he had gone I leaped from my bed. "So, the effects commence," I thought. "So, there is no more doubt about it. How much longer has he to live? Perhaps he will not die ... not die! Oh! no, that is impossible. The air was icy, cut short his respiration." And again I saw the infant breathing, again I saw his little mouth half-closed, the dimple in his throat.

XLVI.

The doctor said:

"There is no reason whatever for anxiety. It is nothing but a slight cold. The air-passages are free."

He bent again over Raymond's bare breast, auscultating him.

"There is not the slightest obstruction.

"You can assure yourself by listening," he added, turning toward me.

I placed my ear against that delicate chest and felt its caressing warmth.

"No..."

I looked at my mother, who was trembling with anxiety on the other side of the cradle.

The ordinary symptoms of bronchitis were absent. The child was quiet; at long intervals he coughed lightly; he took the breast as often as usual; his slumber was deep and regular. Even I, deceived by appearances, doubted. "My attempt has been useless. It seems that he must not die. How tenacious his hold on life is!" And I felt the old rancor against him born in me again—become more acute. His calm and healthy appearance exasperated me. I had suffered all that anguish uselessly then. I had exposed myself to all that peril for nothing! With my anger was mingled a sort of superstitious stupor, caused by the extraordinary tenacity of that life. "I shall not have the courage to begin over again. And then? It is I who will be his victim, and I shall not be able to escape him."

The perverse little phantom, the bilious and sly child, full of intelligence and evil instincts, reappeared to me; again he fixed his hard, gray eyes on me with a provocative air. And the terrible scenes in the darkness of the deserted rooms, the scenes created long ago by my hostile imagination, presented themselves again, stood out again in relief, acquired motion, all the characters of reality.

The day was cloudy, and it threatened to snow. Juliana's alcove again seemed like a refuge. The intruder could not be taken from his room, could not come and persecute me in the depths of that retreat. I abandoned myself altogether to my sorrow, without seeking to hide it. While looking at the poor invalid I thought: "She will not get well; she will not recover." The strange words of the previous evening recurred to my memory, troubled me. Without any doubt, the intruder was an executioner for her as well as for me; without any doubt, he imposed himself exclusively on her thoughts, and it was from this that she was dying by degrees. So heavy a weight on so feeble a heart!

With the incoherence of images seen in a dream, once more I saw in mind divers fragments of my previous life. I recollected another illness, a convalescence long past. I lingered, recomposing these fragments, reconstructing that period, so charming and so painful, during which I had sown the germ of my misfortune. The diffuse whiteness of the light recalled to my memory that mild afternoon which we had passed, Juliana and I, reading that book of poetry, bending together over the same page, following the same line with our eyes. And, on the margin, I saw again her taper index-finger, the mark of her nail.

Accueillez la voix qui persiste
Dans son naïf épithalame.
Allez, rien n'est meilleur à l'âme
Que de faire une âme moins triste.

I had seized her wrist; I slowly bent my head until my lips touched the hollow

of her hand; I murmured: "You ... could you forget?" And she closed my mouth, pronouncing her great word: "Silence."

I lived that fragment of life over again under the form of a real and profound sensation. And I continued, continued to relive my past. I came to the morning when she had risen for the first time—that terrible morning; I heard her laughing and broken voice; I saw again the gesture of the offering; I saw her again in the arm-chair after the unexpected shock; I saw again what had followed. Why could not my soul free itself from these visions? It was useless to lament; utterly useless. "*It was too late.*"

"Of what are you thinking?" asked Juliana, who, up to then, perhaps, during my silence, had suffered only on account of my sorrow.

I did not conceal my thoughts from her. And she, in a voice that came from the depths of her heart, feeble, but more penetrating than a cry, murmured:

"Oh! I had a heaven for you in my soul."

After a long pause, during which, doubtless, she was driving back to her heart the tears that did not come, she said: "I cannot console you now, any more. There is consolation neither for you nor for me; there never will be ... All is lost."

"Who knows?" I said.

We looked at each other. It was evident that at that instant we were both thinking of the same thing—of Raymond's possible death.

After hesitating a moment, I alluded to the conversation we had had one evening beneath the elms:

"Have you prayed?"

My voice trembled greatly.

She answered (I scarcely heard her):

"Yes."

And she shut her eyes, turned on her side, buried her head in the pillow, gathered herself together, huddled beneath the covers as if chilled by cold.

