The Woman of Mystery

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Chapter 1. The Murder

"Suppose I were to tell you," said Paul Delroze, "that I once stood face to face with him on French. . . ."
Élisabeth looked up at him with the fond expression of a bride to whom the least word of the man she loves is a subject of wonder:
"You have seen William II. in France?"
"Saw him with my own eyes; and I have never forgotten a single one of the details that marked the meeting. And yet it happened very long ago."
He was speaking with a sudden seriousness, as though the revival of that memory had awakened the most painful thoughts in his mind.
"Tell me about it, won't you, Paul?" asked Élisabeth.
"Yes, I will," he said. "In any case, though I was only a child at the time, the incident played so tragic a part in my life that I am bound to tell you the whole story."
The train stopped and they got out at Corvigny, the last station on the local branch line which, starting from the chief town in the department, runs through the Liseron Valley and ends, fifteen miles from the frontier, at the foot of the little Lorraine city which Vauban, as he tells us in his "Memoirs," surrounded "with the most perfect demilunes imaginable."
The railway-station presented an appearance of unusual animation. There were numbers of soldiers, including many officers. A crowd of passengers—tradespeople, peasants, workmen and visitors to the neighboring health-resorts served by Corvigny—stood amid piles of luggage on the platform, awaiting the departure of the next train for the junction.
It was the last Thursday in July, the Thursday before the mobilization of the French army.
Élisabeth pressed up against her husband:
"Oh, Paul," she said, shivering with anxiety, "if only we don't have war!"
"War! What an idea!"
"But look at all these people leaving, all these families running away from the frontier!"
"That proves nothing."
"No, but you saw it in the paper just now. The news is very bad. Germany is preparing for war. She has planned the whole thing. . . . Oh, Paul, if we were to be separated! . . . I should know nothing about you . . . and you might be wounded . . . and . . ."
He squeezed her hand:
"Don't be afraid, Élisabeth. Nothing of the kind will happen. There can't be war unless somebody declares it. And who would be fool enough,

criminal enough, to do anything so abominable?"
"I am not afraid," she said, "and I am sure that I should be very brave if you had to go. Only . . . only it would be worse for us than for anybody else. Just think, darling: we were only married this morning!"
At this reference to their wedding of a few hours ago, containing so great a promise of deep and lasting joy, her charming face lit up, under its halo of golden curls, with a smile of utter trustfulness; and she whispered:
"Married this morning, Paul! . . . So you can understand that my load of happiness is not yet very heavy."
There was a movement among the crowd. Everybody gathered around the exit. A general officer, accompanied by two aides-de-camp, stepped out into the station-yard, where a motor-car stood waiting for him. The strains were heard of a military band; a battalion of light infantry marched down the road. Next came a team of sixteen horses, driven by artillery-men and dragging an enormous siege-piece which, in spite of the weight of its carriage, looked light, because of the extreme length of the gun. A herd of bullocks followed.
Paul, who was unable to find a porter, was standing on the pavement, carrying the two traveling-bags, when a man in leather gaiters, green velveteen breeches and a shooting-jacket with horn buttons, came up to him and raised his cap:
"M. Paul Delroze?" he said. "I am the keeper at the château."
He had a powerful, open face, a skin hardened by exposure to the sun and the cold, hair that was already turning gray and that rather uncouth manner often displayed by old servants whose place allows them a certain degree of independence. For seventeen years he had lived on the great estate of Ornequin, above Corvigny, and managed it for Élisabeth's father, the Comte d'Andeville.
"Ah, so you're Jérôme?" cried Paul. "Good! I see you had the Comte d'Andeville's letter. Have our servants come?"
"They arrived this morning, sir, the three of them; and they have been helping my wife and me to tidy up the house and make it ready to receive the master and the mistress."
He took off his cap again to Élisabeth, who said:
"Then you remember me, Jérôme? It is so long since I was here!"
"Mlle. Élisabeth was four years old then. It was a real sorrow for my wife and me when we heard that you would not come back to the house . . . nor Monsieur le Comte either, because of his poor dead wife. So Monsieur le Comte does not mean to pay us a little visit this year?"
"No, Jérôme, I don't think so. Though it is so many years ago, my father is still very unhappy."
Jérôme took the bags and placed them in a fly which he had ordered at Corvigny. The heavy luggage was to follow in the farm-cart.

