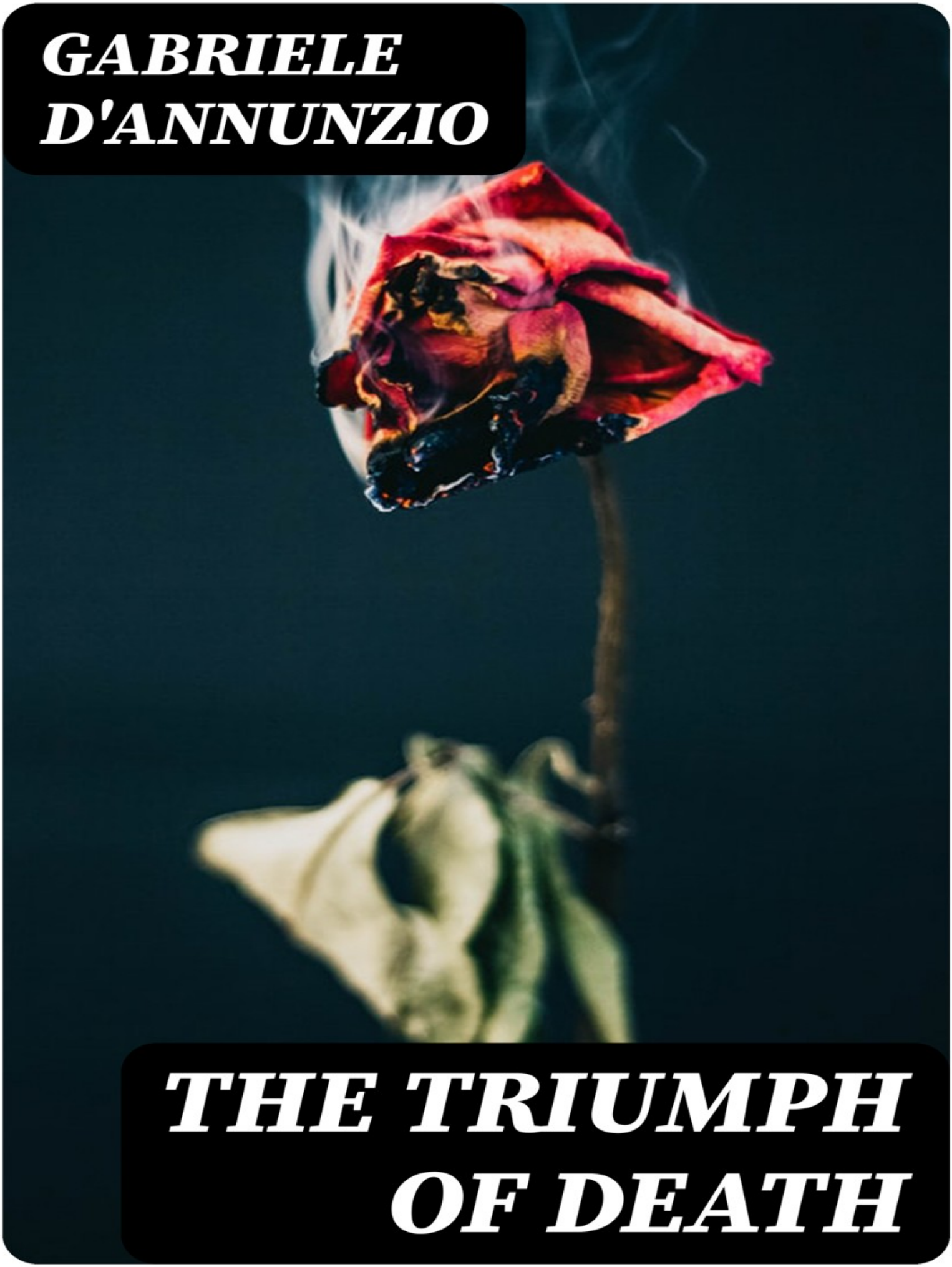
GABRIELE D'ANNUNZIO



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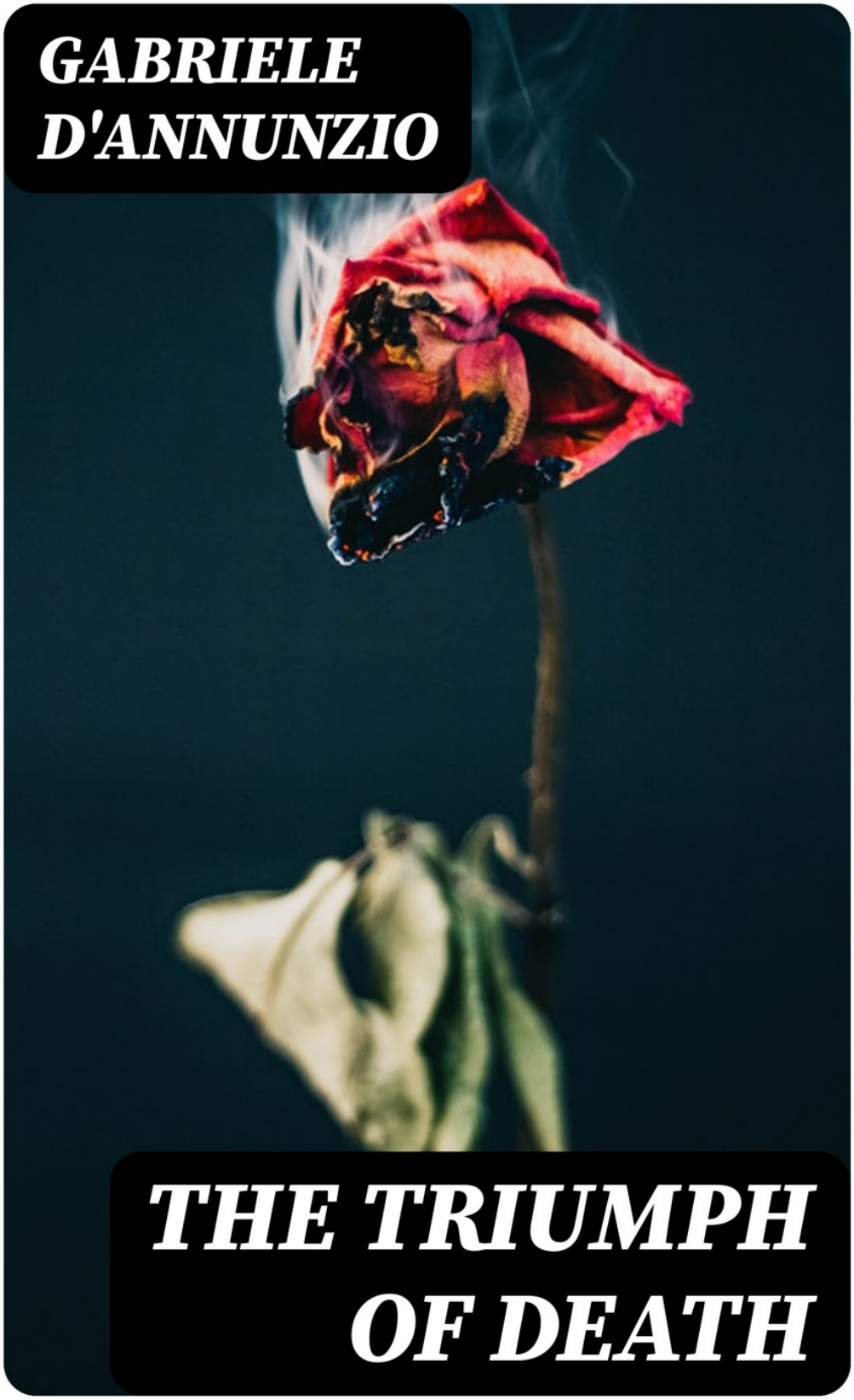

THE TRIUMPH OF DEATH

Gabriele D'Annunzio

The Triumph of Death

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Table of Contents

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I.

Table of Contents

THE PAST.

Table of Contents

CHAPTER I.

When she perceived a group of men leaning against the parapet and looking down into the street below, Hippolyte stopped and exclaimed: "What has happened?"

With a slight gesture, betraying fear, she placed her hand involuntarily on George's arm as if to restrain him.

After watching the men a moment George said: "Someone must have leaped from off the terrace." Then he added: "Shall we turn back?"

She hesitated a few moments, wavering between curiosity and fear, and then replied: "No. Let's see what it is."

They advanced along the parapet as far as the end of the walk.

Unconsciously, Hippolyte accelerated her pace towards the small crowd that had gathered.

On this March afternoon the Pincio was almost deserted. Occasional sounds died away in the gray and heavy atmosphere.

"That's what it is," said George. "Someone has killed himself."

They stopped close to the crowd. All the spectators had their gaze intently fixed upon the pavement below. Most of them were workmen without occupation. Their faces, each different, expressed neither compassion nor sorrow, and the immobility of the gaze imparted a sort of bestial dulness to their eyes.

A young lad came up, eager to see; but scarcely had he ensconced himself in a position satisfactory to himself than he was hailed by one of the bystanders, in an indefinable tone of jubilation and pleasantry, as if delighted that no new arrival could enjoy the spectacle. "You're too late," he cried; "they've taken him away."

"Where to?"

"To the Santa Maria del Popolo."

"Dead?"

"Yes, dead."

Another individual, emaciated and of a greenish complexion, with a large woollen muffler around his neck, leaned half over; then, removing a pipe from his mouth, he shouted: "What's that on the ground?"

His mouth was distorted on one side, seamed as if by a burn, and convulsed as if by an endless flow of bitter saliva. His voice was so deep that it sounded as if it emerged from a cavern.

"What's that on the ground?" he repeated.

Down in the street below, a wagon-driver was squatting close to the foot of the wall. So as to hear his answer the better, the spectators became quiet and motionless. On the pavement could be seen a little blackish mud.

