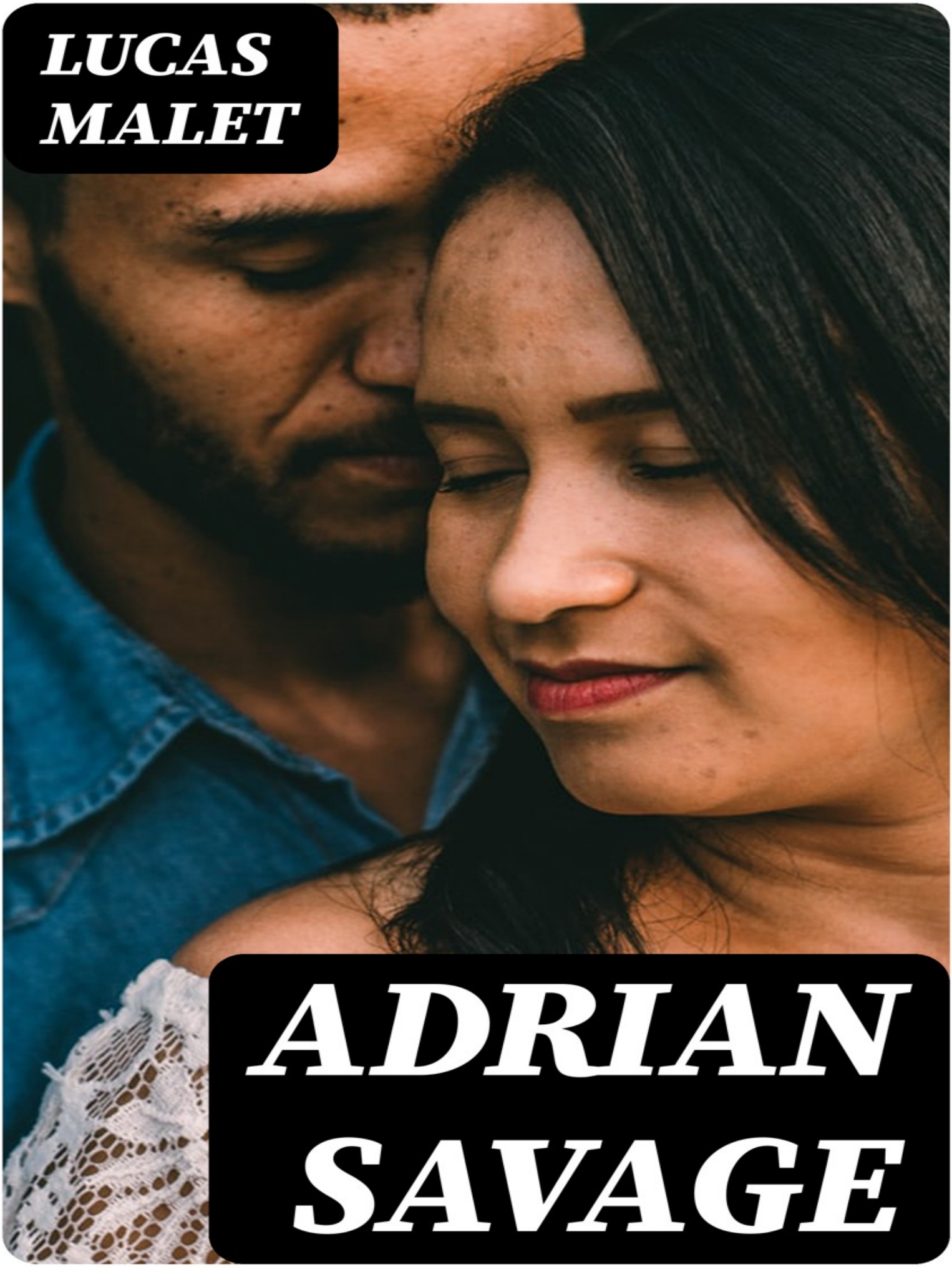
LUCAS MALET



# ADRIAN SAVAGE

**Lucas Malet**

# Adrian Savage

**A Novel**

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# CHAPTER I

# IN WHICH THE READER IS INVITED TO MAKE THE ACQUAINTANCE OF THE HERO OF THIS BOOK

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Adrian Savage—a noticeably distinct, well-groomed, and well-set-up figure, showing dark in the harsh light of the winter afternoon against the pallor of the asphalt—walked rapidly across the Pont des Arts, and, about half-way along the *Quai Malaquais*, turned in under the archway of a cavernous *porte-cochère*. The bare, spindly planes and poplars, in the center of the courtyard to which this gave access, shivered visibly. Doubtless the lightly clad, lichen-stained nymph to whom they acted as body-guard would have shivered likewise had her stony substance permitted, for icicles fringed the lip of her tilted pitcher and caked the edge of the shell-shaped basin into which, under normal conditions, its waters dripped with a not unmusical tinkle. Yet the atmosphere of the courtyard struck the young man as almost mild compared with that of the quay outside, along which the northeasterly wind scourged bitingly. Upon the farther bank of the turgid, gray-green river the buildings of the Louvre stood out pale and stark against a sullen backing of snow-cloud. For the past week Paris had cowered, sunless, in the grip of a black frost. If those leaden heavens would only elect to unload themselves of their burden the

weather might take up! To Adrian Savage, in excellent health and prosperous circumstances, the cold in itself mattered nothing—would, indeed, rather have acted as a stimulus to his chronic appreciation of the joy of living but for the fact that he had to-day been suddenly and unexpectedly called upon to leave Paris and bid farewell to one of its inhabitants eminently and even perplexingly dear to him. Having, for all his young masculine optimism, the artist's exaggerated sensibility to the aspects of outward things, and equally exaggerated capacity for conceiving—highly improbable—disaster, it troubled him to make his adieux under such forbidding meteorologic conditions. His regrets and alarms would, he felt, have been decidedly lessened had kindly sunshine set a golden frame about his parting impressions.