It was a fine day and Paul told them to lower the hood. Then he and his wife took their seats.
"It's not a very long drive," said the keeper. "Under ten miles. But it's up-hill all the way."
"Is the house more or less fit to live in?" asked Paul.
"Well, it's not like a house that has been lived in; but you'll see for yourself, sir. We've done the best we could. My wife is so pleased that you and the mistress are coming! You'll find her waiting for her at the foot of the steps. I told her that you would be there between half-past six and seven. . . ."
The fly drove off.
"He seems a decent sort of man," said Paul to Élisabeth, "but he can't have much opportunity for talking. He's making up for lost time."
The street climbed the steep slope of the Corvigny hills and constituted, between two rows of shops, hotels and public buildings, the main artery of the town, blocked on this day with unaccustomed traffic. Then it dipped and skirted Vauban's ancient bastions. Next came a switchback road across a plain commanded on the right and left by the two forts known as the Petit and the Grand Jonas.
As they drove along this winding road, which meandered through fields of oats and wheat beneath the leafy vault formed overhead by the close-ranked poplars, Paul Delroze came back to the episode of his childhood which he had promised to tell to Élisabeth:
"As I said, Élisabeth, the incident is connected with a terrible tragedy, so closely connected that the two form only one episode in my memory. The tragedy was much talked about at the time; and your father, who was a friend of my father's, as you know, heard of it through the newspapers. The reason why he did not mention it to you was that I asked him not to, because I wanted to be the first to tell you of events . . . so painful to myself."
Their hands met and clasped. He knew that every one of his words would find a ready listener; and, after a brief pause, he continued:
"My father was one of those men who compel the sympathy and even the affection of all who know them. He had a generous, enthusiastic, attractive nature and an unfailing good-humor, took a passionate interest in any fine cause and any fine spectacle, loved life and enjoyed it with a sort of precipitate haste. He enlisted in 1870 as a volunteer, earned his lieutenant's commission on the battlefield and found the soldier's heroic existence so well suited to his tastes that he volunteered a second time for Tonkin, and a third to take part in the conquest of Madagascar. . . . On his return from this campaign, in which he was promoted to captain and received the Legion of Honor, he married. Six years later he was a widower."
"You were like me, Paul," said Élisabeth. "You hardly enjoyed the happiness of knowing your mother."

"No, for I was only four years old. But my father, who felt my mother's death most cruelly, bestowed all his affection upon me. He made a point of personally giving me my early education. He left nothing undone to perfect my physical training and to make a strong and plucky lad of me. I loved him with all my heart. To this day I cannot think of him without genuine emotion. . . . When I was eleven years old, I accompanied him on a journey through France, which he had put off for years because he wanted me to take it with him at an age when I could understand its full meaning. It was a pilgrimage to the identical places and along the roads where he had fought during the terrible year."
"Did your father believe in the possibility of another war?"
"Yes; and he wanted to prepare me for it. 'Paul,' he said, 'I have no doubt that one day you will be facing the same enemy whom I fought against. From this moment pay no attention to any fine words of peace that you may hear, but hate that enemy with all the hatred of which you are capable. Whatever people may say, he is a barbarian, a vain-glorious, bloodthirsty brute, a beast of prey. He crushed us once and he will not rest content until he has crushed us again and, this time, for good. When that day comes, Paul, remember all the journeys which we have made together. Those which you will take will mark so many triumphant stages, I am sure of it. But never forget the names of these places, Paul; never let your joy in victory wipe out their names of sorrow and humiliation: Froeschwiller, Mars-la-Tour, Saint-Privat and the rest. Mind, Paul, and remember!' And he then smiled. 'But why should I trouble? He himself, the enemy, will make it his business to arouse hatred in the hearts of those who have forgotten and those who have not seen. Can he change? Not he! You'll see, Paul, you'll see. Nothing that I can say to you will equal the terrible reality. They are monsters.'"
Paul Delroze ceased. His wife asked him a little timidly:
"Do you think your father was absolutely right?"
"He may have been influenced by cruel recollections that were too recent in his memory. I have traveled a good deal in Germany, I have even lived there, and I believe that the state of men's minds has altered. I confess, therefore, that I sometimes find a difficulty in understanding my father's words. And yet . . . and yet they very often disturb me. And then what happened afterwards is so inexplicable."
The carriage had slackened its pace. The road was rising slowly towards the hills that overhang the Liseron Valley. The sun was setting in the direction of Corvigny. They passed a diligence, laden with trunks, and two motor cars crowded with passengers and luggage. A picket of cavalry galloped across the fields.
"Let's get out and walk," said Paul Delroze.
They followed the carriage on foot; and Paul continued:
"The rest of what I have to tell you, Élisabeth, stands out in my memory in very precise details, that seem to emerge as though from a thick fog