"It's blood," replied the wagon-driver without rising.

And with the point of a stick he continued his search in the bloody mire.

"Anything else?" asked the man with the pipe.

The wagon-driver rose. On the end of his stick he held something extended that could not be identified from above.

"Hair."

"What color?"

"Blond."

The precipice formed by the high walls lent a strange resonance to the voices.

"Let us go, George!" pleaded Hippolyte.

Disturbed and pale, she shook her lover's arm, as he leaned against the parapet near the group, fascinated by the horror of the scene.

They silently left the tragic spot. Both were preoccupied with painful thoughts of this death, and sadness was visible on their features.

"Happy are the dead!" exclaimed George at last. "They have no more doubts."

"That's true," replied his companion.

The weary tones in which both spoke seemed to indicate boundless discouragement.

She bent her head and added, with a bitterness mixed with regret: "Poor love!"

"What love?" asked George, preoccupied.

"Ours."

"Do you feel that it is growing cold?"

"In me, no," replied Hippolyte significantly.

"But you think it is in me?" persisted George.

An ill-concealed irritation lent sharpness to his words. Fixing his gaze on her, he repeated: "But you think it is in me? Don't you?"

She remained silent, her head drooping still lower.

"You won't answer? You know you're not telling the truth."

There was a pause. Both felt an unspeakable desire to read the other's heart. Then he continued:

"That is how the agony of love begins. You are not as yet aware of it, but since your return I have studied you ceaselessly and I daily discover in you a new symptom."

"What symptom?"

"A bad symptom, Hippolyte." Then, in a burst of mental agony, he exclaimed: "Oh, how horrible it is to love and yet not lose one's keenness of perception!"

She shook her head with a gesture of anger, and her face darkened. Once more, as on many previous occasions, hostility had risen between the two lovers. Each felt hurt by the injustice of suspicion, and secretly rebelled with that restrained anger which breaks out, from time to time, in brutal and irrevocable words, grave accusations and absurd recriminations. An indescribable fury seized them to torture themselves, to rend and martyrize their hearts.

Hippolyte became gloomy and silent. Her brows were knit in a frown and her lips were tightly pressed together. George regarded her with an irritating smile.

"Yes, that's how it will begin," he repeated, still smiling his disagreeable smile and fixing her with his keen glance. "You find at the bottom of your soul an inquietude, a sort of vague impatience which you cannot repress. When near me, you feel an instinctive repugnance arise in your breast against me—a repugnance which you cannot subdue. And then you become taciturn, you're obliged to make an enormous effort to speak to me at all; you misunderstand everything I say, and, perhaps unconsciously, you speak crossly even about the most trivial things."

She did not interrupt him even by so much as a gesture. Hurt by this indifference on her part, he continued to reproach her, spurred on to torment his companion not only by his sudden fit of temper, but also by a certain disinterested taste for investigation rendered the keener and the more literary by culture. He always tried to express himself with the accuracy and demonstrative precision which the works of the analysts had taught him; but, in the monologues, the formulas by which he interpreted his inner inquiry exaggerated and modified the mental condition under observation, while, in the dialogues, the preoccupation caused by being perspicacious often obscured the sincerity of his emotion and led him to err as to the secret motives which he claimed to discover in others. His brain, encumbered by a mass of psychological observations, personal or gathered from books, ended by confounding and confusing everything both as regarded himself and others.

He continued:

"Mind you, I make no reproach. I know it is not your fault. Every human soul has but a fixed quantity of sensitiveness for passion. It is inevitable that this quantity is exhausted in time and that no power can prevent the cessation of passion. Now, you have already loved me for a long time—almost two years! It will be the second anniversary of our love on the second of April. Had you thought of it?"

She nodded. He repeated, as if to himself: "Two years!"

They approached a bench and sat down. Hippolyte sank down with a weary sigh, as if overcome by an enervating weakness. The heavy black coach of a prelate passed by on the road below, the wheels rattling on the uneven cobblestones. The faint sound of a bugle came from the Flaminian Road, and then once more silence regained possession of the surrounding groves. A few drops of rain fell.

"Our second anniversary will be dismal," he went on, without pity for his moody companion. "But we must celebrate it all the same. I have a fondness for bitter fruits."

Hippolyte revealed her sorrow by a painful smile, and with unexpected gentleness said: "Why all these unkind words?"

She looked long and searchingly into George's eyes. A second time an inexpressible desire to read each other's hearts seized them. She knew well the horrible malady from which her lover suffered; she knew well the obscure cause of all his acrimony. To induce him to talk so he might unburden his heart, she added:

"What ails you?"

The tenderness of her tone, for which he was unprepared, threw him into some confusion. At this accent he knew that she understood him and pitied him; and he felt a great pity for himself swell in his bosom. A profound emotion stirred his whole being.

"What ails you?" repeated Hippolyte, touching his hand as though to sensually augment the power of her tenderness.

