

frightened birds. He staggered to the window to cool his burning forehead. He stood there for a moment stupefied, his eyes on the clouds, then began to walk up and down the room with nervous strides, like a caged animal.

After a while he sat down and reflected. It was true—Fabienne, whom he loved so much and in whom he had so much confidence, was like all other women! She had lied to him from the first. She had lied to him since, every day. All those little caresses and evidences of affection had only served as a mask for the basest treachery.

He had been too happy. It could not last.

How could she have deceived him so? How could a woman with a character so sweet yet so decided, who spoke so frankly, whose look was so pure and loyal—how could she stoop to such duplicity? How had she begun to play such a part when nothing in her way of living, in her language, her manner, betrayed secret preoccupation? By what power of will had she been able to conceal a mystery so deep and penetrating? Well, it was all over—this fatal discovery was the supreme blow. His life was broken forever!

As he sat there the panorama of his life passed before him. The days of his childhood came back one by one. He saw himself again running like a colt through the woods of his country home, startling his mother by the audacity of his exploits. Then one day his father's sudden death and the departure in tears. Years of battle followed. The little rooms in the Rue Truffant, with Lise, the old servant, who would not abandon them. Then college, with its long and tedious lessons, and finally the crowning step to success, his admission to the government office, where he made his way rapidly.

He recalled his meeting with her. It was in the house of an old friend of the family at a soiree. He was standing awkwardly in a corner of the room rubbing his white-gloved hands nervously together when she came in followed by a murmur of admiration. She raised her eyes, they met his, and the romance of his life had begun. Delicious memories followed—he loved to linger over them now as over a beautiful dream that cannot, must not be forgotten.

Seated here in his own parlor that had been the scene of so much happiness, a terrible sadness oppressed him. The romance was over; the book must be closed. He felt that awful sensation of the irreparable, that impression of emptiness which seizes one after a great misfortune—one on which our entire life depends. His anger fell, and he regretted that he had found these letters. Better to have lived out his days in peace and ignorance. How many husbands quite as unfortunate as himself in other ways

were living in tranquillity, free from doubt. Cursed letters!

But what reason had he for thinking that they were written to her? They were not in envelopes. There was no address. Perhaps they belonged to a friend. It would be just like Fabienne to have taken charge of a secret correspondence to help one she cared for. But was he not a part of her? She need not have confided everything to him, but she might have spoken about it. Perhaps she had forgotten to or feared to anger him. Some day, no doubt, she would tell him all. He was ready to seize at any idea to dispel his suspicions, and as he reflected he recovered in a measure his spirits.

He made the resolution to return the letters to their hiding place, put everything in order and say nothing for the present about the matter. Then some day he would suddenly unmask his batteries, and his wife would be forced to avow her guilt or explain the mystery.

He gathered up the letters carefully and placed them in the secret drawer, fearing every moment that his wife might enter and surprise him. He looked at the clock. It was only an hour since he had come in, and yet it seemed as if he had lived years during that time. He

hastened to arrange everything and closed the secret drawer. At that moment the doorbell rang. Just in time! It was probably his wife, who had forgotten her key. He felt a sharp twinge in his heart at the thought of meeting her face to face, but he hurried to let her in. Instead of his wife, whom he expected, a strange man confronted him, who addressed him by his own name.

"Sir," said the visitor, "I wish to speak to you particularly, and I shall be obliged if you will give me an interview of five minutes—if I do not disturb you."

This speech puzzled Louis, but he made a motion for the stranger to enter. He closed the door, and they sat down in the parlor.

The visitor was tall and sturdily built. His face, sunburned and weather beaten, showed that he was accustomed to a life in the open air. A red ribbon in his button hole indicated that he was an officer in the navy.

He cast a sweeping look about the room, then his face lighted up, and he said:

"I hope you will excuse this intrusion, sir, but the matter was of so much importance to me that I sought out your address and hastened here. I will come straight to the point. I beg that you will sell me, at any price, your ebony secretary."

Louis started in surprise and stammered out:

"Sir, what do you mean?"

"Oh, I know that my proposition is a strange one, but when you understand

my motive you will pardon me. That piece of furniture which you bought from the dealer, who gave me your name, was sold at a time of need by a person"—Here the voice of the stranger trembled.

"By a person who through my fault was passing through a painful crisis. She had just lost her husband, who had squandered her fortune to the last penny, and she was forced to sell everything, even to the smallest trifle. This secretary, which has been in the family for a number of years, went with the rest. But she would only consent to part with it on condition that it could be bought back at the end of a year. As she did not appear at that time it was purchased by you. I was out of France at the period. Well, I came back and found my unhappy friend. Our first thought was to find the dealer and recover the secretary. I learned through him where it was, and here I am. I trust you will accede to my request, strange as it may appear."

"Sir," said Louis, "unfortunately that piece of furniture belongs to my wife, and she has filled it with her own things. I could not possibly disarrange it without consulting her."

The stranger grew pale. Then he said to Louis in a choking voice:

"Sir, do you know if your wife discovered a secret hiding place in the secretary?"

"What hiding place are you talking about?" exclaimed Louis, with feigned astonishment.

The stranger sprang toward the secretary and in a moment had opened the secret drawer, pointing at the same time to the package of letters.

"You will understand by this why I cherish this piece of the furniture. Those letters were written by me to the woman who today became my wife."

The words had hardly left his lips before Louis was feverishly tossing out pell-mell the many trifles that filled the drawers and compartments.

"Take it," he cried. "Take it away, sir. I am only too happy to give it to you!"

When his wife entered a few minutes afterward and saw the parlor in such disorder and her secretary gone, she uttered a cry of dismay.

"Console yourself, my darling," said Louis, drawing her close to his heart. "That piece of furniture revived unpleasant memories. I promise you another—another more beautiful."

And he smiled through his tears so tenderly that she grew calm, not understanding his grief, but feeling that what had been done must be, after all, for the best.

A foreign newspaper says this fair colony of ours is under the thralldom of gin-archy—we mean a gynarchy. If you don't know what a gynarchy is, turn up your dictionary.