in which I cannot see a thing. For instance, I just know that, after this part of our journey, we were to go from Strasburg to the Black Forest. Why our plans were changed I cannot tell. . . . I can see myself one morning in the station at Strasburg, stepping into the train for the Vosges . . . yes, for the Vosges. . . . My father kept on reading a letter which he had just received and which seemed to gratify him. The letter may have affected his arrangements; I don't know. We lunched in the train. There was a storm brewing, it was very hot and I fell asleep, so that all I can remember is a little German town where we hired two bicycles and left our bags in the cloak-room. It's all very vague in my mind. We rode across the country."

"But don't you remember what the country was like?"

"No, all I know is that suddenly my father said: 'There, Paul, we're crossing the frontier; we're in France now.' Later on—I can't say how long after—he stopped to ask his road of a peasant, who showed him a short-cut through the woods. But the road and the short-cut are nothing more in my mind than an impenetrable darkness in which my thoughts are buried. . . . Then, all of a sudden, the darkness is rent and I see, with astonishing plainness, a glade in the wood, tall trees, velvety moss and an old chapel. And the rain falls in great, thick drops, and my father says, 'Let's take shelter, Paul.' Oh, how I remember the sound of his voice and how exactly I picture the little chapel, with its walls green with damp! We went and put our bicycles under shelter at the back, where the roof projected a little way beyond the choir. Just then the sound of a conversation reached us from the inside and we heard the grating of a door that opened round the corner. Some one came out and said, in German, 'There's no one here. Let us make haste.' At that moment we were coming round the chapel, intending to go in by this side door; and it so happened that my father, who was leading the way, suddenly found himself in the presence of the man who had spoken in German. Both of them stepped back, the stranger apparently very much annoyed and my father astounded at the unexpected meeting. For a second or two, perhaps, they stood looking at each other without moving. I heard my father say, under his breath, 'Is it possible? The Emperor?' And I myself, surprised as I was at the words, had not a doubt of it, for I had often seen the Kaiser's portrait; the man in front of us was the German Emperor."

"The German Emperor?" echoed Élisabeth. "You can't mean that!"

"Yes, the Emperor in France! He quickly lowered his head and turned the velvet collar of his great, flowing cape right up to the brim of his hat, which was pulled down over his eyes. He looked towards the chapel. A lady came out, followed by a man whom I hardly saw, a sort of servant. The lady was tall, a young woman still, dark and rather good-looking. . . . The Emperor seized her arm with absolute violence and dragged her away, uttering angry words which we were unable to hear. They took

the road by which we had come, the road leading to the frontier. The servant had hurried into the woods and was walking on ahead. 'This really is a queer adventure,' said my father, laughing. 'What on earth is William doing here? Taking the risk in broad daylight, too! I wonder if the chapel possesses some artistic interest. Come and see, Paul.' . . . We went in. A dim light made its way through a window black with dust and cobwebs. But this dim light was enough to show us some stunted pillars and bare walls and not a thing that seemed to deserve the honor of an imperial visit, as my father put it, adding, 'It's quite clear that William came here as a tripper, at hazard, and that he is very cross at having his escapade discovered. I expect the lady who was with him told him that he was running no danger. That would account for his irritation and his reproaches.'"

