

# **MARGOT**

Alfred de Musset

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# MARGOT

Alfred de Musset

Done into english by M. Raoul Pellissier

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## CHAPTER I

In a large gothic house in the Rue du Perche, au Marais, there lived, in 1804, an old lady, well known and beloved by all in the neighborhood. She was called Madame Doradour. She was a woman of the olden times, belonging, not to the court, but to the good middle class, rich, devout, cheerful and charitable. She led a very retired life: her only occupation being to give alms and play "Boston" with her neighbors. She dined at two o'clock and supped at nine. She rarely went out and then only to church, sometimes taking a turn in the Place Royale on her way back. In short, she had preserved the manners and the dress, of her times, entirely ignoring the present, reading her prayer-book, rather than the newspapers, leaving the world to go its own way and thinking only of dying in peace.

As she was a great talker, and even somewhat loquacious, she had always, during the twenty years since the death of her husband, a lady companion. This woman, who never left her, had now become a friend. They were continually seen together, at mass, out for a walk or by the fireside. Mademoiselle Ursule kept the keys of the cellar, of the cupboards and even of the writing-desk. She was a tall, dried-up woman, of masculine appearance, speaking with the tip of her tongue, extremely imperious and quite ill-tempered. Madame Doradour, who was not very large, would take the arm of this ugly creature, babbling the while: she called her "my good one," and allowed herself to be tied to her apron-strings. She had unlimited confidence in her favorite and had in advance willed her a large part of her property. Mademoiselle Ursule did not forget it and professed to love her mistress more than herself, and never spoke of her without raising her eyes to heaven with sighs of gratitude.

Needless to relate, Mademoiselle Ursule was the true mistress of the house. While Madame Doradour, buried in her armchair, was knitting in the corner, Mademoiselle Ursule, laden with her keys, majestically paraded the corridors, banged the doors, paid the tradespeople and caused the servants to swear. But as soon as the dinner hour arrived, and the guests were assembled, she timidly appeared, clad in a dark and modest dress. She bowed with compunction, knew how to keep at a distance and how to apparently abdicate her real position, of mistress of the house. At church, no one was more devout than she, nor cast their eyes down

lower. If it happened that Madame Doradour, whose piety was sincere, fell asleep in the middle of the sermon, Mademoiselle Ursule nudged her and the preacher was thankful to her. Madame Doradour had farmers, tenants and business men to deal with: Mademoiselle Ursule verified their accounts and in the matter of any arguments regarding them, she was incomparable. Thanks to her, there was not a speck of dust in the house; everything was clean, neat, rubbed, brushed, the furniture in order, the linen spotless, the china shining and the clocks regulated. All this was necessary to the housekeeper to enable her to grumble at her ease and reign in all her glory.

Madame Doradour, speaking truthfully, was by no means blind to the defects of her good friend, but during all her life she had been able to distinguish only the good in the world. Evil never seemed clear to her: she endured without understanding it. Habit, moreover, was everything to her, and for twenty years Mademoiselle Ursule had given her her arm and they had taken their coffee together. When her protégée made too loud a noise, Madame Doradour would drop her knitting, raise her head and in her small, piping voice remark: "What is the matter, my good one?" But the "good one" did not always deign to answer, or, if she entered into particulars, she so managed it that Madame Doradour returned to her knitting, softly humming, so as to hear no more.

It was suddenly discovered, after such a long period of confidence, that Mademoiselle Ursule had been deceiving every one; her mistress to begin with. Not only did she make an income from the expenses which she regulated, but, in anticipation of the will, she appropriated clothes, linen and even jewelry. Impunity emboldening her, she went so far as to remove a casket of diamonds, which, it is true, Madame Doradour never made use of, but which she had zealously preserved in a drawer, from time immemorial, in memory of her lost charms. Madame Doradour had no wish to take proceedings against a woman she had been fond of. She was satisfied with dismissing her, and refused to see her a last time. But she suddenly found herself in such a cruel solitude, that she shed the most bitter tears. In spite of her piety, she could not help cursing the instability of things here below and the pitiless whims of fate, which will not even respect an old and demure illusion.

One of her good neighbors, M. Desires, having come to console her, she asked his advice.

"What will now become of me?" she said to him. "I can not live alone, and where shall I find a new friend? She whom I have just lost was so dear to me and I was so accustomed to her, that, in spite of the sad way in which she has rewarded me, I almost regret not having seen her once more. Who will answer for another? What confidence shall I now be able to repose in a stranger?"

"The misfortune that has overtaken you," answered M. Desires, "would he doubly to be deplored if it caused a soul like yours to doubt virtue. There are in this world wretches and many hypocrites, but there are also honest folk. Take another companion, not hurriedly, but also not with too many scruples. Your confidence has been misplaced this time; that is one reason that it should not be deceived a second."

"I believe you are right," answered Madame Doradour, "but I am very sad and in a most awkward position. I do not know a soul in Paris. Could you not oblige me by making inquiries and finding an honest girl for me, who would be well treated here, and could at least give me her arm to go to Saint Francois d'Assise? "

M. Desires, being also an inhabitant of the Marais, was neither very quick nor very well acquainted. He nevertheless began his quest, and a few days later Madame Doradour had a new companion, with whom, at the expiration of two months, she had become extremely friendly, for she was as easy-going as she was good. But at the end of three months more it became necessary to eject the latest arrival, not as being dishonest, but untrustworthy.

This was a second blow for Madame Doradour. She wished to make another choice, searched through the

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whole neighborhood, wrote to the "*Petites Affiches*" and yet had no success.

She became discouraged and this good old lady was now seen going to church alone, leaning on a stick. She had resolved, she said, to finish her days without help from any one, and she attempted, in public, to cheerfully bear her sadness and her years. But her limbs trembled as she mounted the stairs, for she was seventy years old. She was to be found in the evening near the fire, her hands folded and with bent head. She could not endure solitude; her health, already weak, soon declined; little by little she fell into a state of melancholy.

She had an only son named Gaston, who had early embraced the career of a soldier, and who was at that time doing garrison duty. She wrote to inform him of her troubles and implored him to come and assist her in her very unfortunate position. Gaston loved his mother tenderly. He asked and obtained leave of absence; but his regiment was unfortunately in garrison at Strasbourg, where, it is well known, are to be found in great numbers the prettiest grisettes in France. There are to be seen those German brunettes, combining Saxon languor with French vivacity. Gaston was on good terms with two pretty tobacconists, who did not want him to go. He vainly attempted to persuade them and even went so far as to show them his mother's letter. They gave him so many reasons, that he allowed himself to be convinced, and delayed his departure from day to day.

Meanwhile, Madame Doradour became seriously ill. She was born so cheerful and grief was so unnatural to her, that for her it could be but a disease. The doctors did not know what to do, "Leave me alone," she would say. "I wish to die alone. Since all whom I loved have forsaken me, why should I cling to the remainder of a life in which no one is interested? "

The deepest sadness reigned in the house, and at the same time the greatest disorder. The servants, seeing their mistress at the point of death and knowing that her will was made, began to neglect her. The rooms formerly so well kept, and the furniture so neatly arranged, were now covered with dust. "Oh, my dear Ursule," cried Madame Doradour, "my good one, where are you? You would have driven away these rascals!"

One day when she was at her worst, they were astonished to see her suddenly sit up in bed, draw aside the curtains and put on her spectacles. She held in her hand a letter which had just been delivered to her and which she was unfolding with great care. At the top of the page was a fine vignette representing the Temple of Friendship, with an altar in the middle and two hearts in flames on the altar. The letter was written in a very regular manner, the words perfectly in line, and with large flourishes to the capital letters. It was a New Year's compliment, couched somewhat as follows:

"Madame and Dear Godmother It is to wish you a good and happy year that I take up my pen on behalf of the whole family, being the only one among us who is able to write. Papa, mamma and my brothers wish you the same. We have learned that you are ill, and pray God to preserve you, as He surely will. I take the liberty of sending you with this, a small present, and I am, with much respect and attachment,

"Your goddaughter and servant,

"Marguerite Piédeleu."

After having read this letter, Madame Doradour placed it under her pillow: she sent for M. Desires at once and dictated to him her answer. No one in the house had any knowledge of this, but as soon as the reply was gone, the patient appeared more at ease, and a few days later found her as merry and as well as ever.

## CHAPTER II

The goodman Piédeleu was a Beauceron, that is a native of Beauce, where he had spent his life and where he fully expected to die. He was an old and honest farmer from the Hunville estate, near Chartres, the property of Madame Doradour. He had never in his life seen a forest or a mountain, for he had never left his farm but to go to town or somewhere in the neighborhood, and Beauce, as every one knows, is but a vast plain. It is true, he had seen a river, the Eure, which flowed past his house. As for the sea, he believed in it as he did in Paradise, that is to say, that he should first go and see it. Moreover, there were for him in this world but three things worthy of admiration; the tower of Chartres, a beautiful girl and a fine field of wheat. His learning did not go beyond the facts that he knew it to be warm in summer, cold in winter, and that he was aware of the last market price of wheat. But when, in the midday sun, at the hour when the farm-laborers are resting, the goodman left the farmyard to say good morning to his crops, it did one good to see his fine figure and broad shoulders stand out against the horizon. It seemed then as if the blades of grain held themselves more erect and proud than usual, and that the plowshares shone more brilliantly. At sight of him, his men, stretched in the shade, while eating their dinner, respectfully doffed their hats, still munching great mouthfuls of bread and cheese. The cattle were contentedly chewing their cud and the horses pranced under the hand of their master patting their plump flanks, "Our country is the granary of France," the goodman would sometimes say. Then he would walk on, with bent head, looking at his straight furrows, and lose himself in contemplation.