"What ails me?" he echoed. "I love!"

The aggressiveness had died away. In thus expressing his incurable weakness, he commiserated with himself on his own malady. The vague rancor which had ravaged his soul appeared to be dissipated. He recognized the injustice of all resentment against this woman because he recognized a superior order of fatal necessities. No, no human creature caused his misery. It arose from the very essence of life. He had to complain, not of the woman he loved, but of Love itself. Love, towards which his whole being reached out with invincible impetuosity, was, he thought, the greatest of human sorrows. And, until death possibly, he was condemned to this supreme misfortune.

As he remained silent and thoughtful, Hippolyte asked:

"Then do you think, George, that I don't love you?"

"I believe that you love me now," he answered. "But can you prove to me that to-morrow, or in a month, or in a year, you will still be happy to be mine? Can you prove to me that to-day, even at this very moment, you are wholly mine? How much of you do I possess?"

"Everything," murmured Hippolyte.

"No," he went on, "nothing, or almost nothing. And I do not possess what I should like to possess. You are a perfect stranger to me. Like every other human being, you conceal within yourself a world which is impenetrable to me and to which no depth of passion can give me access. Of your sensations, your sentiments, your thoughts, I know but a small part. Speech is at best an imperfect sign. The soul is incommunicable. You cannot show me your soul. Even in our most ecstatic moments we are two, always two—separate, strangers, lonely at heart. I kiss your brow, and beneath that brow there exists possibly a thought that is not of me. I speak to you and what I say perhaps awakens in you memories of other days, and not of my love. A man passes, looks at you, and in your heart this slight fact gives rise to an emotion which I am unable to detect. And I never know what reflections of your past life may flash upon you even when you show most affection for me. Ah, I am so afraid of that past life of yours! I am by your side; I feel a delicious happiness invade my being, a happiness which at certain moments results from your presence alone. I caress you, I speak to you, I listen to you, I abandon myself entirely. All at once, a thought chills me. If, without being aware of it, I had evoked in your memory the phantom of a former sensation, melancholy relic of by-gone days? Never can I describe my anguish. This ardor, which induces in me the illusory feeling of I know not what communion between you and me, dies out all at once. You escape me, you steal away, you become inaccessible. And I remain alone in frightful solitude. Ten, twenty months of intimacy, are all as nothing. You seem to me as much a stranger as before your love for me began.

And I—I cease to caress you, I no longer speak, I retire within myself, I avoid all external manifestation, I dread that the slightest shock should raise from the bottom of your soul the obscure dregs deposited there by irrevocable life. And then there fall on us those long silences full of anguish, in which the energies of the heart are uselessly and miserably consumed. I ask you: 'Of what are you thinking?' And you reply: 'Of what are you thinking?' I am ignorant of your thoughts and you are ignorant of mine. Every moment the distance between us widens, until finally it becomes abysmal."

"But," objected Hippolyte, "I experience no such feelings. I give you more of myself than ever. I think my love is stronger."

This affirmation of superiority wounded anew the invalid.

"You think too much," she continued. "You pay too much attention to your thoughts. Possibly I have less attraction for you than your thoughts, because your thoughts are always different, always new, while now I have nothing that is new to offer you. In the beginning of our love you were less reflective and more spontaneous. You had not yet developed a taste for the bitter things in life; you were more lavish with your kisses than with your words. If, as you say, speech is an imperfect sign, it is not well to abuse it. And you do abuse it and in an almost always cruel manner."

Then, after an interval of silence, prompted to speak by something he said, she yielded to the temptation to express herself:

"Only cadavers are dissected."

But scarcely had she spoken than she regretted it. Her remark struck her as being vulgar, unfeminine, and acrimonious. She was sorry she had not preserved that gentle and indulgent tone which had moved her lover so strongly a few moments before. Once more she had failed in her resolution to be to him the most patient and tender of nurses.

"You see," she said repentantly, "it is you who spoil me."

He gave a faint smile. Both understood that in this quarrel their love only had been wounded.

The prelate's carriage repassed, the two black, long-tailed horses going at a trot. In the atmosphere which the haze of twilight rendered more and more livid, the trees assumed the appearance of spectres. Leaden-looking clouds darkened the height of the Palatine and the Vatican. A ray of light, yellow as sulphur, straight as a sword, lightly touched Mount Mario behind the pointed tops of the cypress-trees.

"Does she still love me?" George thought to himself. "Why is she so easily irritated? It may be that she feels that I speak the truth, or, at least, what will soon be the truth. Irritation is a symptom. But am I not conscious of a constant dull irritation in myself also? I know well the cause of my irritation. I am jealous. Of what? Of everything. Of the objects reflected in her eyes."

He looked at her. "She is very beautiful to-day. She is pale. It would please me to see her always depressed, always ill. When her color returns it seems to me as if it were no longer she. When she laughs I cannot repress a vague hostility, almost anger, at her laugh. Not always, though."