Paul broke off again. Élisabeth nestled up against him timidly. Presently he continued:

"It's curious, isn't it, Élisabeth, that all these little details, which really were comparatively unimportant for a boy of my age, should have been recorded faithfully in my mind, whereas so many other and much more essential facts have left no trace at all. However, I am telling you all this just as if I still had it before my eyes and as if the words were still sounding in my ears. And at this very moment I can see, as plainly as I saw her at the moment when we left the chapel, the Emperor's companion coming back and crossing the glade with a hurried step; and I can hear her say to my father, 'May I ask a favor of you, monsieur?' She had been running and was out of breath, but did not wait for him to answer and at once added, 'The gentleman you saw would like to speak to you.' This was said in perfect French without the least accent. . . . My father hesitated. But his hesitation seemed to shock her as though it were an unspeakable offense against the person who had sent her; and she said, in a harsher tone, 'Surely you do not mean to refuse!' 'Why not?' said my father, with obvious impatience. 'I am not here to receive orders.' She restrained herself and said, 'It is not an order, it is a wish.' 'Very well,' said my father, 'I will agree to the interview. I will wait for your friend here.' She seemed shocked. 'No, no,' she said, 'you must . . .' 'I must put myself out, must I?' cried my father, in a loud voice. 'You expect me to cross the frontier to where somebody is condescending to expect me? I am sorry, madam, but I will not consent to that. Tell your friend that if he fears an indiscretion on my part he can set his mind at rest. Come along, Paul.' He took off his hat to the lady and bowed. But she barred his way: 'No, no,' she said, 'you must do what I ask. What is a promise of discretion worth? The thing must be settled one way or the other; and you yourself will admit. . . .' Those were the last words I heard. She was standing opposite my father in a violent and hostile attitude. Her face was distorted with an expression of fierceness that terrified me. Oh, why did I not foresee what was going to happen? . . .

But I was so young! And it all came so quickly! . . . She walked up to my father and, so to speak, forced him back to the foot of a large tree, on the right of the chapel. They raised their voices. She made a threatening gesture. He began to laugh. And suddenly, immediately, she whipped out a knife—I can see the blade now, flashing through the darkness—and stabbed him in the chest, twice . . . twice, there, full in the chest. My father fell to the ground."

Paul Delroze stopped, pale with the memory of the crime.

"Oh," faltered Élisabeth, "your father was murdered? . . . My poor Paul, my poor darling!" And in a voice of anguish she asked, "What happened next, Paul? Did you cry out?"

"I shouted, I rushed towards him, but a hand caught me in an irresistible grip. It was the man, the servant, who had darted out of the woods and seized me. I saw his knife raised above my head. I felt a terrible blow on my shoulder. Then I also fell."

Chapter 2. The Locked Room

The carriage stood waiting for them a little way ahead. They had sat down by the roadside on reaching the upland at the top of the ascent. The green, undulating valley of the Liseron opened up before them, with its little winding river escorted by two white roads which followed its every turn. Behind them, under the setting sun, some three hundred feet below, lay the clustering mass of Corvigny. Two miles in front of them rose the turrets of Ornequin and the ruins of the old castle.
Terrified by Paul's story, Élisabeth was silent for a time. Then she said:
"Oh, Paul, how terrible it all is! Were you very badly hurt?"
"I can remember nothing until the day when I woke up in a room which I did not know and saw a nun and an old lady, a cousin of my father's, who were nursing me. It was the best room of an inn somewhere between Belfort and the frontier. Twelve days before, at a very early hour in the morning, the innkeeper had found two bodies, all covered with blood, which had been laid there during the night. One of the bodies was quite cold. It was my poor father's. I was still breathing, but very slightly. . . . I had a long convalescence, interrupted by relapses and fits of delirium, in which I tried to make my escape. My old cousin, the only relation I had left, showed me the most wonderful and devoted kindness. Two months later she took me home with her. I was very nearly cured of my wound, but so greatly affected by my father's death and by the frightful circumstances surrounding it that it was several years before I recovered my health completely. As to the tragedy itself. . . ."
"Well?" asked Élisabeth, throwing her arm round her husband's neck, with an eager movement of protection.
"Well, they never succeeded in fathoming the mystery. And yet the police conducted their investigations zealously and scrupulously, trying to verify the only information which they were able to employ, that which I gave them. All their efforts failed. You know, my information was very vague. Apart from what had happened in the glade and in front of the chapel, I knew nothing. I could not tell them where to find the chapel, nor where to look for it, nor in what part of the country the tragedy had occurred."
"But still you had taken a journey, you and your father, to reach that part of the country; and it seems to me that, by tracing your road back to your departure from Strasburg. . . ."
"Well, of course they did their best to follow up that track; and the French police, not content with calling in the aid of the German police, sent their shrewdest detectives to the spot. But this is exactly what afterwards, when I was of an age to think out things, struck me as so