Madame Piédeleu, his wife, had presented him with nine children, of which eight were boys, and if all the eight were not six feet high, they were not far from it. It is true that this was the goodman's height, and the mother was five feet five inches; she was the finest woman in that part of the country. The eight boys, strong as bullocks, alike the terror and admiration of the village, obeyed their father like slaves. They were, so to speak, the first and most zealous of his servants, doing in turn the work of carters, plowmen and thrashers. It was a fine sight to see these eight jolly fellows, with turned-up sleeves and their forks in their hands, building up a mow; or to meet them on Sunday going to mass, arm in arm, their father walking ahead; or again, to see them in the evening, when the day's work was over, seated round the long kitchen table, chatting while taking their soup and clinking their pewter mugs.

In the midst of this family of giants had appeared a small creature, full of health, but quite small; it was Madame Piédeleu's ninth child, Marguerite, known as Margot. Her head did not reach her brothers' elbows, and when her father kissed her, he would always lift her up and place her on the table. Little Margot was not yet sixteen; her turned-up nose, her well-cut mouth, always smiling, her skin tinted by the sun, her plump arms and well-rounded figure, gave her the appearance of cheerfulness itself; and in truth, she was the joy of the family. Seated in the midst of her brothers, she shone and pleased the sight, like a bluebell in a field of waving corn. "In faith," the goodman would say, "I do not know how my wife happened to get me that child: it is a gift from Heaven; but nevertheless, that slip of a girl will make me happy all my life."

Margot looked after the housekeeping; Mother Piédeleu, though still robust, had let her do this, in order to accustom her, from an early age, to order and economy. Margot locked up the linen and the wine and had the full care of the pots and pans, which she did not deign to wash; but she spread the cloth, poured out the drinks, and sang them a song at dessert. The servants of the house spoke of her only as Mademoiselle Marguerite, for she assumed a certain air of reserve. To sum it up, she was, as the good folks say, as pretty as a picture. I do not mean to say she was not coquettish; she was young, attractive and a daughter of Eve. But none of the boys, even the beaux of the village, dared press her waist too hard; they would have fared ill. The son of a fanner, Jarry by name, who was what is known as a bad case, had kissed her one day at a dance, and been rewarded with a good box on the ears.

M. le Curé held Margot in the highest esteem. When he had an example to quote, it was always she whom he chose. He even did her the honor one day of mentioning her in his sermon, and of giving her as a model to his flock. If the progress of intelligence, as it is said, had not done away with that ancient and honest custom of

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our ancestors, of giving a rose as a prize for good conduct, Margot would have carried white roses, which is worth more than a sermon; but our gentlemen of '89 have suppressed that, with many other good things. Margot could sew and even embroider; her father had wished, as well, that she should be able to read and write and also learn spelling, a little grammar and some geography. A religious Carmelite had taken charge of her education. Therefore, Margot was the oracle of the locality; as soon as she opened her mouth, the peasants were wonderstruck. She told them that the earth was round, and they believed her. They formed a circle round her, on Sunday, when she danced on the lawn; for she had had a dancing-master and his *pas de bourrée* astonished every one. In a word, she found means to be both loved and admired at the same time, which may be accounted difficult. The reader is already aware that Margot was Madame Doradour's goddaughter, and that it was she who sent her that New Year's greeting, written on paper with a beautiful engraving at the top. This letter, hardly ten lines in all, had cost the little farmer's girl much trouble and reflection, for she was not well versed in literature. However, Madame Doradour, who had always been very fond of Margot, and who knew her as the most honest girl in the country, had determined to ask her of her father, and to make of her, if possible, her lady companion.

The goodman was in the yard one evening, all his attention concentrated on a new wheel just attached to one of his wagons. Mother Piédeleu, standing in the shed, was gravely holding the nose of a troublesome bull with a large pair of pincers, to prevent him from moving while he was being examined by a veterinary surgeon. The farm boys were rubbing down the horses, just back from the water-trough. The cattle began to come in, a majestic procession of cows moving toward the stable in the setting sun, and Margot, seated on a bundle of hay, was reading an old number of the *Journal de l'Empire* which the Curé had loaned her.

The Curé himself appeared at this moment, approached the farmer and handed him a letter from Madame Doradour. The goodman opened the letter with respect; but he had scarce read the first lines when he was obliged to sit down on a bench, so surprised and moved was he. "To ask of me my daughter!" he cried, "my only daughter, my poor Margot!"

At these words, Madame Piédeleu, thoroughly alarmed, ran to him; the boys, who were returning from the fields, gathered round their father. Margot alone remained aside, fearing to move or even to breathe. After the first exclamations, the entire family preserved a mournful silence.

The Curé then began to speak and enumerated all the advantages that would accrue to Margot if she accepted her godmother's proposition. Madame Doradour had been a real friend to the Piédeleus and had in fact been their benefactress. She needed some one to make her life pleasant and to care for her and her home. She applied to her farmer with confidence and would be sure to treat her goddaughter well and to look after her future. The goodman listened to the Curé without saying a word, and finally asked for a few days to think it over before coming to a decision on the matter.

At the end of a week, after much hesitation and many tears, it was resolved to allow Margot to start for Paris. Her mother was inconsolable: she said it was disgraceful to make a servant out of her daughter, when she had but to choose from the handsomest young fellows of the country to become a rich farmer's wife. The Piédeleu boys, for the first time in their lives, were unable to agree together; they quarreled all day, some consenting, the others refusing; finally, the house was in an indescribable state of disorder and grief. But the farmer remembered that, in a bad year, Madame Doradour, instead of demanding her rent, had sent him a bag of money. He silenced them all and decided to allow his daughter to leave.

The day of departure arrived and a horse was harnessed to the wagon to take Margot to Chartres, where she was to take the coach. No one was in the fields that day; almost the entire village assembled in the farmyard. A complete outfit had been presented to Margot: the back, the front and the inside of the wagon were encumbered with boxes and parcels of all description: the Piédeleus did not wish their daughter to cut a bad figure in Paris. Margot had bid good-by to all, and was about to embrace her father, when the Curé took her

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by the hand and addressed her with a few words of fatherly advice on her journey, her future life and the dangers she was about to experience. "Preserve your virtue, young girl," cried the worthy man, "it is the most precious of all treasures; look after that and God will reward you."

Farmer Piédeleu was moved to tears, although he had not clearly understood all the Curé had said. He pressed his daughter to his heart, let her go, then came back and embraced her again; he wished to speak, but his grief made him dumb. "Remember always the advice of M. le Curé," said he, at last, in an altered voice: "remember it well, my poor child...." Then he added brusquely: "A thousand devil's pipes! Do not forget it."

The Curé, who was stretching out his hands to give Margot his benediction, stopped short at these words. It was to conquer his emotion that the farmer had sworn; he turned his back on the Curé and went into the house without another word.

Margot climbed into the wagon, and the horse was about to start, when they heard such a deep sob that every one turned round. They then perceived a little boy, about fourteen years old, whom nobody had hitherto noticed. He was called Pierrot and his business was not very noble, for he tended the turkeys; but he loved Margot passionately, not from love, but from friendship. Margot, on her part, also loved this poor little fellow. She had many times given him a handful of cherries or some grapes to eat with his dry bread. As he was not lacking in intelligence, she liked to talk to him and teach him what little she knew herself. As they were both about the same age, it had often happened that, when the lesson was over, the teacher and the student had played hide-and-seek together. At this very moment Pierrot was wearing a pair of wooden shoes that Margot had given him, having pitied him walking with bare feet. Standing in a corner of the yard, surrounded by his small flock, Pierrot was looking at his shoes and sobbing as if his heart would break. Margot beckoned him to approach and held out her hand. He seized it and carried it to his lips as if to implant a kiss, but placed it on his eyes instead; Margot withdrew it all bathed in tears. For the last time she said good-by to her mother and the wagon started.

## CHAPTER III

When Margot climbed into the coach at Chartres, the idea of going twenty leagues, and seeing Paris, so upset her that she lost all appetite. Much saddened as she was at leaving her home, she could not help feeling curious, and she had so often heard Paris spoken of as a wonderful place, that she could hardly imagine that she was going to see such a beautiful city with her own eyes. Among her stage companions was a commercial traveler, who, according to the habit of his class, did not fail to talk all the time. Margot listened to his stories with religious attention. From the few questions she hazarded, he noticed what a novice she was, and outdoing himself, he painted such an extravagant and bombastic picture of the capital that on hearing him you would not have known if it was a description of Paris or Pekin. Margot had no thoughts of doubting him, and he was not the man to stop and think that at her first step into the city she would see that he had been lying. It is in this manner that one can not much admire the supreme attraction of bragging. I remember well that once when traveling in Italy the same thing happened to me as to Margot: one of my fellow-travelers gave me a description of Genoa, which I was on my way to see. He lied on the boat which we were on, he lied in sight of the town, and even when we were in port.