His thoughts died away in the shade of the twilight. He noticed suddenly how much the appearance of the evening reminded him of his beloved. From beneath the pallor of her dark face a light, violet-colored effusion shone through; and the narrow ribbon, of an exquisite shade of yellow, which she wore about her throat disclosed the brown marks of two beauty spots.

"She is very beautiful," he mused. "The expression of her face is nearly always profound, expressive, passionate. Therein rests the secret of her charm. Her beauty never tires me; it constantly suggests new dreams. What are the elements of this beauty? I cannot say. Materially, she is not beautiful. Sometimes, when I look at her, I am painfully surprised by a disillusion. That is because I then see only her physical characteristics; her face is not transfigured, illumined by the power of spiritual expression. She possesses, however, three divine elements of beauty: the brow, the eyes, and the mouth. Yes, divine."

Her laugh came to his mind.

"What did she tell me yesterday? I have forgotten what it was, some humorous incident that had happened at Milan during her visit to her sister's. '*How we laughed!*' So then, even when away from me, she can *laugh*, be happy! Yet all her letters, which I have treasured, are full of sorrow, of tears, of hopeless regrets."

He felt as if he had received a wound, and then a great restlessness came upon him, as if he were cognisant of a serious and irreparable fact not entirely clear to him. The ordinary phenomena of sentimental exaggeration manifested themselves in him by means of associated

images. This simple laugh was transformed in his imagination into an incessant hilarity, ever-present, daily, hourly, during the entire period of her absence. Hippolyte had led a gay, commonplace existence, with people unknown to him, among the companions of her brother-in-law, in a circle of stupid admirers. Her sad letters were only lies. He remembered a passage in one letter: "*Life here is insupportable; friends weary us constantly and do not leave us a single peaceful hour. You know how cordial the Milanese are.*" In his imagination arose a vision of Hippolyte surrounded by a crowd of common clerks, advocates, and tradesmen. She smiled on them all, giving her hand to all, listening to witless conversations, making stupid answers, sinking herself to the same ordinary level.

And then there fell upon his heart all the weight of the misery he had endured for the past two years at the thought of the existence his mistress led and the unknown world in which she passed the time not spent with him.

"What does she do? Whom does she see? To whom does she speak? What is her behavior towards people who visit her, in whose life she is a factor?" Ever-recurring, unanswerable questions!

He thought, with anguish:

"Each one of these persons takes something from her, and consequently takes something from me. I shall never know what influence these people have over her, the emotions and thoughts they arouse in her. Hippolyte's beauty is full of seductive power, the kind of beauty which torments men and arouses in them the passion of desire. Among that odious crowd, she must have been frequently

desired. A man's desire is discernible in his look and the look is free, and the woman is without defence against the look of the man who desires her. What can be the impression of a woman who perceives that she is desired? She certainly cannot remain impassive. It must produce in her a feeling of disquietude, certainly some kind of emotion, if only one of repugnance and disgust. And thus the first man who comes along has the power to disturb the woman who loves me! In what, then, consists my possession of her?"

He suffered keenly because the physical pictures bore out his mental reasoning.

"I love Hippolyte; I love her with a passion which I should judge to be everlasting, did I not know that all human passion must cease at some time. I love her, and I cannot imagine keener voluptuous delights than those she gives me. More than once, however, at the sight of some passing woman, I have been seized with a sudden desire; more than once has the flash of a pair of feminine eyes thrown me into a melancholy train of thought; more than once I have dreamed of meeting some woman—a woman perceived in a drawing-room, or the mistress of a friend. What can be her way of loving? Of what does its voluptuous secret consist? And for some time this woman has haunted my mind, not, indeed, to the exclusion of all other thoughts, but at intervals and persistently. Such phantasies suddenly present themselves to my imagination even when I hold Hippolyte in my arms. Why should she not have been seized by desire upon sight of some passing man? Had I the gift of reading her soul and saw it traversed by such a desire, if but for a moment, I should, without the slightest doubt, consider my

mistress sullied by an indelible stain and it seems to me that I should die of grief. This material proof I can never have, because the soul of my mistress is invisible and impalpable; this, however, does not prevent the soul from being as much or even more exposed to profanation than the body may be. But the analogy enlightens me; the possibility is certain. Perhaps at this very moment my mistress is cognisant of a recent stain upon her conscience and sees this stain expand beneath her contemplation."

Stunned by his pain, he started violently.

"What ails you—of what are you thinking?" asked Hippolyte gently.

"Of you," he replied.

"Good or bad?"

"Bad."

She gave a sigh and then said: "Shall we go?"

"Yes—let us go."

They rose and regained the road by which they had come. Slowly and with tearful accents Hippolyte murmured: "What a sad evening, O my love!"

And she stopped as if to recall and live over again the sorrows scattered through the day that was about to close. Around them, now, the Pincio was deserted, full of silence, full of violet shadows in which the busts on their pedestals took on the appearance of funereal monuments. Below, the city was covered with ashes. A few drops of rain were falling.