strange: not a single trace was found of our stay at Strasburg. You quite understand? Not a trace of any kind. Now, if there was one thing of which I was absolutely certain, it was that we had spent at least two days and nights at Strasburg. The magistrate who had the case in hand, looking upon me as a child and one who had been badly knocked about and upset, came to the conclusion that my memory must be at fault. But I knew that this was not so; I knew it then and I know it still."
"What then, Paul?"
"Well, I cannot help seeing a connection between the total elimination of undeniable facts—facts easily checked or reconstructed, such as the visit of a Frenchman and his son to Strasburg, their railway journey, the leaving of their luggage in the cloak-room of a town in Alsace, the hiring of a couple of bicycles—and this main fact, that the Emperor was directly, yes, directly mixed up in the business."
"But this connection must have been as obvious to the magistrate's mind as to yours, Paul."
"No doubt; but neither the examining magistrate nor any of his colleagues and the other officials who took my evidence was willing to admit the Emperor's presence in Alsace on that day."
"Why not?"
"Because the German newspapers stated that he was in Frankfort at that very hour."
"In Frankfort?"
"Of course, he is stated to be wherever he commands and never at a place where he does not wish his presence known. At any rate, on this point also I was accused of being in error and the inquiry was thwarted by an assemblage of obstacles, impossibilities, lies and alibis which, to my mind, revealed the continuous and all-powerful action of an unlimited authority. There is no other explanation. Just think: how can two French subjects put up at a Strasburg hotel without having their names entered in the visitors' book? Well, whether because the book was destroyed or a page torn out, no record whatever of the names was found. So there was one proof, one clue gone. As for the hotel proprietor and waiters, the railway booking clerks and porters, the man who owned the bicycles: these were so many subordinates, so many accomplices, all of whom received orders to be silent; and not one of them disobeyed."
"But afterwards, Paul, you must have made your own search?"
"I should think I did! Four times since I came of age I have been over the whole frontier from Switzerland to Luxemburg, from Belfort to Longwy, questioning the inhabitants, studying the country. I have spent hours and hours in cudgeling my brains in the vain hope of extracting the slightest recollection that would have given me a gleam of light. But all without result. There was not one fresh glimmer amid all that darkness. Only three pictures showed through the dense fog of the past,