Carriages coming from Chartres enter Paris by the Champs-Élysées. I leave you to imagine the admiration of a peasant girl from Beauce at the spectacle of this magnificent avenue, which has no equal in the world, and which might have been made for the triumphant entry of a hero, master of the world. The quiet and narrow streets of the Marais appeared very dreary after such grandeur. However, when her carriage stopped in front of Madame Doradour's door, she was enchanted with the fine appearance of the house. With a trembling hand she lifted the knocker and allowed it to fall, with a feeling of fear, not unmixed with pleasure. Madame Doradour expected her goddaughter. She received her with open arms, showered kisses upon her, called her "daughter," settled her in an easy-chair and then had her supper brought to her. Dizzy from the noise of the

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streets, Margot looked at the tapestries, the painted panels and the gilded furniture, but, above all, at the fine mirrors decorating the drawing-room. She, who had never done her hair but by the aid of her father's shaving-mirror, thought it charming and wonderful to see her image repeated around her in so many different manners. The refined and polished manners of her godmother and her noble and reserved way of speaking, also made a deep impression upon her. The very clothes of the good lady, her ample dress of flowered silk, her large cap and powdered hair, gave Margot much to think of and showed her that she was in the presence of a superior being. As she had a quick and easy mind, and at the same time a child's natural inclination for imitation, she had hardly chatted with Madame Doradour for an hour before she assayed to take her as her model. She sat up, straightened her cap, and brought into play all the grammar she knew. Unfortunately a glass of very good wine that her godmother had made her drink, to recuperate her after the fatigue of the journey, had confused her ideas; she closed her eyes. Madame Doradour took her by the hand and led her to a beautiful room; after which, having kissed her once more, she wished her good night and retired.

Almost immediately some one knocked at the door; a lady's-maid entered, relieved Margot of her shawl and cap, and knelt down to undo her shoes. Margot was standing, nearly asleep, and allowed her to do as she wished. It was only when her chemise was removed that she noticed she was being undressed, and without reflecting that she was quite nude, made a deep bow to the lady's-maid. She then hurried through her prayers and quickly got into bed. From the light of her night-lamp, she saw that her bedroom also boasted of some gilt furniture and that it was adorned with one of those magnificent mirrors she loved so well. Above this mirror was a panel, and the little carved cupids appeared in her eyes as so many good spirits inviting her to admire herself. She promised herself to make full use of it, and rocked by the sweetest dreams, with a delicious feeling fell asleep.

People rise early in the country, and our little country girl was up with the birds the following morning. She sat up in bed and perceiving in her beloved mirror her pretty face, she honored herself with a gracious smile. The maid soon appeared and respectfully asked if mademoiselle wished to take a bath. At the same time she placed upon her shoulders a robe of scarlet, which appeared to Margot no less than king's purple.

Madame Doradour's bathroom was a more worldly retreat than one would have expected such a devout lady to possess; it had been built under Louis XV. The bath, raised off the floor, was surrounded by a stucco of gilded roses, and the inevitable cupids pursued each other all over the ceiling. On the panel opposite was to be seen a copy of Boucher's "Bathers;" a copy perhaps from the hand of Boucher himself. A garland of flowers ran along the panels; a soft carpet covered the floor, and silk curtains gracefully looped allowed a mysterious glamour of light to penetrate through the half-open shutters.

Needless to say that time had somewhat tarnished all this luxury, and the gildings showed traces of age: but, for this very reason, one felt more at one's ease inhaling the lingering perfume of those sixty years of folly the reign of the well-loved king.

Margot, alone in this room, timidly approached the bath. First she examined the gilded griffins situated at each end; she hardly dared to enter the water, which seemed to her at least rose water. She softly dipped one leg into the water, then the other, and then remained standing in contemplation before the panel. She knew nothing about painting; the nymphs of Boucher appeared as goddesses to her; she did not imagine such women could exist on this earth, or that one could eat with hands so white, or that such small feet were possible. What would she not have given to have been as lovely! She did not guess that with her sunburnt hands she was a hundred times better than these dolls. A slight movement of the curtain broke in upon her thoughts; she started at the idea of being surprised thus, and sank into the water up to her neck.

A feeling of ease and languor soon held her in its sway. Like the children, she began by playing with the water with the corner of her gown; she then amused herself by counting the flowers and the roses in the room; then examined the little cupids, but their large stomachs displeased her. She leaned her head on the rim

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of the bath and looked out through the partly open window.

The bathroom was on the ground floor, and the window looked on to the garden. It was not, as you may well imagine, an English garden, but an old-fashioned French garden, better by far than any other: fine graveled walks with borders of boxwood, large flower beds brilliant with well-assorted colors, beautiful statues scattered here and there, and in the background a labyrinth of shrubs. Margot looked at the labyrinth, the dark entrance of which made her dream. The games of hide-and-seek were recalled to her memory and she was thinking that in the windings of the shrubbery there must be some fine hiding-places.

At this moment a handsome young man in the uniform of a hussar came out of the labyrinth and went toward the house. After having passed the flower beds, he came so near the window of the bathroom that his elbows shook the lattice, Margot was unable to withhold a slight exclamation called forth by her fright; the young man stopped, opened the shutters and put his head in. He perceived Margot in the bath and, although a hussar, he blushed. Margot blushed also, and the young man walked away.

## CHAPTER IV

The most unfortunate thing under the sun for every one, and especially for young girls, is that to be good is quite a struggle and that to be only reasonable, one must undergo much hardship; whereas, to do wrong one needs but to let oneself go. Homer tells us that Sisyphus was the wisest of mortals; nevertheless the gods unanimously condemn him to roll a great stone to the top of a mountain, whence it recoils at once on the poor man, who must begin all over again. Commentators have exhausted themselves in trying to find a reason for this punishment; as for myself, I do not doubt that by means of this beautiful allegory the ancients wished to represent Wisdom. Wisdom, in fact, is that enormous rock that we roll up without ceasing, and which incessantly falls back upon our heads. Notice that the day it escapes us it is of no avail that we have pushed it up for so many years; while on the contrary, if a fool by chance does a wise action, infinite praise is bestowed upon him. Folly is far from being a stone: it is a soap-bubble which goes dancing before us, and reflecting, like the rainbow, all the colors in creation. It is true, the bubble bursts, and scatters a few drops of water in our eyes, but a new one comes to life at once, and to sustain it in the air all we need do is to breathe.

By these philosophical reflections I wish to show that it is not astonishing that Margot was somewhat in love with the young man who had seen her in her bath, and I wish also to point out that one should think none the less of her for this. When love enters our affairs, there is small need to assist it, and one knows that to shut the door in its face is no way of refusing it admission; but in this case it entered by the window and in the following manner:

This young gentleman, in the uniform of a hussar, was none other than Gaston, Madame Doradour's son, who had torn himself away, not without much trouble, from the flirtations of the garrison, and who had just arrived at his mother's house. Heaven willed it that the room in which Margot was lodged was situated at the corner of the house, and that young man's was also there; that is to say that their two windows were almost face to face, and at the same time quite close together. Margot dined with Madame Doradour and spent the afternoon with her; but from seven in the morning till midday she remained in her room. Gaston also, the greater part of the time, was in his room during these hours, so that Margot had nothing better to do than to sew near the window and watch her neighbor. Proximity has, from time immemorial, been the cause of many troubles. There is nothing so dangerous as a pretty neighbor; were she ugly, it would not be much better, for seeing her so often, sooner or later the day arrives when one finds her pretty. Gaston had a small round mirror attached to his window, according to a bachelor's custom. He shaved before the mirror, combed his hair and tied his cravat. Margot noticed that he had beautiful blond hair, naturally curly; this was the cause of her buying a bottle of violet hair-oil and taking good care that the two little curls of black hair which escaped from her cap were always glossy and brilliant. Finally, she noticed that Gaston had some beautiful ties and that he changed very often; so she purchased a dozen scarfs, the finest to be obtained in the Marais. Besides,

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Gaston had that habit which made the great philosopher of Geneva so indignant and caused him to break with his friend Grimm: he pared his nails, as Rousseau says, with an instrument made on purpose. Margot was not such a great philosopher as Rousseau; instead of being indignant, she bought a brush and to hide her hands, which were slightly red, as I have said before, she put on black mitts which only allowed the tips of her fingers to be seen. Gaston had many more fine things which Margot could not imitate; for instance, red trousers and sky-blue waistcoat embroidered in black. Margot, it is true, was the proud possessor of a scarlet flannel wrapper, but how could she equal the blue waistcoat? She pretended to have earache and made herself for morning wear a small toque of blue velvet. Having perceived a portrait of Napoleon at the head of Gaston's bed, she wished to have one of Josephine. Finally, Gaston having said one day, at breakfast, that he was fond of a good omelette, Margot conquered her timidity and performed an act of courage; she declared that no one in the world could make an omelette as well as she, and that, at home, she always made them, and begged her godmother just to taste one.