"Where shall we go to-night? What are you going to do?" she asked.

He replied dejectedly: "What I shall do? I do not know."

They suffered, both of them, as they stood side by side; and they thought with terror of a greater agony which awaited them, well known and far more cruel—the horrible torture with which their nocturnal imaginations would rend their defenceless souls.

"If you like, I will remain with you to-night," said Hippolyte timidly.

Devoured by a secret rancor and spurred on by a furious desire to be spiteful and resentful, George replied: "No."

But his heart protested. "Stay far from her to-night? You cannot. No, you cannot." And in spite of his blind, hostile impulses, the conviction of this impossibility, the sure knowledge of this absolute impossibility, gave him a kind of internal thrill, a strange thrill of exalted pride at being controlled by such a great passion. He repeated to himself: "*I could not* stay away from her to-night; no, I could not." And he felt the indefinable sensation of being dominated by an unknown power. A tragic breath passed over his being. "George!" cried Hippolyte, frightened and clinging to his arm.

He started. He recognized the spot where they had stopped to look at the bloody stain left by the suicide. "Are you afraid?" he asked.

"A little," she replied, still holding his arm.

He disengaged himself from this restraint and, approaching the parapet, leaned over. Darkness had already enshrouded the street below; but he believed he could still distinguish the blackish spot on the cobblestones, because he still had the recent picture before his mind. The deepening twilight seemed to suggest and create a

phantom corpse, the indefinite and bloody form of a blond young man. "Who was this man? Why did he kill himself?" In this phantom he seemed to recognize his own form. Rapid, incoherent thoughts coursed through his brain. He saw, as by a lightning flash, his poor uncle Demetrius, his father's youngest brother, also a suicide—a face covered by a black pall resting on a white pillow, a slender, pale, yet virile hand, and a small silver vessel containing holy water suspended from the wall by three small chains which, every now and then, rattled as they were swung by the breeze. "Suppose I threw myself over? A leap forward, a rapid fall! Does one lose consciousness when falling through space?" He imagined the shock of the body against the stones, and he shuddered. Then he felt in all his limbs a violent, agonizing repulsion, mingled with a feeling of strange lassitude. In his imagination he conjured up the delights of the coming night: to be lulled gradually into a state of delicious languor; to awake with a superabundance of tenderness mysteriously accumulated during one's sleep. Fancies and ideas followed one another with extraordinary rapidity.

When he turned round, his eyes met those of Hippolyte. Her eyes were widely dilated and fixed upon him, and he believed he could read in their depths things which increased his pain. He passed his arm beneath that of his mistress with an affectionate gesture customary with him. And she pressed his arm firmly against her heart. Both felt a sudden desire to embrace, to dissolve one into the other, distractedly.

"All out! All out!"

The cry of the keepers resounded among the groves, disturbing the silence.

"All out!"

After the cry, the silence seemed heavier and more dismal than ever, and these few words, vociferated by men they could not see, gave the two lovers an insupportable shock. To show that they had heard and were preparing to leave, they hastened their step. But here and there, in the deserted paths, the voices obstinately repeated:

"All out!"

"Curse their cries!" exclaimed Hippolyte, with a gesture of impatience and exasperation, and increasing the rapidity of her pace.

The clock of the Trinita-de-Monti sounded the Angelus. Rome appeared, similar to an immense, grayish, formless cloud touching the earth. Already, in the neighboring houses, several windows were lit up, their lights enlarged by the fog. A few drops of rain were falling.

"You'll come to me to-night, won't you?" asked George.

"Yes, yes, I will come."

"Early?"

"About eleven."

"I should die if you did not come."

"I will come."

They gazed in each other's eyes, exchanging an intoxicating promise.

Overcome by his emotion, George murmured: "Am I forgiven?"

They looked at each other again, and their gaze was charged with caresses.

"Adored one!" he murmured.

"Addio!" she rejoined softly. "Think of me until eleven."

"Addio!"

They separated at the foot of the Via Gregoriana. She went down the Via Capo-le-Case. As long as he could see her going along the wet pavement, lit up by the reflection of the shop windows, his gaze followed her.

"Thus it is," he thought. "She leaves me; she enters a house of which I know nothing; she reënters upon her commonplace life, despoiled of all the ideality in which I have clothed her; she becomes another woman entirely. I no longer know her. The gross necessities of life occupy her, absorb her, and degrade her...."

A perfume of violets was carried to him from a florist's close by, and his heart swelled with confused aspirations.

"Ah! why is it not permitted us to conform our existence according to our dreams, and to live forever in ourselves alone?"

CHAPTER II.

At ten o'clock in the morning George was still buried in the profound and refreshing slumber which, in the young, follows a night of voluptuousness, when his servant entered to awaken him.

Turning in his bed, he cried ill-humoredly:

"I am at home to no one. Let me be."

But from the adjoining room he heard the importunate visitor's voice addressing him in beseeching accents:

"Excuse me, George; I must speak to you."