XLVII.

In the evening, I went to see Raymond. I found him in my mother's arms. He seemed rather pale, but he was still quiet; he breathed freely. No suspicious

symptom was noticeable.

"He only just woke up," said my mother.

"Does that make you uneasy?"

"Yes, he has never slept so long before."

I looked fixedly at the child. His gray eyes were dull and lifeless. He incessantly moved his lips, as if chewing. At one moment he vomited a little curdled milk on his bib.

"Oh! no, no, the child is not well," cried my mother, shaking her head.

"Has he coughed?"

As if in answer to my question, Raymond began to cough.

"Do you hear?"

It was a little, hoarse cough, unaccompanied by any sound of any of the internal organs. It ceased immediately.

I thought: "We must wait." But in proportion as the fatal presentiment was resuscitated in me, my aversion toward the intruder diminished, my irritation subsided. I perceived that my heart remained oppressed and miserable, incapable of a single joyful transport.

I remember that evening as being the saddest I have ever passed during the course of my fatal career.

Supposing that Giovanni di Scordio might be in the neighborhood, I left the house and walked along the walk where my brother and I had met him the last time. There were signs of a snowstorm in the night air. Under the row of trees stretched a carpet of leaves. The bare and dry branches stood out against the sky.

I looked around me in the hope of seeing the old man. I thought of his tenderness for his godson, of that senile and desolate love, of those large, callous, and rugged hands which I had seen become ennobled and tremble on the whiteness of his clothes. I thought: "How he will weep!" I saw the little dead body in its swaddling-clothes lying in its coffin, amidst the wreaths of white chrysanthemums, between four lighted candles, and Giovanni weeping on his knees. "My mother will weep, will be in despair. The entire house will be in mourning. Christmas will be funereal. And what will Juliana do when I present myself on the threshold of the alcove, at the foot of the bed, and announce: 'He is dead!'"

I had arrived to the end of the avenue. I looked around; I saw no one. The country was silently disappearing in the darkness; a fire shone red on the hill, very distant. I retraced my steps, alone. Suddenly something white trembled before my eyes and disappeared. It was the first snow.

That evening, while I was at Juliana's bedside, I again heard the bagpipes

continuing the nine days' prayer, *at the same hour.*

XLVIII.

The evening passed, the night passed, the following morning passed. Nothing extraordinary happened. But the doctor, on his visit, did not conceal the fact that there existed a catarrh of the nasal mucosa and larger bronchi: a slight indisposition of no gravity whatever. Nevertheless, I perceived that he tried to dissimulate a certain uneasiness. He gave various orders, recommended the greatest prudence, promised to return during the day. My mother had no more rest.

On entering the alcove, I said to Juliana, in a low voice, without looking her in the face:

"He is getting worse."

And we were silent for a long time. At moments I arose and walked to the window to watch the snow. I walked about the room, the prey of unbearable anxiety. Juliana, her head buried in the pillow, was almost hidden beneath the covers. When I approached she opened her eyes, and gave me a rapid look, which told me nothing.

"Are you cold?"

"Yes."

But the room was warm. I returned ceaselessly to the window to watch the snow, and the whitened country on which the flakes continued to fall slowly. It was two o'clock in the afternoon. What was passing in the child's room? Nothing very extraordinary, certainly, since they had not called me. But my anxiety increased so much that I resolved to go to see. I opened the door.

"Where are you going?" cried Juliana, raising herself on her elbow.

"I am going downstairs for a moment. I will return immediately."

She remained raised on her elbow, very pale.

"Do you not want me to go?" I asked.

"No, stay with me."

She did not let herself sink back on her pillow. A strange fright had changed her expression; her eyes wandered restlessly, as if pursuing a moving shadow. I approached her, and laid her down myself, arranged her in the bed, touched her forehead, asked her gently:

"What ails you, Juliana?"

"I do not know; I am afraid."

"Of what?"

"I do not know. It is not my fault; I am ill; I am like that."

But her eyes, instead of fixing themselves on me, continued to wander.

"What are you seeking? Do you see something?"

"No, nothing."

I touched her forehead again. Its warmth was normal. But my imagination began to be disturbed.

"You see, I do not leave you; I'll stay with you."

I sat down; I waited. My soul was in that state of anxious suspension which accompanies the expectation of an approaching event. I was certain that I should be called. I listened for the slightest sound. From time to time I heard bells ring in the house. I heard the dull roll of a carriage on the snow. I said:

"It is probably the doctor."