Thus did the poor child try to show her modest love, but Gaston took no notice whatever. How could a bold and proud young man, accustomed to noisy pleasures and garrison life, notice this childish stratagem? The grisettes of Strasbourg set to work in a different fashion when they have some fancy in their heads. Gaston dined with his mother, then went out for the evening: and as Margot could not go to sleep till he had returned, she awaited his arrival behind her curtains. It happened several times that the young man, perceiving the light in her room, remarked to himself as he crossed the yard: "Why is not that little girl in bed?" It also happened that while making his toilette he cast on Margot an absent-minded look which penetrated to her very soul; but she would at once turn away her head and would rather have died than face that look. I must also add that in the drawing-room she did not show herself the same. Seated near her godmother, she endeavored to appear grave and reserved and to be modestly listening to Madame Doradour's chatter. When Gaston addressed her, she answered as best she could; but, what will seem strange, she answered almost without emotion. Explain who can what passes through the mind of a girl of fifteen; Margot's love was, so to speak, locked up in her room and there she found it as soon as she entered and left it there on leaving; but she removed the key, so that no one, in her absence, might desecrate her little sanctuary.

It is easy to understand, on the other hand, that the presence of Madame Doradour should have made her circumspect and obliged her to reflect, for this presence ceaselessly called to her mind the distance that separated her from Gaston. Any other but Margot might perhaps have despaired, or rather would have cured herself, seeing the danger of her passion. But Margot had never asked herself, even in the depths of her heart, of what use was her love to be; and, in fact, is there a more senseless question than that, continually addressed to those in love; "To what will this lead you?" "Well, good people, it will lead me to love."

As soon as Margot awoke, she jumped out of bed, and with naked feet, her cap on her head, would draw aside a corner of her curtain to see if Gaston had opened his shutters. If the shutters were closed, she quickly went back to bed, and the instant she heard the creaking of the knob, about which she was never mistaken, she would be on the watch. This moment arrived, she put on her slippers and dressing-gown, in her turn opened her window, and leaned out looking from side to side in a sleepy manner, as if to study the weather. Then she would push one of the window-sashes in such a way as to be seen only by Gaston, placed her looking-glass on a small table and began to comb her beautiful hair. She did not know that a born coquette only shows herself in all her finery, and does not allow herself to be seen while decking herself out. As Gaston arranged his hair before her, she did the same in front of him. Hidden by her mirror, she risked timid glances, ready to lower her eyes if Gaston looked at her. When her hair was well combed and done up, she placed on her head her little cap of tulle, embroidered *à la paysanne*, which she had refused to give up. This little cap was always quite white, as was also the broad turned-down collar which covered her shoulders and gave her somewhat the appearance of a young nun. She remained thus with bare arms, in a short petticoat, awaiting her coffee. Soon Mademoiselle Pélagie, her maid, would appear carrying a tray and escorted by the family cat, an indispensable piece of furniture at the Marais, which never failed to pay its respects to Margot every morning. He then enjoyed the privilege of settling in an easy-chair in front of her, and of having half the breakfast as

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his share. It was for her, as one may imagine, but a pretext for coquetry. The cat, that was old and spoiled, rolled into a ball on an armchair and gravely received kisses not meant for him at all. Margot teased it, took it in her arms, threw it on her bed, now caressing it, now teasing it. During the ten years the cat had been one of the household it had never experienced such treatment and was not exactly pleased, but patiently accepted all, being, at heart, good-natured and evincing a deep friendship for Margot. After taking her coffee, she again approached the window, again looked out to inspect the weather, and then pulled the window-frame to, but not closing it entirely. Now for a man with the instinct of a hunter this was the time to lie in wait. Margot finished dressing, and shall I say she showed herself? Not so; she was dying from a fear of being seen and from a strong desire to show herself. And was Margot a good girl? Yes, good, honest and innocent. And what was she doing? She was putting on her shoes, her skirt and her dress and from time to time one could have seen her, through the half-opened window, stretching out her arm to take a hairpin from the table. And what would she have done had one looked in? She would have closed the window immediately. Then why leave it half-open? Ask her, I can not tell.

Matters were thus, when on a certain day Madame Doradour and her son had a long private conversation. An air of mystery surrounded them and they often spoke in whispers, Shortly after, Madame Doradour said to Margot: "My dear child, you are about to see your mother once more; we shall spend the autumn at la Honville."

## CHAPTER V

The house at la Honville was distant about a league from Chartres, and half a league from the farm where lived the parents of Margot. It was not exactly a castle, but a very fine mansion surrounded by a beautiful park. Madame Doradour did not often grace it with her presence, and for a number of years no one had been seen there but a steward. This sudden journey and the secret interviews between the young man and the old lady surprised and disturbed Margot.

Madame Doradour had arrived but two days before, and all the luggage had not yet been unpacked, when there were seen advancing across the plain ten giants, marching in good order: it was the Piédeleu family coming to pay their respects. The mother brought a basket of fruit, each of the sons held in his hand a pot of gillyflowers, and the goodman strutted along, carrying in his pockets two enormous melons that he had chosen himself and judged to be the best in his garden. Madame Doradour accepted these presents with her usual kindness, and as she had expected this visit from the farmer, she brought forth from her closet eight waistcoats of flowered silk for the brothers, some lace for Mother Piédeleu and for the goodman a broad-brimmed felt hat, the edge of which was turned up and held in place by a buckle of gold. Having exchanged compliments, Margot, full of joy and vigor, appeared before her people. After they had all in turn kissed her, her godmother praised her aloud, and spoke very highly of her sweetness, her goodness and her spirit, and the cheeks of the young girl, all pink from the kisses she had received, became of even a warmer color. Mother Piédeleu, seeing Margot's clothes, judged that she must be happy, and could not help, good mother that she was, telling her that she had never appeared so pretty. "My faith, 'tis true," said the farmer. "Yes, it is true," repeated a voice that caused Margot to tremble all over; it was Gaston who had just entered.

At this moment, the door having remained open, they perceived in the hall Pierrot, the little tender of turkeys, who had wept so bitterly at Margot's departure. He had followed his masters at a distance and, not daring to enter the room, from afar he timidly saluted them, "And who is this little fellow?" said Madame Doradour. "Come in, little one, come and say good morning." Pierrot bowed once more, but nothing could induce him to enter; he became red as fire and rushed away as fast as his little legs could carry him.

"Is it really true that you think me pretty?" Margot repeated to herself, while walking alone in the park, after her people had gone home. "But what audacity men have to say such things before every one! I do not even dare to look him in the face, and how is it that he tells me aloud a thing I can not hear without blushing. He

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must be very much accustomed to it, or that he thinks nothing of it; still, to tell a woman she is pretty, is a great deal; it is something like a declaration of love."

At this thought Margot stopped and asked herself just exactly what a declaration of love was. She had heard a good deal on the subject, but did not very clearly understand. "How do people say that they love?" she asked herself, and she could only imagine it must be by saying "I love you." It seemed to her that it should be something quite different, that for this there should be a secret, some particular language, a mystery full of danger and delight. She had read but one novel; I do not know the title. It was an odd volume she had discovered, in her father's store-room. It told of a Sicilian brigand running away with a nun, and she found many sentences quite unintelligible to her and which she had judged must be words of love. But she had heard the Curé say that all novels were but foolishness, and it was the truth alone that she was burning to know; but whom could she dare ask?

Gaston's room, at la Honville, was not as near as in Paris. No more furtive glances, no creaking hinges. Every day, at five in the morning, a bell was quietly rung. It was the gamekeeper awakening Gaston, the bell being near his window. The young man got up and went out shooting. Hidden behind her shutters, Margot saw him, surrounded by his dogs and gun in hand, mount his horse and lose himself in the mist that covered the fields. She followed him with her eyes with as much emotion as if she had been a feudal lord's captive lady whose master was leaving for Palestine. It often happened that Gaston, instead of opening the first gate, made his horse jump it. Margot, at this sight, uttered many a sigh, half sweet, half sad. She imagined that in hunting one ran the gravest danger. When Gaston returned in the evening, covered with dust, she examined him from head to foot to assure herself he was un-wounded, as if he had but just returned from a fight. But when she saw him take from his game-bag a hare or a brace of pheasants and place them on the table, she thought she saw a victorious warrior laden with the spoils of his enemy.

What she so much dreaded happened one day. Gaston, in jumping a hedge, was thrown from his horse; he fell among branches and escaped with a few scratches. Of what deep emotion this accident was the cause! Margot's prudence almost abandoned her; at first she almost fainted. She crossed her hands and breathed a hushed prayer. What would she not have given to be able to wipe away the blood on the young man's hand? She took her finest handkerchief and put it in her pocket, the only handkerchief she possessed that was embroidered, and impatiently she awaited an opportunity of offering it to Gaston to wrap his hand in, but she did not even have this consolation. The cruel fellow being at supper, and a few drops of blood escaping from his wound, he refused Margot's handkerchief and rolled his napkin round his wrist. Margot was so disappointed that her eyes filled with tears.