pictures of the place and the things which witnessed the crime: the trees in the glade, the old chapel and the path leading through the woods. And then there was the figure of the Emperor and . . . the figure of the woman who killed my father."
Paul had lowered his voice. His face was distorted with grief and loathing.
"As for her," he went on, "if I live to be a hundred, I shall see her before my eyes as something standing out in all its details under the full light of day. The shape of her lips, the expression of her eyes, the color of her hair, the special character of her walk, the rhythm of her movements, the outline of her body: all this is recorded within myself, not as a vision which I summon up at will, but as something that forms part of my very being. It is as though, during my delirium, all the mysterious powers of my brain had collaborated to assimilate entirely those hateful memories. There was a time when all this was a morbid obsession: nowadays, I suffer only at certain hours, when the night is coming in and I am alone. My father was murdered; and the woman who murdered him is alive, unpunished, happy, rich, honored, pursuing her work of hatred and destruction."
"Would you know her again if you saw her, Paul?"
"Would I know her again! I should know her among a thousand. Even if she were disfigured by age, I should discover in the wrinkles of the old woman that she had become the face of the younger woman who stabbed my father to death on that September evening. Know her again! Why, I noticed the very shade of the dress she wore! It seems incredible, but there it is. A gray dress, with a black lace scarf over the shoulders; and here, in the bodice, by way of a brooch, a heavy cameo, set in a gold snake with ruby eyes. You see, Élisabeth, I have not forgotten and I never shall forget."
He ceased. Élisabeth was crying. The past which her husband had revealed to her was filling her with the same sense of horror and bitterness. He drew her to him and kissed her on the forehead.
"You are right not to forget," she said. "The murder will be punished because it has to be punished. But you must not let your life be subject to these memories of hatred. There are two of us now and we love each other. Let us look towards the future."
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The Château d'Ornequin is a handsome sixteenth century building of simple design, with four peaked turrets, tall windows with denticulated pinnacles and a light balustrade projecting above the first story. The esplanade is formed by well-kept lawns which surround the courtyard and lead on the right and left to gardens, woods and orchards. One side of these lawns ends in a broad terrace overlooking the valley of the Liseron. On this terrace, in a line with the house, stand the majestic ruins of a four-square castle-keep.

The whole wears a very stately air. The estate, surrounded by farms and fields, demands active and careful working for its maintenance. It is one of the largest in the department.

Seventeen years before, at the sale held upon the death of the last Baron d'Ornequin, Élisabeth's father, the Comte d'Andeville, bought it at his wife's desire. He had been married for five years and had resigned his commission in the cavalry in order to devote himself entirely to the woman he loved. A chance journey brought them to Ornequin just as the sale, which had hardly been advertised in the local press, was about to be held. Hermine d'Andeville fell in love with the house and the domain; and the Count, who was looking for an estate whose management would occupy his spare time effected the purchase through his lawyer by private treaty.

During the winter that followed, he directed from Paris the work of restoration which was necessitated by the state of disrepair in which the former owner had left the house. M. d'Andeville wished it to be not only comfortable but also elegant; and, little by little, he sent down all the tapestries, pictures, objects of art and knicknacks that adorned his house in Paris.

They were not able to take up their residence until August. They then spent a few delightful weeks with their dear Élisabeth, at this time four years old, and their son, Bernard, a lusty boy to whom the Countess had given birth that same year. Hermine d'Andeville was devoted to her children and never went beyond the confines of the park. The Count looked after his farms and shot over his coverts, accompanied by Jérôme, his gamekeeper, a worthy Alsatian, who had been in the late owner's service and who knew every yard of the estate.

At the end of October, the Countess took cold; the illness that followed was pretty serious; and the Comte d'Andeville decided to take her and the children to the south. A fortnight later she had a relapse; and in three days she was dead.

The Count experienced the despair which makes a man feel that life is over and that, whatever happens, he will never again know the sense of joy nor even an alleviation of any sort. He lived not so much for the sake of his children as to cherish within himself the cult of her whom he had lost and to perpetuate a memory which now became the sole reason of his existence.

He was unable to return to the Château d'Ornequin, where he had known too perfect a happiness; on the other hand, he would not have strangers live there; and he ordered Jérôme to keep the doors and shutters closed and to lock up the Countess' boudoir and bedroom in such a way that no one could ever enter. Jérôme was also to let the farms and to collect the tenants' rents.

This break with the past was not enough to satisfy the Count. It seems strange in a man who existed only for the sake of his wife's memory, but

everything that reminded him of her—familiar objects, domestic surroundings, places and landscapes—became a torture to him; and his very children filled him with a sense of discomfort which he was unable to overcome. He had an elder sister, a widow, living in the country, at Chaumont. He placed his daughter Élisabeth and his son Bernard in her charge and went abroad.