Juliana did not utter a word. I waited. An interminable length of time passed. Suddenly I heard a sound of opening doors, a sound of approaching steps. I sprang to my feet. And, at the same instant, Juliana raised herself.

"What is the matter?"

I knew what was the matter, I even knew the precise words that the messenger was going to utter.

Cristina entered. She seemed agitated, but tried to dissimulate it. Without coming near me, but giving me a significant look, she stammered:

"May I say something to signor?"

I left the alcove.

"What is the matter?"

She answered in a low voice:

"The child is much worse. Come quickly, signor."

"Juliana, I am going out for a moment. Cristina will stay with you. I will return immediately."

I left the room and ran into Raymond's room.

"Ah! Tullio, the child is dying," cried my mother in despair, bending over the cradle. "Look! Look at him!"

I bent over the cradle. A rapid change had taken place, unexpected, apparently inexplicable, frightful. The little face had become of an ashen color, the lips had blanched, the eyes were faded, dull, lifeless. The poor creature seemed to be under the effect of some violent poison.

My mother told me, in a choking voice:

"An hour ago he seemed quite well. He coughed a little, but that was all. I went out and left Anna in the room. I thought I should find him still asleep; he seemed sleepy. I returned and found him in this condition. Touch him: he is

almost cold!"

I touched his forehead and his cheek. The temperature, in fact, had gone down.

"And the doctor?"

"He has not come yet. I have sent for him."

"They should have taken the carriage."

"Yes. Cyriaque has gone."

"Are you sure? There is no time to lose."

This was no simulation on my part. I was sincere. I could not let the Innocent die like that, without making an attempt to save him. In presence of his almost cadaveric aspect, although my crime was on the point of being consummated, pity, remorse, and grief seized my soul. While waiting for the doctor, I was not less distracted than my mother. I rang. A servant answered.

"Has Cyriaque gone?"

"Yes, signor."

"On foot?"

"No, signor; in the carriage."

Federico came in, panting.

"What has happened?"

My mother, still bending over the cradle, cried out:

"The baby is dying."

Federico ran up and looked:

"He is choking," he said. "Don't you see? He has stopped breathing."

And he seized the child, took it from the cradle, raised it and shook it.

"No, no! What are you doing? You will kill him!" cried my mother.

At this moment the door opened, and a voice announced:

"The doctor."

Doctor Jemma entered.

"I was on my way; I met your man. What has happened?"

Without waiting for an answer he went up to my brother, who still held Raymond in his arms; he took the child, examined him, became serious.

"He must be undressed," he said.

And he put him on the nurse's bed, and helped my mother to remove his clothes.

The little naked body appeared. It was of the same clayey color as the face. The limbs hung flaccid, inert. The doctor's fat hand felt the skin in several places.

"Do something for him, doctor," begged my mother. "Save him!"

But the doctor seemed irresolute. He felt the pulse, put his ear to the chest, and murmured:

"A spasm of the heart.... Impossible."

He asked:

"When did this change take place? Suddenly?"

My mother tried to tell what she had told me, but she burst into sobs before she could finish. The doctor decided to try something; he tried to shock the torpor into which the infant was plunged; he tried to make him cry, to provoke vomiting, to stimulate a movement of energetic breathing. My mother stood by watching him, and tears streamed from her wide-open eyes.

"Has Juliana been told?" asked my brother.

"No, I believe not.... she suspects, perhaps.... Perhaps Cristina.... Stay here, I will run and see, and come back."

I looked at the child as he lay in the doctor's hands; I looked at my mother. I left the room, and ran to Juliana's room. At the door I stopped. "What shall I tell her? Shall I tell her the truth?" I entered; I saw that Cristina was still in the embrasure of the window; I entered the alcove, the curtains of which were now drawn. Juliana was huddled up under the covers. As I approached her, I noticed that she was shaking as if with fever.

"Juliana, it is I."

She turned round and asked in a low voice:

"Were you *there*?"

"Yes."

"Tell me all."

I bent over her, and we spoke in low tones:

"It is very serious."

"Very serious?"

"Yes, very serious."

"Is he dying?"

"Who knows? Perhaps."