George recognized the voice of Alphonso Exili, and his annoyance was only the greater.

This Exili was a college chum, a man of mediocre intelligence, who, ruined by gambling and debauch, had become a parasite and adventurer.

He still appeared a handsome young man, in spite of his face devastated by vice; yet in his person and manners there was that indefinable cunning and ignobleness noticeable in persons reduced to living by their wits.

He entered, waited until the servant had retired, and assumed a distressed air. Then, swallowing half his words, he said: "Forgive me, George, if I have recourse once more to your kindness. I must pay a card debt. I want you to help me. It's a small sum. Only three hundred lira. Forgive me."

"What? You pay your card debts now?" said George. "I'm surprised."

He threw this insult at him with the most perfect *sans-gêne*. Not knowing how to break off all connection with the parasite, he treated him with contempt, just as one would use a stick to ward off a dirty animal.

Exili smiled.

"Come, don't be unkind," he pleaded, in supplicating tones, like a woman's. "You'll give me the three hundred lira, won't you? I will pay you back to-morrow, on my word of honor!"

George burst into laughter. He pulled the bell to summon the servant. The servant entered. "Get my bunch of keys out

of those clothes there, on the sofa." The servant found the keys. "Open the second drawer. Give me the large card-case." The servant passed him the card-case. "Very well, you may go."

"Couldn't you let me have four hundred lira?" asked Exili, with a half-timid, half-convulsive smile when the servant had left the room.

"No, there's three hundred. It's the last time. Now go."

Instead of handing him the bills, George laid them on the edge of the bed. Exili smiled, took them, and placed them in his pocket; then, in an ambiguous tone, in which irony was mixed with adulation, he said: "You have a noble heart."

His gaze wandered around the chamber, and he added: "You have a delicious bedroom."

He seated himself on the sofa, poured out a small glass of liqueur, and refilled his cigar-case.

"Who is your present mistress?" he went on. "What's her name? I believe it's no longer the one you had last year."

"Go away, Exili. I want to sleep."

"What a splendid creature! She has the handsomest eyes in Rome. She's away, I suppose. I have not met her for several days. She must be out of town. She has a sister in Milan, I think."

He refilled his *petit verre* and swallowed its contents at a single gulp. Possibly he gossiped only in order to gain time enough to empty the bottle.

"She's separated from her husband, isn't she?" he continued. "I imagine that her finances must be at a very low ebb, and yet she is always most elegantly dressed. About two months ago I met her in the Via del Babuino. You

know your probable successor. But no, you can't know him. It's Monti, the *mercante di campagna*, a great big fellow, with dirty blond hair. That very day I saw her he was close at her heels in the Via del Babuino. You know one can see at a glance when a man is following a woman. Monti has money, too."

He uttered these last words in a curious tone; an odious tone of envy and cupidity. Then he drank for the third time, noiselessly.

"Are you asleep, George?"

Instead of answering, George pretended to sleep. He had heard everything, but he feared that Exili might see his heart-beats through the bedclothes.

"George!"

He feigned to start like a man suddenly awakened.

"What! You are still here? Aren't you going?"

"I am going now—but look! A tortoise-shell pin!"

He stooped to pick it up from the carpet, examined it with curiosity, and laid it on the coverlid.

"Lucky fellow!" he exclaimed in the same ambiguous tone. "And now, ta-ta—a thousand thanks."

He extended his hand, but George kept his beneath the clothes. The chatterbox turned towards the door.

"Your cognac is exquisite. I'll take another *petit verre*."

He drank, and then went away. George, in his bed, could relish the poison at his leisure.

CHAPTER III.

The second anniversary fell on the second of April.

"This time," said Hippolyte, "we will celebrate it away from Rome. We must pass a great week of love; all by ourselves, no matter where, but not here."

"Do you remember the first anniversary," asked George, "that of last year?"

"Yes, I remember."

"It was a Sunday, Easter Sunday. And I came to your rooms at ten o'clock in the morning. And you wore that little English jacket that pleased me so. You had brought your prayer-book."

"Oh! that morning, I had not been to mass."

"You were in such a hurry."

"My departure from the house was like a flight," answered Hippolyte. "You know, on holy days, I could not call a moment my own. Yet, for all that, I found a way to remain with you until noon. And we had guests for lunch that day."

"Then, the rest of the day we could not see each other. It was a sad anniversary."

"Yes, it was," murmured Hippolyte.

"And that sun!"

"And that forest of flowers in your room," she laughed. "I, too, on that morning, had gone out for a moment; I bought up almost the entire flower market."

"You threw hands full of rose-leaves at me. You put a number of the leaves down my neck, in my sleeves. Do you remember?"

"Yes, I remember."

"And then, at the house, I found them all when I disrobed."

She smiled.

"And on my return my husband found leaves on my hat, in the folds of my dress."

"Yes, you told me."

"I did not go out again that day. I did not care to go out again. I thought, and rethought. Yes, it was a sad anniversary."

After an interval of silent revery, she spoke again.

