

**Octave Mirbeau**

*Torture  
Garden*



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# Introduction

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One evening some friends were gathered at the home of one of our most celebrated writers. Having dined sumptuously, they were discussing murder—apropos of what, I no longer remember probably apropos of nothing. Only men were present: moralists, poets, philosophers and doctors—thus everyone could speak freely, according to his whim, his hobby or his idiosyncrasies, without fear of suddenly seeing that expression of horror and fear which the least startling idea traces upon the horrified face of a notary. I—say notary, much as I might have said lawyer or porter, not disdainfully, of course, but in order to define the average French mind. With a calmness of spirit as perfect as though he were expressing an opinion upon the merits of the cigar he was smoking, a member of the Academy of Moral and Political Sciences said: “Really—I honestly believe that murder is the greatest human preoccupation, and that all our acts stem from it... “ We awaited the pronouncement of an involved theory, but he remained silent. “Absolutely!” said a Darwinian scientist, “and, my friend, you are voicing one of those eternal truths such as the legendary Monsieur de La Palisse discovered every day: since murder is the very bedrock of our social institutions, and consequently the most imperious necessity of civilized life. If it no longer existed, there would be no governments of any kind, by virtue of the admirable fact that crime in general and murder in particular are not only their excuse, but their only reason for being. We should then live in complete anarchy,

which is inconceivable. So, instead of seeking to eliminate murder, it is imperative that it be cultivated with intelligence and perseverance. I know no better culture medium than law." Someone protested. "Here, here!" asked the savant, "aren't we alone, and speaking frankly?" "Please!" said the host, "let us profit thoroughly by the only occasion when we are free to express our personal ideas, for both I, in my books, and you in your turn, may present only lies to the public." The scientist settled himself once more among the cushions of his armchair, stretched his legs, which were numb from being crossed too long and, his head thrown back, his arms hanging and his stomach soothed by good digestion, puffed smoke-rings at the ceiling: "Besides," he continued, "murder is largely self-propagating. Actually, it is not the result of this or that passion, nor is it a pathological form of degeneracy. It is a vital instinct which is in us all—which is in all organized beings and dominates them, just as the genetic instinct. And most of the time it is especially true that these two instincts fuse so well, and are so totally interchangeable, that in some way or other they form a single and identical instinct, so that we no longer may tell which of the two urges us to give life, and which to take it—which is murder, and which love. I have been the confidant of an honorable assassin who killed women, not to rob them, but to ravish them. His trick was to manage things so that his sexual climax coincided exactly with the death-spasm of the woman: 'At those moments,' he told me, 'I imagined I was a God, creating a world!'"

“Ah,” cried the celebrated writer, “if you are going to seek your examples among professional assassins—” “Hold on,” the scientist replied; “simply that we are all more or less assassins. I like to believe that, intellectually, we have all experienced analogous sensations to a lesser degree. We restrain the innate need of murder and attenuate physical violence by giving it a legalized outlet: industry, colonial trade, war, the hunt or anti-Semitism, because it is dangerous to abandon oneself to it immoderately and outside the law, and since after all the moral satisfaction we derive from it is not worth exposing ourselves to the ordinary consequences of the act—imprisonment (testimony before judges (always tiring and scientifically uninteresting), and, finally, the guillotine—” “You're exaggerating,” interrupted the first speaker. “Murder is a dangerous business only for inelegant murderers—witless and impulsive brutes who lack all psychological understanding. An intelligent and rational man may, with ineffable serenity, commit all the murders he desires. He is assured of immunity. The superiority of his calculations will always prevail against the routine of police investigation and, let us admit it, against the puerility of the criminal investigations with which presiding magistrates enjoy dabbling. In this business, as in all others, it is the small who pay for the great. Come, my friend, surely you admit that the number of crimes which go unprosecuted—” “And tolerated—” “And tolerated—I was about to say that—You will admit that that sum is a thousand times greater than the number of discovered and punished crimes, about which the papers chatter with such strange prolixity, and with so repugnant a