Aunt Aline was the most devoted and unselfish of women; and under her care Élisabeth enjoyed a grave, studious and affectionate childhood in which her heart developed together with her mind and her character. She received the education almost of a boy, together with a strong moral discipline. At the age of twenty, she had grown into a tall, capable, fearless girl, whose face, inclined by nature to be melancholy, sometimes lit up with the fondest and most innocent of smiles. It was one of those faces which reveal beforehand the pangs and raptures held in store by fate. The tears were never far from her eyes, which seemed as though troubled by the spectacle of life. Her hair, with its bright curls, lent a certain gaiety to her appearance.

At each visit that the Comte d'Andeville paid his daughter between his wanderings he fell more and more under her charm. He took her one winter to Spain and the next to Italy. It was in this way that she became acquainted with Paul Delroze at Rome and met him again at Naples and Syracuse, from which town Paul accompanied the d'Andevilles on a long excursion through Sicily. The intimacy thus formed attached the two young people by a bond of which they did not realize the full strength till the time came for parting.

Like Élisabeth, Paul had been brought up in the country and, again like her, by a fond kinswoman who strove, by dint of loving care, to make him forget the tragedy of his childhood. Though oblivion failed to come, at any rate she succeeded in continuing his father's work and in making of Paul a manly and industrious lad, interested in books, life and the doings of mankind. He went to school and, after performing his military service, spent two years in Germany, studying some of his favorite industrial and mechanical subjects on the spot.

Tall and well set up, with his black hair flung back from his rather thin face, with its determined chin, he made an impression of strength and energy.

His meeting with Élisabeth revealed to him a world of ideas and emotions which he had hitherto disdained. For him as for her it was a sort of intoxication mingled with amazement. Love created in them two new souls, light and free as air, whose ready enthusiasm and expansiveness formed a sharp contrast with the habits enforced upon them by the strict tendency of their lives. On his return to France he asked for Élisabeth's hand in marriage and obtained her consent.

On the day of the marriage contract, three days before the wedding, the Comte d'Andeville announced that he would add the Château

d'Ornequin to Élisabeth's dowry. The young couple decided that they would live there and that Paul should look about in the valleys of the neighboring manufacturing district for some works which he could buy and manage.
They were married on Thursday, the 30th of July, at Chaumont. It was a quiet wedding, because of the rumors of war, though the Comte d'Andeville, on the strength of information to which he attached great credit, declared that no war would take place. At the breakfast in which the two families took part, Paul made the acquaintance of Bernard d'Andeville, Élisabeth's brother, a schoolboy of barely seventeen, whose holidays had just begun. Paul took to him, because of his frank bearing and high spirits; and it was arranged that Bernard should join them in a few days at Ornequin. At one o'clock Élisabeth and Paul left Chaumont by train. They were going hand-in-hand to the château where the first years of their marriage were to be spent and perhaps all that happy and peaceful future which opens up before the dazzling eyes of lovers.
It was half-past six o'clock when they saw Jérôme's wife standing at the foot of the steps. Rosalie was a stout, motherly body with ruddy, mottled cheeks and a cheerful face.
Before dining, they took a hurried turn in the garden and went over the house. Élisabeth could not contain her emotion. Though there were no memories to excite her, she seemed, nevertheless, to rediscover something of the mother whom she had known for such a little while, whose features she could not remember and who had here spent the last happy days of her life. For her, the shade of the dead woman still trod those garden paths. The great, green lawns exhaled a special fragrance. The leaves on the trees rustled in the wind with a whisper which she seemed already to have heard in that same spot and at the same hour of the day, with her mother listening beside her.
"You seem depressed, Élisabeth," said Paul.
"Not depressed, but unsettled. I feel as though my mother were welcoming us to this place where she thought she was to live and where we have come with the same intention. And I somehow feel anxious. It is as though I were a stranger, an intruder, disturbing the rest and peace of the house. Only think! My mother has been here all alone for such a time! My father would never come here; and I was telling myself that we have no right to come here either, with our indifference for everything that is not ourselves."
Paul smiled:
"Élisabeth, my darling, you are simply feeling that impression of uneasiness which one always feels on arriving at a new place in the evening."
"I don't know," she said. "I daresay you are right. . . . But I can't shake off the uneasiness; and that is so unlike me. Do you believe in presentiments, Paul?"