"Did you believe, in your heart, that we should reach our second anniversary?"

"I—no," he replied.

"Nor I."

"What love!" thought George, "that which carries within itself the presentiment of its end." He then thought of the husband, without hate and even with a sort of compassionate benevolence. "Now she is free. Why, then, am I more uneasy now than formerly? The husband was a sort of guarantee for me; I looked on him as a guardian who shielded my mistress from all danger. Maybe these are illusions; because at that time, also, I suffered much. But the suffering which is passed seems always less severe than the present pain." Following his own reflections, he no longer listened to Hippolyte's words.

"Well," she said, "where shall we go? We must decide. To-morrow is the first of April. I have already said to my mother: 'You know, mamma, one of these days I am going on a short journey.' I must prepare her for my departure. Do not worry. I will invent a plausible pretext. Leave it to me."

She spoke gayly; she smiled. And in the smile which illuminated her closing remarks he believed he discovered the instinctive contentment which a woman feels when concocting some deception. The facility with which Hippolyte succeeded in deceiving her mother displeased him. He thought once more, and not without regret, of the marital vigilance. "Why suffer so cruelly on account of this liberty," he reflected, "when it is in the service of my pleasure? I do not know what I would give could I get away from my fixed idea, from my suspicions which do her injustice. I love her, and I wrong her; I love her, and I believe her capable of an unworthy action!"

"We must not go too far," she said. "You ought to know of some peaceful spot, secluded, full of trees, interesting. Not Tivoli, nor Frascati."

"Take the *Baedeker*—it's there on the table—and look."

"Let us look together."

She took the red book, knelt close to the couch on which he was seated, and with pretty gestures and infantile grace she began to turn over the pages. Every few moments she read a few lines in a low tone.

He sat watching her, fascinated by the finesse of the nape of her neck, from which the little brown curls mounted towards the crown of her head, twisted into a sort of coil. He looked at the two little brown spots, beauty spots, the Twins placed one by the side of the other on the whiteness of the velvety neck to which they gave an ineffable charm. He remarked that she wore no earrings. In fact, for two or three days she had not worn her sapphire earrings. "Has she sacrificed them on account of some money embarrassment?

Who knows? She may be suffering silently from the cares of hard, daily necessities." He had to forcibly compel himself to consider seriously the thought which haunted him. This thought was as follows: "When she becomes tired of me (and that will not be very long), she will fall into the hands of the first comer who will offer her an easy life, and who, in exchange for sensual pleasure, will keep her from want. This man may even be the *mercante* of whom Exili spoke. Disgusted with petty miseries, she will triumph over the other disgust; she will adapt herself. It is even possible that she will not have to overcome any repugnance."

He remembered the mistress of one of her friends, the Countess Albertini. This woman, separated from her husband, left free without fortune, had descended progressively to lucrative *amours*, having enough cleverness to save appearances. He remembered a second example, which illustrated even more truly the possibility of what he feared. And confronted with this possibility, which emerged from the unfathomable future, he felt an inexpressible pain. Henceforth his apprehensions would give him no truce. Sooner or later, he was fated to witness the fall of the creature he had placed so high. Life was full of such forfeitures.

"I have found nothing," she said in a disappointed tone.

"Gubbio, Narni, Viterbo, Orvieto! Look at the map of Orvieto: the Monastery of Saint Peter, the Monastery of Saint Paul, the Monastery of Jesus, the Monastery of Saint Bernardin, the Monastery of Saint Louis, the Convent of Saint Dominique, the Convent of Saint Francis, the Convent of the Servants of Mary."

She read in a sing-song tone, as if she were reciting a litany. All at once she began to laugh, threw back her head, and offered her beautiful forehead to the lips of her lover. She was in one of those moments of expanding kindness which gave her the air of a young girl.

"What a number of monasteries! How many convents! It must be a strange place. Shall we go to Orvieto?"

George experienced a sensation as if his soul had been overwhelmed by a sudden wave of freshness. He abandoned himself with gratitude to this comforting sign. And, as he pressed his lips to Hippolyte's brow, he gathered there the souvenir of the city of the Guelphs, of the deserted city which is silent in mute adoration of its marvellous Duomo.

"Orvieto! were you never there? Imagine to yourself, at the top of a rock of tufa, overlooking a melancholy valley, a city so perfectly silent as to seem without inhabitants; shutters closed; gray lanes in which the grass grows; a capuchin monk crossing a public square; a bishop descending from a black carriage in front of some hospital, with a decrepit domestic at the carriage-door; a tower against a white and rainy sky; a clock slowly tolling the hours; and all at once, at the bottom of a street, a miracle—the Duomo."

"What peace!" murmured Hippolyte, rather dreamily, as if she had before her eyes the vision of this silent city.

"I have seen Orvieto in February," he went on, "when the weather was like to-day, uncertain—a few drops of rain; a few beams of sunshine. I stayed there one day, and I was sorry to leave. I brought away with me a feeling of nostalgia