lack of understanding. If you will admit that, then concede that the gendarme is no hobgoblin to the intellectuals of murder—" "Undoubtedly—but that's not the question. You are clouding the issue. I said that murder is a normal and not at all exceptional function of nature and all living beings. So it is exorbitant of society, under pretext of governing men, to have abrogated the exclusive right to kill them, to the detriment of the individuals in whom alone this right resides." "Quite true!" said an amiable and verbose philosopher whose lectures at the Sorbonne draw a select attendance every week. "Our friend is quite right. As far as I am concerned, I do not believe that a human being exists who is not, basically at least, an assassin. Look! when I am in a drawing room, a church, a station; on the terrasse of a cafe, at the theatre or wherever crowds pass or loiter, I enjoy considering faces from a strictly homicidal point of view. For you may see by the glance, by the back of the neck, the shape of the skull, the jaw bone and zygoma of the cheeks, or by some part of their persons that they bear the stigmata of that psychological calamity known as murder. It is scarcely an aberration of my mind, but I can go nowhere without seeing it flickering beneath eyelids, or without feeling its mysterious contact in the touch of every hand held out to me. Last Sunday I went to a town on the festival day of its patron saint. In the public square, which was decorated with foliage, floral arches, and poles draped with flags, was grouped every kind of amusement common to that sort of public celebration—And beneath the paternal eye of the authorities, a swarm of good people were enjoying themselves. The wooden horses, the roller-coaster

and the swings drew a very meager crowd. The organs wheezed their gayest tunes and most bewitching overtures in vain. Other pleasures absorbed this festive throng. Some shot with rifles, pistols, or the good old cross-bow at targets painted like human faces; others hurled balls, knocking over marionettes ranged pathetically on wooden bars. Still others, mallet in hand, pounded upon a spring which animated a French sailor who patriotically transfixed with his bayonet a poor Hova or a mocking Dahomean. Everywhere, under tents or in the little lighted booths, I saw counterfeits of death, parodies of massacre, portrayals of hecatombs. And how happy these good people were!" Everyone realized the philosopher was launched upon his subject, so we settled ourselves as best we could, to withstand the torrent of his theories and anecdotes. He continued: "I notice that these gentle pastimes have for some years been undergoing a considerable development. The joy of killing has become greater and, besides, has become popularized in proportion to the spread of social refinement—for make no mistake, customs do change! Formerly, when we were still uncultivated, the Sabbath shooting-galleries were a monotonously sorry sight to see. They only shot at pipes, and eggshells dancing upon jets of water. In the more sumptuous establishments, they actually had birds, but they were made of plaster. I ask you what fun was there in that? Today, progress has made it legal for every good man to procure himself the delicate and edifying emotion of assassination, for a couple of sous. Into the bargain, you may still win colored plates and rabbits; but, instead of pipes, eggshells, and plaster birds, which smash stupidly



without suggesting anything bloody to us, the showman's imagination has substituted figures of men, women and children, carefully jointed and costumed as they should be. Then they have made these figures gesticulate and walk. By means of an ingenious mechanism, they walk happily along, or flee terrified.

You see them appear alone or in groups, in decorative settings, scaling walls, entering dungeons, tumbling out of windows, popping up out of trapdoors... They function just like real beings and move their arms, legs and heads. Some appear to be weeping, some seem to be paupers, some invalids, and there are some dressed in gold like legendary princesses. Really, you can believe that they possess intelligence, a will, a soul—that they are alive! Some even assume pathetic attitudes. You can almost hear them cry: 'Mercy! Don't kill me!' It is an exquisite sensation to imagine you are going to kill things that move, suffer, and implore! Something like a taste of warm blood comes to your mouth when you aim the rifle or the pistol at them. What a thrill when the shot decapitates these make-believe men! What a clamor when the arrow splits their cardboard breasts and lays the little inanimate bodies low, in corpse-like postures! Everybody gets excited, intent, and eggs the others on. You hear nothing but expressions of destruction and death: 'Kill him!' 'Aim at his eye, aim at his heart!' 'He got his!' No matter how indifferent these good people are to the targets and the pipes, they become elated when the mark represents a human being. The clumsy ones grow angry, not with their own awkwardness, but with the marionette they