She could not, however, imagine that Gaston despised her love, but he ignored it and what was she to do? At times Margot felt resigned, and at other times impatient. The most indifferent events became for her in turn moments of joy or of sorrow. A kind word, a look from Gaston made her happy all day. If he crossed the drawing-room without noticing her, if he went to bed without wishing Her the customary "Good night," she would pass the night thinking how she could have displeased him. If he sat near her and complimented her on her tapestry, she beamed with pleasure and gratitude; if at dinner, he declined some dish she offered him, she imagined he no longer loved her.

There were certain days when she, so to speak, had pity on herself. She began to be doubtful of her beauty, and for whole afternoons would imagine herself ugly. At other moments, feminine pride rose within her; sometimes, before her mirror, she would spitefully shrug her shoulders, on thinking of Gaston's indifference. A movement of anger and discouragement would make her rumple her collar and crush her cap down over her eyes; a sudden feeling of pride would reawaken her coquetry. She would suddenly appear, in the middle of the day, decked in all her finery and in her Sunday gown, as if to protest with all her might, against the injustice of fate.

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Margot, in her new condition, had preserved the tastes of her earlier life. While Gaston was hunting, she often spent her mornings in the kitchen-garden. She knew how to handle the pruning-knife, the rake and the watering-pot, and more than once had given the gardener good advice. The kitchen-garden stretched in front of the house and, at the same time, served as a flower bed; flowers, fruit and vegetables grew here in harmony. Margot was particularly fond of a large fruit wall covered with the finest peaches. She tended it most carefully and it was she who, every day, carefully plucked some fruit for dessert. There was one peach much larger than the others. Margot could not make up her mind to pluck it; she found it so velvety and of such a beautiful purple hue, that she dared not remove it from the tree and it seemed to her that it would be almost committing a crime to eat it. She never passed by without admiring it, and had warned the gardener never to touch it, under pain of her wrath and the reproaches of her godmother. One day, at sunset, Gaston, returning from the hunt, was crossing the garden. Carried away by thirst, he stretched out his hand on passing the fruit wall and, as luck would have it, he detached Margot's favorite peach, biting into it at once without respect. She was standing a short distance away, watering a vegetable bed. She hastily ran forward, but the young man, not perceiving her, continued on his way. After one or two mouthfuls he threw away the fruit and entered the house. Margot had seen from the start that her precious peach was lost. Gaston's sudden movement and the careless manner in which he had thrown away the peach had produced a curious and unexpected result. The young girl was grieved and at the same time delighted, for she thought Gaston must have been extremely thirsty, the sun having been shining brilliantly all day, and that this fruit must have given him pleasure. She picked up the peach, and after having blown off the dust, looked round to see that no one could perceive her and lightly kissed it. But at the same time she could not help just biting it, to get a taste. I do not know what singular thought crossed her mind, and thinking perhaps of the fruit, perhaps of herself, murmured: "Oh, you bad boy, little do you know what you are throwing away."

I ask the reader's pardon for all these childish pranks of which I am telling him, but what else can I narrate, my heroine being but a child? Madame Doradour had been invited to dinner in a neighboring castle. She took with her Gaston and Margot. The party broke up very late and night had closed in when they started back for the house. Margot and her godmother were at the back of the carriage; Gaston, seated in front, and having no one beside him, had stretched himself out on the cushion, nearly full length. It was a clear moonlight night, but the inside of the carriage was dark; a few rays of light occasionally penetrated it. The conversation lagged; a good dinner, some slight fatigue, the darkness and the soft rocking of the carriage, all tempted our travelers to sleep. Madame Doradour was the first to doze off, and, as she went to sleep, she placed her foot on the front seat, without noticing if she disturbed Gaston. The air was fresh; a thick rug over their knees covered both godmother and goddaughter. Margot, curled up in a corner, did not move, although thoroughly wide-awake, but she was very anxious to know if Gaston was asleep. It seemed to her that since her eyes were open, his should be also; she looked toward him without seeing him, and wondered if he was looking at her. Whenever a little light entered the carriage, she risked a slight cough. The young man remained motionless and the young girl dared not speak, for fear of disturbing her godmother's sleep. She stretched her head and looked out; the idea of a long journey so much resembles a long love, that, on seeing the moonlight and the fields, Margot immediately forgot that they were on their way to la Honville. She half closed her eyes, and while watching the passing trees she imagined herself leaving for Switzerland or Italy with Madame Doradour and her son. This dream, as one may think, led to many others and to such sweet ones that she abandoned herself to them entirely. She saw herself, not Gaston's wife, but his fiancée, going round the world, loved by him and having the right to love him, and at the end of the journey was Happiness, that charming word which she incessantly repeated, and which, happily for her, she understood so little. The better to dream, she shut her eyes completely; she dozed, and by an involuntary movement, she did as Madame Doradour had done. She placed her foot on the seat opposite and, as chance had it, this foot, daintily clad and very small, landed exactly on Gaston's hand. Gaston appeared to notice nothing; but Margot woke with a start. She did not immediately remove her foot, only slid it a little to one side. Her dream had enveloped her so entirely that even her awakening did not dispel it. And can one not place one's foot on the seat where one's lover is sleeping, when one starts with him for Switzerland? Little by little, however, the illusion was dissipated. Margot began to think of the foolish act of which she had just been guilty.

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"Did he notice it?" she asked herself. "Is he asleep or only pretending? If he did notice it, why did he not remove his hand? And if he is sleeping, how is it this did not awaken him? Perhaps he despises me too much to show that he felt my foot; perhaps he rather likes it, and in pretending not to feel it, he is waiting for me to begin again; perhaps he thinks that I am sleeping myself. But it is not pleasant to have another's foot on one's hand, unless one loves that person. My shoe must have soiled his glove, for we have walked a great deal to-day; but perhaps he does not wish to appear to notice so small a thing. What will he say if I begin again? But he well knows I would never dare; perhaps, he even guesses my trouble, and is amusing himself at my expense."

While thinking thus, Margot softly withdrew her foot with all possible care: this little foot trembled like a leaf. While feeling its way in the darkness, it again touched the ends of the young man's fingers, but so lightly that Margot herself scarce had time to notice it. Never had her heart throbbed so quickly; she thought herself lost, and fancied she had committed an irreparable imprudence. "What must he think?" she said to herself. "What opinion will he have of me? In what trouble am I about to find myself? I shall never dare to look him in the face. It was bad enough to have touched him the first time, but it is much worse now. How can I prove that I did not do it on purpose? Boys will never believe anything. He will laugh at me and tell every one, my godmother perhaps, and my godmother will tell my father. I shall no longer be able to show myself in the neighborhood. Where shall I go? What will become of me? Whatever I say, it is certain that I touched him twice and that never did a woman do such a thing. After what has just happened, the least that can occur is for me to leave the house." At this thought Margot shuddered. For a long time she racked her brains for means to justify herself. She thought of writing a long letter to Gaston the next day, which she would have handed to him in secret, and in which she would explain that it was by mistake she had placed her foot upon his hand, and that she begged his pardon, and begged him to forget it. "But if he is not asleep," she thought again. "Suppose he suspects that I love him? Has he found me out? Will he be the first to-morrow to talk to me of our adventure? If he told me he loved me too? If he should make me a declaration..." At this moment the carriage came to a standstill. Gaston, who was really asleep, unceremoniously stretched his arms on awakening. It was some time before he remembered where he was. At this sad discovery, Margot's dreams vanished. And when the young man offered her the very hand her foot had touched, to help her to alight, she but too clearly saw that she had been traveling alone.

## CHAPTER VI

Two unexpected events, the one ridiculous, the other serious, occurred almost at the same time. Gaston was one morning trying a horse, he had just purchased, in the avenue leading to the house, when a little boy, half covered in rags and almost naked, approached him resolutely and stopped before his horse. It was Pierrot, the turkey keeper. Gaston did not recognize him, and thinking he was begging, threw a handful of coppers into the boy's cap. Pierrot pocketed the money, but instead of moving away, he ran after the horseman and once more placed himself in front of his horse a few steps farther on. Gaston called to him two or three times to get out of the way, but in vain; Pierrot still followed and placed himself in the horse's path.

"What do you want of me, you little rogue?" demanded the young man. "Have you sworn to be run over?"

"Monsieur," answered Pierrot, without moving, "I want to be your servant."

"Whose?"

"Yours, monsieur."

"Mine? And why do you ask this?"

"Simply because I want to be monsieur's servant."

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"But I am in no need of a servant. Who told you I wanted one?"

"Nobody, monsieur."

"Then why do you ask?"

"I want to be monsieur's servant."

"Are you mad or are you making fun of me?"

"No, monsieur."

"Then take this and do not worry me."

Gaston threw him some more money and turning his horse, continued on his way. Pierrot sat down at the side of the avenue, and Margot, happening to pass by some time later, found him there crying as if his heart would break. She ran to him at once.

"What is the matter, my poor Pierrot? What has happened to you?"

At first Pierrot refused to answer, but at last blurted out between his sobs, "I wanted to be monsieur's servant, and monsieur would not have me."