"No, do you?"
"No, I don't either," she said, laughing and giving him her lips.
They were surprised to find that the rooms of the house looked as if they had been constantly inhabited. By the Count's orders, everything had remained as it was in the far-off days of Hermine d'Andeville. The knickknacks were there, in the same places, and every piece of embroidery, every square of lace, every miniature, all the handsome eighteenth century chairs, all the Flemish tapestry, all the furniture which the Count had collected in the old days to add to the beauty of his house. They were thus entering from the first into a charming and home-like setting.
After dinner they returned to the gardens, where they strolled to and fro in silence, with their arms entwined round each other's waists. From the terrace they looked down upon the dark valley, with a few lights gleaming here and there. The old castle-keep raised its massive ruins against a pale sky, in which a remnant of vague light still lingered.
"Paul," said Élisabeth, in a low voice, "did you notice, as we went over the house, a door closed with a great padlock?"
"In the middle of the chief corridor, near your bedroom, you mean?"
"Yes. That was my poor mother's boudoir. My father insisted that it should be locked, as well as the bedroom leading out of it; and Jérôme put a padlock on the door and sent him the key. No one has set foot in it since. It is just as my mother left it. All her own things—her unfinished work, her books—are there. And on the wall facing the door, between the two windows that have always been kept shut, is her portrait, which my father had ordered a year before of a great painter of his acquaintance, a full-length portrait which, I understand, is the very image of her. Her *prie-Dieu* is beside it. This morning my father gave me the key of the boudoir and I promised him that I would kneel down on the *prie-Dieu* and say a prayer before the portrait of the mother whom I hardly knew and whose features I cannot imagine, for I never even had a photograph of her."
"Really? How was that?"
"You see, my father loved my mother so much that, in obedience to a feeling which he himself was unable to explain, he wished to be alone in his recollection of her. He wanted his memories to be hidden deep down in himself, so that nothing would remind him of her except his own will and his grief. He almost begged my pardon for it this morning, said that perhaps he had done me a wrong; and that is why he wants us to go together, Paul, on this first evening, and pray before the picture of my poor dead mother."
"Let us go now, Élisabeth."
Her hand trembled in her husband's hand as they climbed the stairs to the first floor. Lamps had been lighted all along the passage. They stopped in front of a tall, wide door surmounted with gilded carvings.

"Unfasten the lock, Paul," said Élisabeth.
Her voice shook as she spoke. She handed him the key. He removed the padlock and seized the door-handle. But Élisabeth suddenly gripped her husband's arm:
"One moment, Paul, one moment! I feel so upset. This is the first time that I shall look on my mother's face . . . and you, my dearest, are beside me. . . . I feel as if I were becoming a little girl again."
"Yes," he said, pressing her hand passionately, "a little girl and a grown woman in one."
Comforted by the clasp of his hand, she released hers and whispered:
"We will go in now, Paul darling."
He opened the door and returned to the passage to take a lamp from a bracket on the wall and place it on the table. Meanwhile, Élisabeth had walked across the room and was standing in front of the picture. Her mother's face was in the shadow and she altered the position of the lamp so as to throw the full light upon it.
"How beautiful she is, Paul!"
He went up to the picture and raised his head. Élisabeth sank to her knees on the *prie-Dieu*. But presently, hearing Paul turn round, she looked up at him and was stupefied by what she saw. He was standing motionless, livid in the face, his eyes wide open, as though gazing at the most frightful vision.
"Paul," she cried, "what's the matter?"
He began to make for the door, stepping backwards, unable to take his eyes from the portrait of Hermine d'Andeville. He was staggering like a drunken man; and his arms beat the air around him.
"That . . . that . . ." he stammered, hoarsely.
"Paul," Élisabeth entreated, "what is it? What are you trying to say?"
"That . . . that is the woman who killed my father!"