have missed. They call it a coward and overwhelm it with vile insults when it disappears intact behind the door of a dungeon. They challenge it: 'Come on out, you bum!' They begin to fire at it again, until they have killed it. Consider these good people; at that moment they are really assassins, beings moved solely by the desire to kill. The homicidal monster which up to then had slumbered in them, awakens with the illusion that they are going to destroy something living. "For, the little fellow of cardboard, sawdust, or wood which moves back and forth amid the scenery is no longer a toy to them, or a bit of lifeless material. Watching it pass back and forth, they unconsciously endow it with warm blood, sensitive nerves, thought—all those things it is so bitterly sweet to annihilate and so fiercely delicious to see oozing from the wounds you have inflicted. They even go so far as to ascribe political and religious convictions to it, contrary to their own; accusing it of being a Jew, an Englishman, or a German, in order to add a particular hate to this general hatred of life, and thus augment the instinctive pleasure of killing by a personal vengeance, intimately relished." Here the host interrupted out of politeness to his guests, and with the charitable desire of permitting our philosopher and us a breathing space. He objected, quietly: "You're only talking of brutes—peasants who, I concede, are always inclined toward murder. But it is not possible for you to apply the same observations to cultivated minds, disciplined natures, or cultured individuals every day of whose lives witnesses victories over native instinct and the savage vestiges of atavism." To which our philosopher eagerly replied: "Allow

me—what are the habits, my friend, and the preferred pleasures of those whom you call 'cultivated minds and disciplined natures'? Fencing, dueling, violent sports, the abominable pigeon—shoot, bull fighting, the various manifestations of patriotism, hunting—everything which is in reality only a reversion to the period of old—time barbarity, when man—if we may say so was, as far as moral culture is concerned, on the same plane with the wild beasts he pursued. After all, we need not complain that the hunt has survived all the slightly altered trappings of earlier customs. It is a powerful counter—irritant, through whose agency 'cultivated minds and disciplined natures' are enabled, without too much harm to us, to drain off what destructive energy and bloody passion still remains in them. Without it, instead of coursing deer, finishing off the boar and slaughtering innocent game—birds in the meadows, you may be sure that the 'cultivated minds would turn their packs on our trail. We would be the ones whom the 'disciplined natures' would joyfully mow down with rifle—fire, which they do not fail to do when they obtain the power, through some means or another, and with more determination and—let us frankly admit it—less hypocrisy than the brute peasant. Ah, let us never look forward to the disappearance of game from our fields and forests! It is our safeguard and, after a fashion, our ransom. The day it finally disappears, it will not be long before we take its place, for the exquisite enjoyment of the 'cultivated minds'. The Dreyfus affair affords us an excellent example, and never, I believe, was the passion for murder and the joy of the manhunt so thoroughly and cynically displayed. The pursuit

of Monsieur Grimaux through the streets of Nantes remains the most characteristic of the startling incidents and monstrous events to which it gave opportunity daily during the past year. And it accrues to the honor of the 'cultivated minds and disciplined natures', who saw to it that this great savant, to whom we are indebted for the most brilliant researches in chemistry, was overwhelmed with indignities and threats of death. In this connection, we must always remember that the mayor of Clisson, 'a cultivated mind', in a letter which was made public, refused to allow Monsieur Grimaux to enter his town, and regretted that modern laws did not permit him to hang him high and dry—a thing which befell savants in the lovely days of the ancient monarchies. And for that, this excellent mayor was strongly commended by all whom France numbers among those exquisite 'worldly personalities' who, according to our host, win such brilliant victories every day over original instinct and the savage vestiges of atavism. Notice also that it is from among the cultivated minds and disciplined natures that officers are almost exclusively recruited. Men—that is to say—who, neither more nor less wicked nor stupid than others, freely choose a calling—a highly honored calling, moreover—in which every intellectual effort is bent toward committing the most diversified violations upon the human being; and in developing and compiling the most complete, far reaching and certain means of pillage, destruction and death. Aren't there warships to which we have given the perfectly logical and understandable names of Devastation... Fury... Terror? "As for me? Listen to this! I'm positive that I believe I am a normal man, with affections, high sentiments, superior

culture and the refinements of civilization and sociability. Well, how often have I heard the imperious voice of murder snarling in me! How often have I felt the desire rising in a surge of blood from the depths of my being to my brain—that bitter, violent and almost invincible desire to kill. Do not believe that this desire arose in a passionate crisis, accompanied a sudden, unreflective rage, or was combined with a keen lust for money. Not at all! This desire is born suddenly—powerful and unjustified in me—for no reason and apropos of nothing... In the street, for example, behind the back of an unknown pedestrian. Yes, there are some backs on the street which cry for the knife. Why?” After this unexpected revelation, the philosopher was silent for a moment, and looked at us all in alarm; then he continued: “No—you see, the moralists have split hairs in vain. The need to kill is born in man with the need to eat, and merges with it... This instinctive need, which is the mainspring of all living organisms, is developed by education instead of being restrained, and is sanctified by religion instead of being denounced. Everything conspires to make it the pivot upon which our admirable society revolves. As soon as man awakens to consciousness, we instill the spirit of murder in his mind. Murder, expanded to the status of a duty, and popularized to the point of heroism, accompanies him through all the stages of his existence. He is made to adore uncouth gods, mad, furious gods who are only gratified by cataclysms and, ferocious maniacs that they are, gorge themselves with human lives and mow down nations like fields of wheat. He is made to respect only heroes, those disgusting brutes saddled with crime and red with human