It was not without much trouble that Margot finally arrived at the facts of the case. At length she understood. Since she had left the farm, Pierrot had longed to see her again. Half in shame and half in tears, he poured out his troubles, and she could not help laughing at them, and at the same time being sorry for him. The poor boy, to explain his regrets, spoke in a breath of his love for Margot, of his worn-out wooden shoes, of his loneliness in the fields, of one of his turkeys that had died; all this was somewhat mixed up in his head. Finally, no longer able to bear his troubles, he had decided to come to la Honville, and offer his services to Gaston as a servant or a groom. He had been eight days in coming to this determination, and as you have just seen, he had met with scant success. He even spoke of dying rather than return to the farm. "Since monsieur will not have me," said he, as he finished his story, "and since I can not be near him like you are with Madame Doradour, I shall let myself die of hunger." I need not add that these last words were accompanied by a further outburst of tears.

Margot consoled him as best she could, and taking him by the hand, led him toward the house. Then, not giving him time to die of hunger, she made him go into the kitchen and gave him some bread, ham and fruit. Pierrot, still in tears, ate with a good appetite, watching Margot the while with all his eyes. She easily made him understand that, in order to enter any one's service, one must wait for a vacancy, and she promised that on the first occasion she would formulate an application in his behalf. She thanked him for his friendship, assured him that she also liked him, wiped away his tears, kissed him on the forehead, in a motherly way, and finally persuaded him to go back. Pierrot, fully convinced, stuffed his pockets with the remnants of his breakfast. Margot presented him also with a silver crown wherewith to buy himself a waistcoat and some new shoes. Quite consoled, he seized the young girl's hands and pressed them to his lips, saying in a trembling voice: "Au revoir, Mademoiselle Marguerite." As he slowly walked away, Margot noticed that the little boy was beginning to grow manly. She remembered that he was but one year younger than she, and she made up her mind that on the next occasion she would not be so prone to kiss him.

The next day she noticed that Gaston, contrary to his custom, had not gone hunting, and that he was more carefully dressed than usual. After dinner, that is to say toward four o'clock, the young man gave his arm to his mother and they both went off in the direction of the avenue. They were talking in whispers and appeared

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expectant. Margot, alone in the drawing-room, was anxiously looking out of the window, when a post-chaise drove into the courtyard. Gaston ran to open the door; an old lady descended first, then a pretty young lady, about nineteen years old, elegantly attired and beautiful as day. From the welcome extended to the two visitors, Margot guessed that they were not only people of distinction, but must surely be related to her godmother. The two finest rooms in the house had been set aside for their use. When the newcomers entered the drawing-room, Madame Doradour beckoned Margot and whispered to her to retire. She did so reluctantly, and the stay of these two ladies seemed to augur little pleasure for her.

She was hesitating, the following day, whether she should go down to breakfast, when her godmother came to fetch her and introduced her to Madame and Mademoiselle de Vercelles, for so were the visitors named. On entering the dining-room, Margot saw that there was a white napkin before her usual place, which was next to Gaston. She sat down silently, but somewhat sadly, in another place: her own was taken by Mademoiselle de Vercelles, and it was easy enough to see that the young man greatly admired his neighbor. Margot remained dumb during the meal; she served the dish in front of her and when she offered some to Gaston, he did not even appear to have heard her. After breakfast they strolled into the park. After taking a few turns in the shaded walks, Madame Doradour took the arm of the old lady and Gaston offered his to the beautiful girl. Margot, left alone, walked behind: no one thought of her or spoke to her, so she soon stopped and went back into the house. At dinner, Madame Doradour had a bottle of Frontignan opened, and as she had preserved all the good old customs, she held out her glass for the others to clink with her, as a token of friendship. They all followed suit, with the exception of Margot, who did not exactly know what to do. However, she also raised her glass slightly, hoping for encouragement. No one answered her timid action, and she put the glass down before her, without having touched its contents.

"It is a pity we are not five," said Madame de Vercelles, after dinner, "we could play bouillotte." Bouillotte was played by five people in those days.

Margot, seated in a corner, took good care not to say she played, and her godmother proposed a hand at whist. Supper having been brought in, they begged Mademoiselle de Vercelles to sing during dessert. The young lady had to be pressed hard, but finally with a light and graceful voice she sang a merry little song. Margot, on hearing her, could not help sighing and thinking of her father's house, where it was she who sang during dessert. When it was time to retire for the night, she found, on entering her room, that two of her favorite articles of furniture had been removed, a large sofa and a little inlaid table on which she was accustomed to place her mirror when combing her hair. All trembling she half opened her window, to look for a moment at the light generally shining through Gaston's curtains. It was her nightly good-by, but this time all was dark. Gaston had closed his shutters; she crept into bed heartbroken and was unable to sleep that night.

What motives brought the two visitors and how long would their visit last? This, Margot was unable to ascertain, but it was quite clear that their presence was connected with those secret conversations between Madame Doradour and her son. Here was a mystery impossible to fathom, and whatever it might be, Margot felt that it would surely destroy her happiness. She had at first supposed these ladies to be relatives, but they were treated in too formal and polite a way for this to be the case. Madame Doradour, during their walk, had taken great care to expatiate on the size of the park. She had whispered of the products and value of the estate; was it possibly a question of selling la Honville, and in this case, what would happen to the Piédeleu family? Would the new tenants keep the old farmers? But, on the other hand, what reason could Madame Doradour have for selling the house in which she was born, and of which her son seemed so fond, when she was so wealthy? The visitors were from Paris; they spoke of it constantly and did not seem enchanted with country life. Madame de Vercelles had mentioned, at supper, that she was often with the Empress; that she accompanied her to Malmaison, and stood well in the imperial lady's favor. Perhaps it was a question of promotion for Gaston, and, if that was the case, it was only natural to pay all these attentions to a lady of standing. Such were Margot's conjectures; but, whatever effort she made, her mind was dissatisfied, and her

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heart refused to allow her to admit the only likely supposition, and at the same time the only true one.

Two servants had, with great difficulty, brought a large wooden case into the apartment of Mademoiselle de Vercelles. At the moment Margot was leaving the room she heard the sound of a piano; it was the first time in her life that her ears had been struck with such chords. She knew nothing about music beyond the country dances of the village. She stopped, full of admiration. Mademoiselle de Vercelles was playing a waltz; she began to sing and Margot softly approached the door, in order to hear the words. It was an Italian song. The sweetness of this unknown tongue appeared to Margot still more wonderful than the harmony of the instrument. Who was this fine lady who was thus voicing mysterious words in the midst of so strange a melody? Margot, overcome by curiosity, stooped and drying her eyes, still wet with tears, looked through the keyhole. She saw Mademoiselle de Vercelles in dishabille, her arms bare, her hair in disorder, lips half open and eyes turned heavenward. She seemed to see an angel; never had such a charming sight presented itself before her. She moved slowly away, dazzled and at the same time in consternation, unable to understand her emotions. But, while descending the stairs, she tremblingly repeated several times: "Oh! Sacred Virgin, what loveliness!"

## CHAPTER VII

It is singular that in this world those who are most directly interested are always most easily deluded. Looking at Gaston's attitude toward Mademoiselle de Vercelles, the most indifferent witness must have guessed him to be in love with her. But Margot did not at first perceive anything, or perhaps did not wish to see it. In spite of the grief she felt, an unexplainable feeling, that many would believe impossible, for a long time prevented her from discovering the truth: I mean that admiration which had so suddenly sprung up in her for Mademoiselle de Vercelles.

That lady was tall, blond and graceful. She did more than please: she was, if one can thus express it, of a consoling kind of beauty. There was such a singular and soft calmness in her looks and her speech that it was impossible to resist the charm she cast around her. After a few days she showed quite a liking for Margot; in fact, it was she who made the first advances. She showed her several secrets in embroidery and tapestry; she took her arm when out walking, and accompanying her on the piano, made her sing her little village songs.

Margot was the more touched by these marks of kindness, inasmuch as she was almost heartbroken. Three days of utter desolation passed, before the young Parisienne had approached and, for the first time, spoken to her. Margot trembled with pleasure, fear and surprise. She suffered at being utterly forgotten by Gaston and well guessed the reason. She felt in this action of her rival, a sort of charm mingled with bitterness. At first she was pleased at the thought of being removed from that utter isolation, which had so suddenly oppressed her; at the same time she felt flattered at being noticed by such a beautiful creature. This beauty, which should have caused her only jealousy, enchanted her from the very first. Becoming more and more familiar, she became passionately attached to mademoiselle. After having admired her face, she praised her deportment, her exquisite simplicity, her stately bows, and even the smallest ribbon she wore. She followed her incessantly with her eyes, and listened with the deepest attention to all that she said. When Mademoiselle de Vercelles sat at the piano, Margot's eyes shone and seemed to say to every one: "Here is my good friend about to play." For thus she called her, and not without some small feeling of vanity. When they passed through the village together, the country folk would turn round and stare. Mademoiselle de Vercelles was supremely indifferent, but Margot blushed with pleasure. Almost every morning, before breakfast, she would call upon her good friend; she helped her to dress, watched her washing her beautiful white hands and listened to her singing in that sweet Italian tongue. Then she would come down into the drawing-room with her, proud if having remembered some arietta and hummed it on the staircase. With all this, she was devoured by grief, and as soon as she was alone would burst into tears.