With a sudden movement, she disengaged her arms and threw them around my neck. My cheek pressed against hers; and I felt her tremble, I felt the leanness of her poor, sickly bosom. And, while she embraced me, I had before my mind the sinister vision of the distant room; I saw the child with his faded, lifeless, opaque eyes and livid lips; I saw my mother's tears flowing. There was no joy in that embrace. My heart was oppressed; and my soul, bent thus over the obscure abyss of that other soul, felt helpless and *alone*.

XLIX.

By night-time Raymond was dead. All the indications of acute poisoning by carbonic acid appeared on the little body that had become a corpse. The little face was livid and leaden; the nose was pinched; the lips had taken on a dark blue color; a glimpse of the opaque whiteness could be caught beneath the still half-closed eyelids; on one thigh, near the groin, was a reddish spot. It seemed as if decomposition had already set in, so lamentable was the appearance of that infantile flesh, which, a few hours before, all rosy and tender, had been caressed by my mother's fingers.

In my ears resounded the cries, the sobs, the distracted words ejaculated by my mother, while Federico and the women led her out of the room.

"Nobody must touch him! Let no one touch him! I want to wash him myself, I wish to dress him myself."

Then silence followed. The cries had ceased. At moments could be heard a slamming of doors. I was there alone. The doctor had been in the room, too, but I was now alone. Some extraordinary change was taking place within me; but I did not yet know exactly what it was.

"Come," said the doctor gently, touching me on the shoulder. "Come, leave the room."

I was docile; I obeyed. I walked slowly along the corridor, when I felt another touch. It was Federico; he embraced me. I did not cry; I did not feel any strong emotion; I did not understand his words. Yet I heard when he named Juliana's name.

"Take me to Juliana's room," I said to him.

I put my arm beneath his; I let myself be conducted like a blind man.

When we were in front of the door, I said: "Leave me." He pressed my hand and left me. I entered alone.

L.

In the night the silence of the house was sepulchral. A light burned in the corridor. I walked toward that light like a somnambulist. Some extraordinary change was taking place within me; but I did not yet know exactly what it was.

I stopped, warned by a sort of instinct. A door was open; a light filtered through the drawn curtains. I crossed the threshold, parted the portières, and advanced.

The cradle was in the centre of the room, between four lighted candles and draped with white. My brother was seated on one side, Giovanni di Scordio on the other, holding the vigil. The old man's presence caused me no surprise. It seemed to me natural that he should be there. I asked nothing; I said nothing. I believe that I smiled faintly at them when they looked at me. I do not know if my lips really smiled; but I had intended they should, as if to say: "Do not grieve about me, do not try to console me; you see I am calm. We must be resigned."

I made several steps; I went and placed myself at the foot of the cradle between the two candles. To the foot of this cradle I bore a fearful, humble, feeble soul, totally freed from its previous passions. My brother and the old man had not left their places; and yet I felt alone.

The little dead body was clothed in white: in the same robe in which it was baptized, it seemed to me. Only the face and the hands were uncovered. The little mouth, whose wailings had so often aroused my hate, was now motionless beneath a mysterious seal. The silence that reigned over this mouth also reigned in me, reigned about me. And I looked, looked.

Then, in the silence, there arose a great light in the centre of my soul. *I understood.* That which neither my brother's words nor the old man's smile had been sufficient to reveal to me, the little dumb mouth of the Innocent revealed to me in a second. *I understood.* And then I was assailed by a terrible desire to confess my crime, to publish my secret, to declare in the presence of those two men: "It was I who assassinated him!"

They both looked at me; and I perceived that they were both uneasy concerning me and my attitude before the corpse, that they were both waiting with anguish the end of my silence. Then I said:

"Do you know who killed this innocent?"

In the silence my voice was so strangely sonorous that it was unrecognizable to me; it seemed to me that that voice was not my own. And a sudden terror froze my blood, stiffened my tongue, clouded my sight. And I began to tremble. And I felt that my brother was supporting me, was holding my head. In my ears was such a strong buzzing that his words reached me indistinctly, in fragments. I understood that he thought my mind was deranged by a violent attack of fever and that he was trying to lead me out. I let him take me away.

He led me to my room, supporting me. Terror still controlled me. At the sight of a single candle that was burning on the table, I shuddered; I could not remember having left it lit.

"Undress yourself and go to bed," said Federico to me, stroking me with his hands tenderly.

He made me sit down on my bed and felt my forehead again.

"Listen. Your fever is increasing. Begin to undress. Come, come."