blood. The virtues by which he rises above others, and which win him glory, fortune and love, are based entirely upon murder. In war, he discovers the supreme synthesis of the eternal and everlasting folly of murder—regulated, regimented and obligatory—a national function. Wherever he goes, whatever he does, he will always see that word: murder—immortally inscribed upon the pediment of that vast slaughter—house—humanity. “Then why do you expect this man, in whom the scorn of human life is inculcated from infancy, and whom we consecrate to legalized slaughter—why do you expect him to recoil from murder when he finds in it interest or distraction? In the name of what law could society condemn assassins who, in reality, have only conformed to the homicidal laws which it dictates, and followed the bloody example which it sets them? ‘Why is it?’ assassins might readily say, ‘that you force us to overpower groups of men whom we do not hate, whom we do not even know—then, the more we overwhelm them, the more you overwhelm us with rewards and honors? Then again, trusting in your logic, we destroy people because they hamper us or we detest them, or because we covet their money, their wives, their positions, or simply because we enjoy destroying them: all of which are concise, plausible and human reasons—and along comes the gendarme, the judge and the hangman! ‘Here is a revolting injustice which is perfectly senseless!’ What could society reply to that, if it had the slightest regard for logic?” A young man who had been silent until then said: “Is this really the explanation of that strange murderous mania by which you maintain we are all originally or willfully tainted? I do not think so and I

do not wish to. I prefer to believe that everything about us is mysterious. Furthermore, this satisfies the indolence of my mind, which has a horror of solving social, and human problems which, besides, are never solved. And it strengthens the reasons—the purely poetic reasons by which I am tempted to explain, or rather not to explain, everything which I do not understand. You have just made quite a terrible disclosure, Doctor, and described impressions which, if they were to assume active form, might lead you far a field, and me also; for I have often experienced these impressions, and quite recently, under the following exceptionally banal circumstances. But first permit me to add that I ascribe these abnormal states of mind to the environment in which I was brought up, and the daily influences which affected me, unawares. “You know my father, Doctor Trepan. You know that there is no more sociable or charming man than he. Nor is there one of whom the profession has made a more deliberate assassin. I have often witnessed those marvelous operations which made him famous the world over. There is something truly phenomenal in his disregard for life. Once he had just performed a difficult laparotomy and, examining his patient, who was still under the influence of the chloroform, he suddenly said: “This woman may have an affected pylorus... suppose I also go into that stomach. I have time. Which he did. There was nothing wrong. Then my father started to sew up the needless wound he had made, saying: 'Now, at least, I'm certain.' He was so certain that the patient died the very same night. Another time, in Italy, where he had been summoned for an operation, we were visiting a

museum. I was enraptured. 'Ah, poet! poet!' exclaimed my father, who was not interested for a moment in the masterpieces which carried me away with enthusiasm; 'Art! art! Beauty! Do you know what it is? Well, my boy, it is a woman's abdomen, open and all bloody, with the hemostats in place!' But I won't philosophize any more, I'll narrate... From the tale I promised you, you will deduce all the anthropological conclusions of which it admits, if it really admits of any..." This young man had so authoritative a manner and so bitter a tone, that it made us shiver slightly. "I was returning from Lyon," he continued, "and I was alone in a first-class compartment. I've forgotten what station it was, but a traveler got on. I admit that the irritation of being disturbed when alone can bring about very violent states of mind, and arouse you to peevish behavior. But I experienced nothing of the sort. I was so bored with being alone that the chance arrival of this companion was rather a pleasure to me from the very start. He settled himself across from me, after carefully depositing his few bags in the rack. He was a bulky man, of common appearance, whose greasy ugliness shortly became obnoxious to me. After a few moments, I felt something like an insuperable disgust in looking at him. He was stretched out heavily on the cushions, his thighs apart, and at every jolt of the train his enormous belly trembled and heaved like a disgusting mass of jelly. As he seemed hot, he took off his collar and sloppily mopped his forehead—a low, wrinkled and bumpy forehead, raggedly framed by a few short, sticky hairs. His face was merely a lumpy mass of fat; his triple chin a slack flap of soft flesh, spread on his chest. To avoid this unpleasant sight I pretended to look at