Madame Doradour was too light-hearted to notice any change in her goddaughter. "You seem to be pale,"

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she would sometimes remark, "have you not slept well?" Then, without awaiting an answer, she would busy herself about something else. Gaston saw further, and when he troubled to think about it, was not mistaken as to the cause of Margot's sadness, but he told himself it was but a childish infatuation, some slight jealousy natural to women and which would soon pass away. One must observe that Margot had always avoided any occasion of being alone with him. The thought of a *te^te-à-te^te* made her tremble, and however far off she might see him, when out for a walk, she would turn away, so that the precautions she took to hide her love appeared to the young man as the result of her simple character. "Funny little girl!" he often remarked, on seeing her run away as soon as he approached her. And to tease her he had sometimes come up with her, in spite of herself. Margot would then lower her head, answer only in monosyllables, and close in on herself, so to speak, like the sensitive plant.

The days went by extremely monotonous: Gaston no longer hunted; they played but little and rarely went for a walk. It was all conversation and two or three times a day Madame Doradour would motion to Margot to retire to leave them more to themselves. The poor girl was going and coming all the time. If she happened to enter the drawing-room at an awkward moment, she saw the two mothers nod to each other and every one was silent. When she was recalled, after a long and secret conversation, she would sit down without looking at any one and her anxiety was much like one feels at sea when a storm is heralded and slowly advances across a cloudless sky.

One morning she was passing the room of Mademoiselle de Vercelles, when the latter called her. After a few commonplace remarks, Margot noticed on one of her good friend's fingers a beautiful ring.

"Try it on," said Mademoiselle de Vercelles, "and let us see if it fits you."

"Oh, mademoiselle, my hand is not beautiful enough to be adorned with such jewels."

"Never mind that, this ring fits you exactly. I will make you a present of it on my wedding-day."

"Are you going to be married?" asked Margot, trembling.

"Who knows?" laughingly replied Mademoiselle de Vercelles. "We girls are exposed to these things every day."

I leave you to guess in what a state of anxiety, these words threw Margot. She repeated them to herself a hundred times, day and night, but almost mechanically and without daring to think about it. However, shortly after supper, as the coffee was being passed round, Gaston gave her a cup which she softly pushed away, saying: "Give it to me on your wedding-day." The young man smiled, but Madame Doradour frowned and requested Margot, somewhat severely, to mind her own business.

Margot acted on these instructions. What she desired and feared so much to know, now seemed proved to her. She ran and shut herself in her room. Once there she buried her face in her hands and cried bitterly. When she had somewhat recovered, she took good care to bolt the door so that no one should witness her grief. Locked in, in this way, she felt more free and began little by little to unravel her thoughts.

In spite of her extreme youth and the mad love that possessed her, Margot had much common sense. The first thing she felt was the impossibility of struggling against fate. She understood that Gaston loved Mademoiselle de Vercellea, that the two families were in accord and the marriage settled. Perhaps, even the date of the wedding was fixed; she remembered having seen a man dressed in black writing on a stamped paper in the library; it was probably a lawyer drawing up the deeds of settlement. Mademoiselle de Vercelles was rich and Gaston would be, after his mother's death; what could she do in face of all these arrangements, so natural, so just? She thought of this continually, and the more downcast she became, the more

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unsurmountable did she find the obstacles. Unable to prevent this marriage she thought that all she could do was to be absent on the day of the ceremony. She drew from under her bed a small trunk that belonged to her and placed it in the middle of the room, resolved to pack up her things and return to her parents. But her courage failed and instead of opening the trunk she sat down on it and renewed her tears. Here she remained for an hour in a really pitiable condition. The motives which had first struck her now became somewhat mixed in her mind; her tears made her dizzy, and she shook her head as if to free herself of them. While she was racking her brains to think of what she should do, she had not perceived that her candle was almost out. Suddenly she found herself in the dark; she rose and opened the door and went out to ask for a light; but it was late and every one was in bed. She went on, however, feeling her way, not thinking it was so late.

When she saw that the staircase was in darkness and that she was, so to speak, alone in the house, a sudden feeling of terror, natural in one of her age, took possession of her. She had gone down a long passage leading from her bedroom; she stopped, hardly daring to retrace her steps. It sometimes happens that some event apparently of small importance can change the course of our thoughts; darkness, more than anything else, has this effect. The staircase of la Honville was, as in many an old habitation, constructed in an adjoining tower which it entirely filled, encircling a stone column as it ascended. Margot in her hesitation leaned on this column, the coldness of which, added to her fear and grief, froze the blood in her veins. She remained motionless for a time; a sinister thought suddenly presented itself; the faintness she experienced made her think of death, and strange to relate, this idea, which lasted but a moment and then vanished, restored her to her senses. She returned to her room and once more locked herself in until daylight.

As soon as the sun had risen she went out in the park. This year the autumn was superb; the leaves, already yellow, appeared of a golden hue. No leaves as yet had fallen from the branches, and the wind, soft and warm, seemed to hold the trees of la Honville in deep respect. The season when the birds do their last love-making had but just begun.

Poor Margot had not advanced far, when the beneficent heat of the sun seemed to gradually ease her grief. She began to think of her father, her family and her religion. She returned to her first impulse which had been to leave and resign herself. Soon she even began to think that it was no longer as necessary as it had appeared to her the night before. She asked herself what harm she had done to be banished from the spot where had been spent the happiest days of her life. She imagined that she could remain, not without suffering, but with less suffering than if she went away. She plunged into the dark paths, now walking slowly, now rushing madly on. Then she stopped and remarked: "To love is a great thing; one must have courage to love." This word "love" and the certainty that no one in the world was aware of her passion, led her to hope in spite of herself what? Of this she was ignorant, and for this very reason hoped the more. Her beloved secret appeared to her a treasure hidden in the depths of her heart; she could not make up her mind to tear it out; she swore to keep it there forever and to protect it against all, even though it should remain engulfed there forever. Against all reason, illusion once more took the upper hand, and as she had loved as a child after having grieved as a child, she consoled herself as a child. She thought of Gaston's blond hair and of the windows of the Rue du Perche; she tried to persuade herself that the marriage was not yet settled and that she might have misunderstood her godmother. She laid down at the foot of a tree and, exhausted by emotion and fatigue, she soon fell asleep.

It was noon when she awoke. She looked around hardly remembering her grief. A slight noise she heard near-by made her turn her head. She saw coming toward her, under the overhanging foliage, Gaston and Mademoiselle de Verelles. They were alone and Margot, hidden by the thick undergrowth, was invisible to them. In the middle of the walk Mademoiselle de Verelles stopped and sat down on a seat. Gaston remained for some time standing before her tenderly watching her; then he bent his knee, placed his arms round her and kissed her. At this sight a terrible anguish seized Margot and, utterly regardless of where she was going, she rushed away toward the open country.

## CHAPTER VIII

Since Pierrot had failed in the great plan he had formed of being enrolled as Gaston's servant, he had day by day become sadder. Margot's consolation had satisfied him for the time, but it lasted no longer than the provisions he had carried away with him in his pockets. The more he thought of his dear Margot, the more he thought he could not live away from her, and, to tell the truth, the life he led on the farm and the company he kept were not likely to distract him. Now the very day of our heroine's despair, he was walking along beside the river, dreaming and driving his turkeys before him, when at a distance of about a hundred paces ahead he saw a woman running breathlessly and who, after wandering here and there, suddenly disappeared among the willows that bordered the river. This surprised and disturbed him; he also started to run, trying to catch up with the woman; but on reaching the spot where she had disappeared, he looked for her in vain in the neighboring fields. He thought she must have entered a mill that stood near-by; but at the same time he followed the watercourse with a feeling of impending catastrophe. The Eure was swollen by the late heavy rainfall, and Pierrot, feeling none too bright, found the waters more sinister-looking than usual. After a time he thought he saw something white among the reeds; he approached and stretching himself at full length on the bank he pulled toward him a body that was none other than that of Margot. The unhappy girl gave no sign of life; she was motionless, cold as marble and her eyes open and fixed.

At this sight Pierrot uttered such piercing shrieks that all the people in the mill rushed out. His grief was so violent that at first he felt inclined to throw himself into the water and die by the side of her he had loved so well. However, he remembered having been told that the drowned could be restored to life, if attended to in good time. The peasants maintained, it is true, that Margot was quite dead, but he would not believe them, nor allow them to place the body in the mill. He raised it on his shoulders and carried it to the hut he lived in. Heaven willed it that on the way he met the village doctor, who was starting on horseback to make his round of calls. He stopped him and made him come in to see if there remained any hope.

The doctor was of the same opinion as the peasants. Hardly had he seen the body when he cried: "Yes, she is quite dead, and there is nothing to be done but to bury her; from the state the body is in she must have been in the water more than a quarter of an hour." Saying which, the doctor went out of the cottage and prepared to mount his horse, adding that it was necessary to go before the mayor and make the declaration required by the law.

Besides loving Margot passionately Pierrot was very obstinate. He well knew she had not been in the water a quarter of an hour, since he had seen her throw herself in. He ran after the doctor and begged him in the name of heaven not to go away before making certain that nothing could be done.