With a tenderness that recalled that of my mother, he assisted me to undress. He helped me to get into bed. Seated at my bedside, he felt my forehead from time to time, to judge of my fever; and as he saw that I still trembled, he asked:

"Are you very cold? Does not your shivering cease at all? Shall I cover you more? Are you thirsty?"

Shivering, I thought: "Suppose I had spoken! Suppose I had had the strength to keep on! Was it I, positively I, who, with my own lips, spoke those words? Was it absolutely I? And suppose Federico, on thinking them over, on deeply reflecting, began to suspect? I asked: 'Do you know who killed this innocent?' Nothing more. But had I not the aspect of an assassin about to confess? On thinking it over, Federico could not fail to ask himself: 'What did he want to say? Against whom did he direct that strange accusation?' My excitement will seem equivocal. The doctor ... He must think: 'Perhaps he alluded to the doctor.' He must have some new proof of my exaltation, he must continue to believe my mind deranged by fever, in a condition of intermittent delirium." While I reasoned thus, rapid and clear visions passed through my mind, with evidence of real and tangible things. "I am feverish, and very strongly so. What if true delirium should set in, what if I unconsciously revealed my secret?"

I watched over myself with frightful anguish.

I said: "The doctor, the doctor—did not know..."

My brother bent over me, felt my forehead again uneasily, emitted a sigh.

"Do not worry, Tullio. Be quiet."

And he went and wrung out a linen in cold water, and applied it to my burning head.

The procession of rapid and clear visions continued. I saw again the baby's agony with terrible intensity. He was agonizing in his cradle. His face was ashen, so pallid that the milk crusts above the eyebrows appeared yellow. The lower lip, depressed, was invisible. From time to time he raised his eyelids, that were lightly tinted with violet, and one would have thought that the irides were adherent because they followed the ascending movement and lost themselves beneath, leaving a view only of the opaque whites. From time to time the choking death rattle was interrupted. At one time the doctor said, as if to make a supreme attempt:

"Quick! Quick! Let us take the cradle near the open window. Room! room! The little one needs air. Make room."

My brother and I carried the cradle, which seemed like a coffin. But, in the daylight, the spectacle was still more frightful, beneath that cold, white light reflected by the snow.

My mother cried:

"He is dying! Look, look: he is dying! Feel: his pulse has stopped!"

And the doctor said:

"No, no. He breathes. As long as there is a sigh, there is some hope."

And between the livid lips of the dying child he introduced a spoonful of ether. After a few seconds, the child opened his eyes, turned up his pupils, and gave a feeble wail. A slight change took place in his color. His nostrils quivered.

The doctor said:

"Don't you see? He breathes. We must hope, even to the end."

He agitated the air above the cradle with a fan; then with his finger he depressed the baby's chin in order to unclose his lips, to open the mouth. The tongue, clove to the palate, fell down like a clapper; and I caught a glimpse of the thread-like mucus that stretched between the palate and the tongue, the whitish matter accumulated in the throat. A convulsive movement raised towards the face the little hands, that had become violet, particularly at the palms, at the folds of the phalanges, and at the nails—hands already cadaverous, and which my mother touched each moment. The little finger of the right hand was always kept apart, away from the other fingers, and trembled lightly. Nothing could be more lamentable.

Federico tried to persuade my mother to leave the room. But, bent over Raymond's face, almost touching it, she watched the slightest indications. One of her tears fell on the adored one's head. Quickly she dried it with her handkerchief; but she perceived that, on the head, the fontanels were sunk, depressed.

"Look, doctor!" she cried with fright.

And my eyes fixed themselves on that soft head, dotted with milk crusts, yellowish, like a piece of wax in the midst of which a hollow had been made. All the sutures were visible. The bluish temporal vein was lost beneath the crusts.

"Look, look!"

The vital energy, reawakened for a moment by the artificial means of ether, subsided. The death rattle began to acquire a characteristic sonorousness; the little hands fell along the sides, inert; the chin retracted more; the fontanels became deeper, and no longer pulsated. All at once, the dying child seemed to make an effort. Quickly the doctor raised the head. And there came from the little, violet mouth a small quantity of a whitish liquid. But in the effort made in vomiting the skin of the forehead was stretched, and through the epidermis the brown spots of an effusion could be seen appearing. My mother uttered a cry.

"Come, come, go with me," repeated my brother, trying to lead her away.

"No, no, no!"

