

his hand affectionately on her shoulder, said in a joyful tone:

'Mother, Artemise is here. Come in!'

She followed him, all the kindness and hospitality of her nature rising to her gentle eyes, all the dignity of her fine, steadfast character asserting itself in her quiet manner.

They were soon gone again. When they had departed, Madame Lestrade opened the window. She did not like the odor of patchouli; it seemed to her vulgar. After putting back the chairs from the table and removing the cups and saucers, she went to her own room. It seemed to her that she must throw herself upon her bed and remain there till they carried her back to Fontaine-Vielle, to rest beside her husband. But her tear-brimmed eyes fell upon a picture of the Sorrowful Mother at the foot of the Cross, and she knelt before it. And it seemed to her she could hear a voice from that cruel bed of death saying to her:

'Come to Me, poor soul! I am the consolation of those who suffer, because I have suffered. I will take care of thee and protect thee, though all the world forsake thee. I will never abandon thee. When thou art faint and weary with the burden of life and its sorrows, I will lift them from thy shoulders. Take up thy cross and follow Me. I will give thee comfort and peace.'

And Mary's eyes also were full of hope and compassion.

'Ah, my crucified Saviour,' she cried, 'I will bear patiently the cross Thou hast laid upon me! Mother of Sorrows, be my Mother also. But thou—thou hadst St. John, and I shall have no one!'

Sobs shook her bosom and the tears fell fast. But the outburst relieved her. She no longer thought of abandoning herself to grief. Raymond must not see her tear-stained eyes, he must not know that she suffered. She bathed her eyes in clear cold water, smoothed her hair, and began to prepare dinner. When it was ready, a messenger brought word that her son would not be home; he was dining with the Lorziers. She went early to bed.

The next morning Raymond remarked:

'Artemise is lovely, isn't she, mother?'

'She is very attractive,' was the reply. 'I hope you will be happy, Raymond.'

'There is no doubt of it. Our tastes and ideas are alike, our views of life the same. Our happiness will be ideal.'

'God grant it! When do you think of marriage?'

'In about three months. We are already looking about for a flat. We want to be entirely suited. We enjoy it so much, going about so. Artemise has exquisite taste. We are picking up furniture here and there already.'

'Three months? That will be May. We left Fontaine-Vielle in May; it is beautiful then. I shall be glad to see the spring at Threuil once more.'

'I can imagine how happy you will be in the old house, among your old friends and the familiar places. What a blessed change it will be for you, mother!'

'I hope so,' she rejoined. Her voice, in spite of herself, was cold. 'I shall go before—before, Raymond.'

'Yes, perhaps that will be better. We shall be so busy just then. But you must come to us every year, at least, for a visit; and we may go down to Threuil sometime for our vacation.'

She did not reply. He went on eating his roll without looking at her. He was not thinking of her at all; he had not even observed the coldness of her tones, which she had striven in vain to make pleasant. He was entirely absorbed in himself and his great happiness. Taking his hat, he went briskly away, humming a tune. She thought her heart would freeze within her bosom.

In April the mother returned to Threuil. The house there was her only source of income. Raymond did not speak to her of money, and she did not mention it. She sold a few things, which left her but little ready cash. In the back garden of the old house there was a cottage of two rooms, formerly inhabited by the schoolteacher, an old maid, who had left it in fairly good condition, and had kept it very clean. In this cottage she established herself with her beloved goods and chattels, and adjusted herself to the new life. After a while she began to feel comparatively happy. She had been there nearly two years, when, seated one afternoon near the fire with her knitting, she heard a knock at the door. She opened it; a tall, large, prosperous-looking woman stood before her. They fell into each other's arms.

'Eugenie!—Melanie!' each exclaimed joyously.

'But come in—come in from the March wind!' cried Madame Lestrade. When they were seated together by the fire, she said: 'And so you have returned

from America? They told me you were expected. And is it to stay?'

'It is to stay. I have always longed for home, but Armand would not come. Since he died, I have waited only to put my affairs in order. And here I am!'

'You have not changed, except to grow stouter and a little gray. Life has gone well with you, Eugenie?'

'Yes, thank God! But you, dear one?'

'I have suffered—yes. But now, in the evening of my days, I am content.'

'Content, yes. But are you happy?'

'Is happiness for old people, Eugenie? I question it.'

'It ought to be. But why are you not with your son, for whom you sacrificed everything, whom you idolized?'

'I sacrificed nothing unusual. The life of a mother must be a perpetual sacrifice. Paris was always distasteful to me. This is home.'

'But Raymond wanted you?'

Under the merciless scrutiny of the eyes of her old friend, Madame Lestrade's eyes fell. She remembered that Eugenie was not easily deceived.

'Well—no,' she answered slowly. 'Nowadays young people prefer to be alone. Apartments are small and rents high in Paris, Eugenie. They are fond of life too, and of amusements; both artists, both gay. I should have been out of place in their menage. Raymond knew that as well as I. It is natural.'

'I see. Is she nice, the wife?'

'Very nice, though different from the girls of Fontaine-Vielle.'

'Naturally. Pity he did not marry one of ours! Little Madeleine now! They tell me she would have taken him.'

'Perhaps. But Raymond would never have been content to live here, and Madeleine is not the kind of girl Parisian life would suit. She would have been out of place there. I fully realise that now, though at first I was disappointed.'

'They come to see you?'

'No: their vacations have to be spent, they say, where they can find material for future work. Of course they are not rich, those two.'

'But he has a fine salary, has he not?'

'Oh, yes.'

'Does he send you money? It is the interest of an old friend and playmate, Melanie.'

'No,' replied Madame Lestrade, lifting her head. 'I do not need it, Eugenie. I have my fixed income, which is quite enough.'

'The income of Threuil!' responded Eugenie, almost contemptuously.

'Yes, and it is quite enough.'

'For this little hut, yes. I have come to take you out of it.'

'To take me out of it?'

'Yes. You are coming to live with me.' I have bought your old home. I always liked it, as you know. I bought it five years ago.'

'And kept it waiting?'

'And kept it waiting—for myself at least, and I confess I had a hope it was for you also. Melanie, I have never had a child, and right glad of it I am; for I know something of the ingratitude of children, especially sons.'

'Don't, Eugenie—don't, if you love me!' said Madame Lestrade. 'I cannot bear it.'

'You poor thing!' said kind-hearted Eugenie, folding her friend in her strong warm embrace.

Madame Lestrade sobbed, but she was comforted. Some one still loved her, then. She was no longer abandoned, no longer to be alone!

'Ah, but you are good, Eugenie!' she murmured, as they wept together; and the other woman felt how sad and empty the life of her old friend had been until this hour.

'I good?' said Eugenie. 'No: I am of the earth, carthy. I love fine clothes, a fine house, a fine table—all creature-comforts that I can have. But within bounds, of course. But you, Melanie—you are a heroine, you are a saint.'

Madame Lestrade smiled feebly—the ghost of the smile that had irradiated her sweet old face the day of the violets.

'A heroine? A saint?' she repeated. 'Nothing like that, my dear faithful friend: I am only a mother.'—'Ave Maria.'

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