the countryside, and forcibly tore myself away from the presence of this irksome companion. An hour passed. And when curiosity, stronger than my will, had drawn my eyes back to him, I saw that he had fallen into a deep and unprepossessing sleep. He slept, sunk into himself, his head drooping and rolling upon his shoulders, and his huge, bloated hands lay open upon the slopes of his thighs. I noticed that his round eyes bulged beneath creased eyelids, and that a bit of bluish pupil showed through a slit, like an ecchymosis on a scrap of limp veal. What insane idea suddenly flashed through my mind? Truly, I don't know. For though I had been frequently tempted by murder, it lay in me in an embryonic state of desire, and had never as yet assumed the precise form of a gesture or an act. Is it possible that the ignominious ugliness of this man alone was able to crystallize that gesture and that act? No, there is a more profound cause, of which I am ignorant. I arose quietly and approached the sleeper, my hands spread, contracted and violent, as though to strangle him." With these words, being a story-teller who knew how to get his effects, he paused. Then, evidently satisfied with himself, he continued: "Despite my rather puny appearance, I am gifted with unusual strength, exceptional muscular agility, and extraordinary power of grip, and at that moment a strange heat unleashed the dynamic force of my bodily faculties. My hands alone moved towards this man's neck—by themselves, I assure you—burning and terrible. I felt in me a lightness, an elasticity, an influx of nervous tides, something like the powerful intoxication of sexual desire. Yes, I can't explain what I felt better than to compare it with that. The

minute my hands were about to close upon this greasy neck, the man woke up. He awoke with terror in his eyes, and he stuttered: 'What? what? what?' And that was all! I saw that he wanted to say more, but he couldn't! His round eye flickered like a little light sputtering in the wind. Then it remained fixed and motionless upon me, in horror. Without saying a word, without even seeking an excuse or a reason, by which the man would have been reassured, I sat down again across from him and nonchalantly, with an ease of manner which still astonishes me, I unfolded a newspaper which, however, I did not read. Fear grew in the man's eyes with every moment; little by little he recoiled, and I saw his face grow spotted with red, then purple, then it stiffened.

All the way to Paris, the man's stare retained its frightful fixity. When the train stopped, the man did not get off... "The narrator lit a cigarette in the flame of a candle, and from a cloud of smoke his phlegmatic voice was saying: "Oh, I know well enough. I had killed him! He was dead of cerebral congestion." This story made us very uneasy, and we looked at each other stupefied. Was the strange young man sincere? Had he tried to mystify us? We awaited an explanation, a commentary or an evasion, but he was silent. Grave and serious, he had resumed smoking, and now he seemed to be thinking of something else. From then on the conversation continued chaotic and lifeless, skimming a thousand frivolous subjects in a languid manner. Then a man with a ravaged face, a bowed back and mournful eyes, whose hair and beard were prematurely grey, arose with difficulty and in a trembling voice, said: "Up to now you



nave talked of everything but women, which is really inconceivable in a situation in which they are of primary importance.”

“Fine! Let's talk about them,” agreed the illustrious writer, who now found himself in his favorite environment; for in the literary world he passed for that curious fool called a feminist writer. “It's high time that all these bloody nightmares were infused with a little jollity. Let us talk of woman, my friends, since it is by her and through her that we forget our savage instincts—that we learn to love, and are raised to the supreme conception of pity and the idea!” The man with the ravaged face emitted a rasping, ironical laugh. “Woman, teacher of compassion!” he exclaimed; “Yes, I know the anthem. It is utilized a good deal in a certain type of literature, and in courses in drawing-room philosophy. Why, her entire history, and not only her history, but her role in nature and life contradicts this purely romantic concept. Why do women rush to bloody spectacles with the same frenzy that they fly to the pursuit of passion? Why is it that you see them in the streets, at the theatre, in the court of assizes or beside the guillotine, craning their necks and eagerly straining their eyes to sights of torture, in order to experience, to the swooning-point, the frightful thrill of death? Why does the very name of a great assassin make them tremble to the very depths of their flesh with a sort of delicious horror? All of them, or nearly all, dreamed about Pranzini! Why?” “Nonsense!” exclaimed the illustrious writer. “Prostitutes—” “No,” said the man with the ravaged face, “noblewomen—and bourgeoisies—it's the same thing.