The doctor administered another spoonful of ether. And the agony was prolonged, the torture was prolonged. The little hands rose up again; the fingers stirred vaguely; between the half-closed pupils the irides appeared, then disap-

peared by a retrograde movement, like two little faded flowers, like two little corollas that closed with a flaccid curling up.

Evening fell, and the Innocent was still in agony. On the window-panes shone a light like the glimmer of approaching dawn, due to the whiteness of the snow conflicting with the shadows.

"He is dead, he is dead!" cried my mother, who no longer heard the death rattle, and who saw a livid spot appear around the nose.

"No, no! He is breathing."

A candle had been lit; one of the women held it, and the little yellow flame flickered at the foot of the cradle. Abruptly my mother uncovered the little body to feel it.

"He is cold, cold all over!"

The limbs were stretched out; the feet were becoming violet. Nothing could be more lamentable than that poor little morsel of dead flesh, lying in front of that darkening window, beneath the light of that candle.

But, once more, an indescribable sound, that was neither a wail, nor a cry, nor death rattle, left that little and almost bluish mouth, together with a little whitish froth. And my mother, as if insane, threw herself on the little corpse.

Once more I saw all that, with my eyes closed. And when I opened my eyes, I saw it again, with unbelievable intensity.

"Remove that candle!" I cried to Federico, raising myself on my couch, terrified by the mobility of the little pale flame. "Remove that candle!"

Federico took it and placed it behind a folding screen. Then he returned to my bedside, made me lie down again, changed the cloth on my forehead.

At moments, in the silence, I heard sighs.

LI.

The following day, although I was in a state of extreme feebleness and prostration, I wished to be present at the religious benediction, at the funeral procession, at the entire ceremony.

The corpse was already enclosed in its little white coffin with a glass lid. A crown of white chrysanthemums was on its forehead; a white chrysanthemum was in its joined hands; but nothing could match the waxy whiteness of those diminutive hands, the nails of which alone were violet.

There were present Federico, Giovanni di Scordio, I, and several servants. The four tapers burned and wept. The priest entered, attired in the white stole, followed by assistants who bore the aspergill and the cross. We all knelt. The priest sprinkled the bier with holy water, saying:

"*Sit nomen Domini.*"

Then he recited the psalm:

"*Laudate, pueri, Dominum...*"

Federico and Giovanni di Scordio rose, and took the coffin. Pietro opened the doors in front of them. I followed. Behind me came the priest, the assistants, four servants, with lighted wax tapers. Passing through the silent corridors, we arrived at the chapel, while the priest recited the psalm:

"*Beati immaculati...*"

While the bier was being borne into the chapel, the priest murmured:

"*Hic accipiet benedictionem a Domino.*"

Federico and the old man placed the bier on the little catafalque, in the middle of the chapel. We all knelt. The priest recited other psalms. Then he uttered an invocation that the soul of the Innocent be called to heaven. Then he again sprinkled the bier with holy water. Then he went out, followed by his assistants.

We all arose. Everything was ready for the burial. Giovanni di Scordio took the light coffin in his arms, and his eyes were fixed on the glass lid. Federico descended first into the vault, and the old man descended behind him, bearing the coffin. I descended last, with a servant. Nobody spoke.

The sepulchral chamber was large, all of gray stone. In the walls were hollowed out niches, some already closed by stone blocks, the others gaping, deep, full of darkness, waiting for their prey. From an arch hung three lamps fed with olive oil, and they burned quietly in the humid and heavy air, with small, thin flames that were never extinguished.

"Here," said my brother.

And he pointed to an open niche, situated beneath another niche already closed by a stone slab. On that stone was engraved the name of Constance, from the gilt letters of whose name came confused flashes of light.

Then, to permit us to contemplate once more the dead child, Giovanni di Scordio extended the arms that bore the coffin. And we gave him a last look. Through the crystal lid that little, livid face, those little joined hands, that little robe, and those chrysanthemums, and all those white things appeared infinitely distant, intangible, as if the transparent lid of the coffin in the arms of that grand old man permitted a glimpse through some cleft of a supernatural mystery, terrible yet full of a sad charm.

No one spoke. It seemed as if no one breathed.

The old man turned toward the mortuary niche, bent over, laid the coffin on the ground, and pushed it slowly toward the end. Then he knelt down, and remained several minutes motionless.

In the depths the coffin stood out with a vague whiteness. In the lamplight the hoary head of the old man seemed luminous, thus bent on the border of the Shadow.

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