"And what help do you wish me to render?" cried the doctor, out of temper. "I have, not a single one of the necessary instruments."

"I will go and fetch them for you, monsieur," answered Pierrot. "Only tell me what you want and wait here for me; I will soon be back."

The doctor in a hurry to be off, bit his lips at the foolish remark he had just made about his instruments. Although he was convinced that Margot was in reality quite dead, he felt that he could not refuse to make some attempt to resuscitate her, without doing himself harm and losing his reputation. "Go on then and be quick," he said to Pierrot; "you must get a tin box which my housekeeper will give you, and you will find me here on your return. In the meantime I will wrap the body in these blankets and see what friction will do. Try at the same time to find some cinders that we can heat, but all this will only help to waste my time," he added, shrugging his shoulders and stamping: "Now then, do you understand?"

"Yes, monsieur," said Pierrot, "and to save time, if monsieur is willing, I will ride his horse."

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And without waiting the doctor's permission, he clambered into the saddle and was gone. A quarter of an hour later he returned at a gallop with two large sacks full of cinders, one in front and the other behind him.

"Monsieur can see I have lost no time," said he, pointing to the horse which was quite exhausted. "I did not waste time in talking and spoke not a single word to any one. Your housekeeper was out and I settled everything myself."

"May the devil take you!" thought the doctor, "here is my horse in a fine condition for traveling." And still muttering to himself, he began by the aid of a bladder to blow into poor Margot's mouth, while Pierrot rubbed her arms. The fire was soon blazing; when the cinders were warm, they spread them all over the bed in such a way that the body was entirely buried in them. The doctor then forced a few drops of brandy between Margot's teeth, then shook his head and took out his watch.

"I am sorry," said he impressively, "but the dead must not be allowed to injure the sick. I am expected some distance away, and must be off."

"If monsieur will but stay another half hour I will willingly give him a crown."

"No, my boy, it is impossible, and I do not want your money."

"Here it is," answered Pierrot, placing it in the doctor's hand as if he had not heard him.

It was the poor lad's entire fortune. He had withdrawn from between his mattresses all his savings and the doctor took it, of course.

"So be it, one-half hour more, but after that I must leave without any further delay, for you can well see all this is useless."

At the end of half an hour, Margot still cold and stiff had given not the slightest sign of consciousness. The doctor felt her pulse, then, fully decided on departing, he took his cane and hat and walked toward his horse. Pierrot having no more money and seeing that his prayers were in vain, followed the doctor out of the hut, and placed himself in front of the horse with the same determined look as on the day when he had stopped Gaston in the avenue.

"What do you want?" demanded the doctor. "Do you expect me to sleep here?"

"No, monsieur," answered Pierrot, "but you must wait still another half hour; it will rest your horse." While speaking thus, he was holding in his hand a stick and watched the doctor with such a strange expression on his face that for the third time the latter returned to the hut. But this time he could not contain himself. "Curse the fellow's obstinacy!" he cried. "The fool's six francs will make me lose a louis!"

"But, monsieur," answered Pierrot, "do they not say that the drowned may even come to life after six hours?"

"Never, Where did you hear that? A fine thing for me to stay six hours in your hovel!"

"And that is what you must do," continued Pierrot, "or else you must leave me the box, the tubes and everything else. Perhaps after seeing you blow for two hours more, I shall know how to do it myself."

The doctor might be as furious as he liked, but had to yield whether he wanted to or not and stay two more hours. After this time Pierrot, who began to despair himself, allowed his prisoner to escape. He was then left alone, standing at the head of the bed, discouraged and almost overcome. In this way he spent the rest of the

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day without moving, his eyes fixed on Margot. With the advent of night he rose and thought it time to go and inform the goodman Piédeleu of the death of his daughter. He went out of the hut, shutting the door behind him; as he closed it he thought he heard a weak voice calling him. He started and ran to the bed, but all was still and he thought he must have been mistaken. However, this moment of hope was sufficient to prevent him from leaving. "Tomorrow will do as well," said he to himself, sitting down again by the bed.

While attentively watching Margot he suddenly thought he noticed a change. It seemed to him that when he had started to leave her, her teeth were tightly closed and now her mouth was half open. At once he seized the doctor's instruments and like him, attempted to blow into Margot's mouth, but he did not know how to set about it; the tubing did not work well with the bladder. Pierrot was blowing as hard as he could, but all the air he blew seemed wasted; he forced a few drops of ammonia into the girl's mouth, but it would not go beyond her throat. Again he had recourse to the tubes, but all was of no avail.

"What stupid machines!" he cried, when at last he was exhausted; "all this is useless and does no good whatever." He threw down the instruments, bent over Margot, placed his lips on hers and as a last despairing effort, blowing with all the might of his strong young lungs, he forced the breath of life into the young girl's breast. At the same moment the cinders were scattered, two dying arms were raised, falling back on Pierrot's neck. Margot heaved a deep sigh and cried out: "I am freezing, I am freezing!"

"No, you are not," answered Pierrot; "you are covered with good warm cinders."

"You are right. Why was I placed here?"

"For nothing, Margot; just to do you good. How do you feel now?"

"Not so badly. Only I am very tired. Help me to raise myself up a little."

The goodman Piédeleu and Madame Doradour, having been notified by the doctor, entered the hut at the moment the half-drowned girl, partly undressed and supported by Pierrot's arms, was swallowing a spoonful of cherry brandy.

"Well, now! What have you been telling me?" cried the goodman. "Do you know that it is very wrong to tell one that one's daughter is dead! You had better not try it again or I shall not pass it over like this!"

Saying which, he threw his arms round his daughter's neck.

"Take care, dear father," said she, smiling. "Do not hug me too hard; it is not long since I lay as dead."

I need not paint the surprise and the joy of Madame Doradour and all Margot's relatives, who arrived one after the other. Gaston and Mademoiselle de Vercelles were also there, and Madame Doradour, having taken the goodman aside, he began to understand what was the matter. Reflection coming too late had now thrown a light on everything. When the goodman had learned that love was the cause of his daughter's despair, and that her stay with her godmother had almost cost her her life, he paced up and down the room for a while. "We are quits," said he at last to Madame Doradour in a rough voice. "I was deeply in your debt and I have paid you well." He then took his daughter by the hand and led her to a corner of the hut. "Here, unhappy girl," he said to her, showing a cloth prepared to serve as a shroud, "take this and, if you are an honest girl, keep it for me, and do not attempt to drown yourself again." He then approached Pierrot and giving him a hearty slap on the back, said: "Why do you not speak out, sir, you who blew so well into the girl's mouth! Must I not return the crown, that you gave the doctor?"

"Monsieur, if you wish," answered Pierrot, "I am quite willing to have my crown back, but I want nothing

more, believe me. Not out of pride, but although I am a mere nobody in this world..."

"Go away, stupid!" answered the goodman, giving him another hearty slap, "go and look after the sick one. The fellow has blown in her mouth, but has not even kissed her!"

## CHAPTER IX

Ten years had elapsed. The victorious disasters of 1814 covered France with soldiers. Threatened and surrounded by all Europe, the Emperor was finishing as he had begun, and in vain, at the end of his career, was once more inspired with the genius of the campaigns in Italy. The Russian divisions, marching on Paris down the banks of the Seine, had just been routed at the battle of Nangis, where ten thousand foreigners had fallen. An officer, badly wounded, had left the army—corps commanded by General Gérard, and was making for Étampes, passing through the Beauce. He could hardly sit on his horse; being overcome with fatigue, he knocked one night at the door of a prosperous looking farmhouse, where he asked shelter for the night. After having given him a hearty supper, the farmer, not more than twenty—five years old, brought forward his wife, a young and pretty peasant girl of about his own age and already the mother of five. On seeing her enter, the officer was unable to restrain a cry of surprise, and the handsome girl smilingly saluted him.

"Am I mistaken?" said the officer. "Were you not lady companion to Madame Doradour, and are you not named Marguerite? "

"At your service," answered the farmer's wife, "and if my memory is not at fault I am addressing Colonel Count Gaston de la Honville. Here is Pierre Blanchard, my husband, to whom I owe it that I am still in this world. Kiss my children, Monsieur le Comte; it is all that remains of a family that for many years faithfully served your own."

"Is it possible?" exclaimed the officer. "What then has happened to your brothers?"

"They fell at Champaubert and Montmirail," said the farmer's wife in a choking voice, "and our father had preceded them by six years."

"And I also," continued the officer, "I have lost my mother, and by this single death I have lost as much as you." Speaking thus, he wiped away a tear.

"Come, Pierrot," he gaily added, addressing the husband and holding out his glass, "let us drink to the memory of the dead, my friend, and to the health of the children! There are rough times in life; the only thing is to know how to surmount them."

The following day, on leaving the farm, the officer thanked his hosts, and as he was mounting his horse he could not resist saying to the farmer's wife:

"And your love of long ago, Margot, do you remember it?"

"Well, Monsieur le Comte," answered Margot, "it remained in the river."

"And with monsieur's permission," added Pierrot, "I shall not go and bring it back."

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