Among women there are no moral categories—only social categories. They are women. Among the common people and in the upper and lower middle—class, and right on up to the most elevated social strata, women pounce upon those hideous morgues and abject museums of crime that make up the fiction columns of the Petit Journal. Why? Because great assassins have always been formidable lovers. Their genetic powers equal their criminal powers. They love in the same way they kill! Murder is born of love, and love attains its greatest intensity in murder. There is the same physiological exaltation, there are the same gestures of strangling and biting—and often the same words occur during identical spasms.” He spoke with difficulty, with an air of suffering and as he spoke his eyes became more mournful and the wrinkles in his face were more accentuated. Woman, dispenser of ideality and compassion!” he went on: “Why, the most atrocious crimes are nearly always the work of woman. It is she who conceives them, organizes them, prepares them and directs them. If she does not execute them with her own hands, which are often too weak, you find her moral presence, her ideas, and her sex expressed in their ferocity and implacability. 'Look for the woman!' said the wise criminologist.” “You slander her!” protested the author, who could not conceal a gesture of indignation. “What you offer us as generalizations are the very rare exceptions. Degeneracy... neurosis... neurasthenia... My God! Woman is no more impervious to psychical disease than man—although with her these disturbances assume a charming and touching form, which makes us better understand the

delicacy of her exquisite tenderness. No sir, you have fallen into a deplorable error. To the contrary, what we must admire in woman is her great common sense and her great love of life which, as I said before, finds its final expression in compassion." "Literature, sir, literature! "And the worst possible kind!" "Pessimism, sir! Blasphemy! Stupidity!" "I think both of you are mistaken," interrupted a physician; "women are far more specialized and complete than you think. Incomparable virtuosi and great artists in grief that they are, they prefer the sight of suffering to that of death, and tears to blood. And it's a wonderfully ambiguous business in which each finds what he is looking for; since everyone draws quite different conclusions. We exalt woman's compassion or curse her cruelty for equally irrefutable reasons, according to whether we are momentarily disposed to owe her gratitude or hatred. So what good are all these fruitless discussions; for in the eternal battle of the sexes, we are always conquered—and we can do nothing about it—and none of us as yet, be he misogynist or feminist, has found a more perfect instrument of pleasure, or any other means of reproduction, than woman." But the man with the ravaged face made violent gestures of denial: "Listen to me," he said. "The hazards of existence and what a life I've had—have placed me in the presence of—not a woman—but woman. I have seen her, stripped of the artifices and hypocrisies with which civilization veils her real soul. I have seen her abandoned to her single whim, or, if you prefer, to her sole driving instincts, in an environment where nothing, it is true, can restrain them and, on the contrary, everything conspires to

excite them. Neither laws, morals, religious prejudices nor social conventions hid her from me—nothing. It was her true self I saw, in her original ,nudity, among gardens and tortures—blood and flowers! When she appeared to me I had fallen to the lowest point of human abjection—at least, I thought so. Then, before her amorous eyes and her compassionate mouth I cried out with hope, and I believed—yes, I believed that through her I would be saved. Well, it was something fearful! Woman revealed crimes to me that I had not known! shadows into which I had not yet descended. Look at my dead eyes, my inarticulate lips, my hands which tremble—only from what I have seen! But I can no more curse her than I can curse the fire which devours towns and forests, the waters which sink ships, or the tiger which carries his bloody prey in his jaws into the depths of the jungle. Woman possesses the cosmic force of an element, an invincible force of destruction, like nature's. She is, in herself alone, all nature! Being the matrix of life, she is by that very fact the matrix of death—since it is from death that life is perpetually reborn, and since to annihilate death would be to kill life at its only fertile source.” “What does that prove?” said the doctor, shrugging his shoulders. He answered simply: “It proves nothing. Must things be proved in order to be painful or pleasant? They need only be felt...” Then, timidly and—oh, the power of human vanity!—with visible self-satisfaction, the man with the ravaged face took out of his pocket a roll of paper, which he carefully unfolded: “I have written,” he said, “the story of this period of my life. I have hesitated to publish it for a long time, and I still hesitate. I would like to read it to you—you who are men