Nevertheless, as—raising his hat gallantly to the concierge, seated in her glass-fronted lodge, swathed mummy-like in shawls and mufflers—he turned shortly to the left along the backs of the tall, gray houses, a high expectation, at once delightful and disturbing, took possession of him to the exclusion of all other sensations. For the past eighteen months—ever since, indeed, the distressingly sudden death of his old friend, the popular painter Horace St. Leger—he had made this selfsame little pilgrimage as frequently as respectful discretion permitted. And invariably, at the selfsame spot—it was where, as he noted amusedly, between the third and fourth of the heavily barred ground-floor windows a square leaden water-pipe, running the height of the house wall from the parapet of the steep slated roof, reached the grating in the pavement—this

quickening of his whole being came upon him, however occupied his thoughts might previously have been with his literary work, or with the conduct of the bi-monthly review of which he was at once assistant editor and part proprietor. This quickening remained with him, moreover, as he entered a doorway set in the near corner of the courtyard and ran up the flights of waxed wooden stairs to the third story. In no country of the civilized world, it may be confidently asserted, do affairs of the heart, even when virtuous, command more indulgent sympathy than in France. It followed that Adrian entertained his own emotions with the same eager and friendly amenity which he would have extended to those of another man in like case. He was not in the least contemptuous or suspicious of them. He permitted cynicism no smallest word in the matter. On the contrary, he hailed the present ebullience of his affections as among those captivating surprises of earthly existence upon which one should warmly congratulate oneself, having liveliest cause for rejoicing.

To-day, as usual, there was a brief pause before the door of the vestibule opened. A space of delicious anxiety—-carrying him back to the poignant hopes and despairs of childhood, when the fate of some anticipated treat hangs in the balance—while he inquired of the trim waiting-maid whether her mistress was or was not receiving. Followed by that other moment, childlike, too, in its deliciously troubled emotion and vision, when, passing from the corridor into the warm, vaguely fragrant atmosphere of the long, pale, rose-red and canvas-colored drawing-room, he once again beheld the lady of his desires and of his heart.

From the foregoing it may be deduced, and rightly, that Adrian Savage was of a romantic temperament, and that he was very much in love. Let it be immediately added, however, that he was a young gentleman whose head, to employ a vulgarism, was most emphatically screwed on the right way. Only child of an eminent English physician of good family, long resident in Paris, and of a French mother—a woman of great personal charm and some distinction as a poetess—he had inherited, along with a comfortable little income of about eighteen hundred pounds a year, a certain sagacity and decision in dealing with men and with affairs, as well as quick sensibility in relation to beauty and to drama. Artist and practical man of the world went, for the most part, very happily hand and hand in him. At moments, however, they quarreled, to the production of complications.

The death of both his parents occurred during his tenth year, leaving him to the guardianship of a devoted French grandmother. Under the terms of Doctor Savage's will one-third of his income was to be applied to the boy's maintenance and education until his majority, the remaining two-thirds being set aside to accumulate until his twenty-third birthday. "At that age," so the document in question stated, "I apprehend that my son will have discovered in what direction his talents and aptitudes lie. I do not wish to fetter his choice of a profession; still I do most earnestly request him not to squander the considerable sum of money into possession of which he will then come, but to spend it judiciously, in the service of those talents and aptitudes, with the purpose of securing for himself an honorable and distinguished career." This idea that something definite,

something notable even in the matter of achievement was demanded from him, clung to the boy through school and college, acting—since he was healthy, high-spirited, and confident—as a wholesome incentive to effort. Even before fulfilling his term of military service, Adrian had decided what his career should be. Letters called him with no uncertain voice. He would be a writer—dramatist, novelist, an artist in psychology, in touch at all points with the inexhaustible riches of the human scene. His father's science, his mother's poetic gift, should combine, so he believed, to produce in him a very special vocation. His ambitions at this period were colossal. The raw material of his selected art appeared to him nothing less than the fee-simple of creation. He planned literary undertakings beside which the numerically formidable volumes of Balzac or Zola shriveled to positive next-to-nothingness. Fortunately fuller knowledge begot a juster sense of proportion, while his native shrewdness lent a hand to knocking extravagant conceptions on the head. By the time he came into possession of the comfortable sum of money that had accumulated during his minority and he was free to follow his bent, Adrian found himself contented with quite modest first steps in authorship. For a couple of years he traveled, resolved to broaden his acquaintance with men and things, to get some clear first-hand impressions both of the ancient, deep-rooted civilizations of the East and the amazing mushroom growths of America. On his return to Paris, it so happened that a leading bi-monthly review, which had shown hospitality to his maiden literary productions, stood badly in need of financial support. Adrian bought a

preponderating interest in it; and by the time in question—namely, the winter of 190- and the dawn of his thirtieth year—had contrived to make it not only a powerful factor in contemporary criticism and literary output, but a solid commercial success.

To be nine-and-twenty, the owner of a well-favored person, of admitted talent and business capacity, and to be honestly in love, is surely to be as happily circumstanced as mortal man can reasonably ask to be. That the course of true love should not run quite smooth, that the beloved one should prove elusive, difficult of access, that obstacles should encumber the path of achievement, that mists of doubt and uncertainty should drift across the face of the situation, obscuring its issues, only served in Adrian's case to heighten interest and whet appetite. The last thing he asked was that the affair should move on fashionable, conventional lines, a matter for newspaper paragraphs and social gossip. The justifying charm of it, to his thinking, resided in precisely those elements of uncertainty and difficulty. If, in the twentieth century, a man is to subscribe to the constraints of marriage at all, let it at least be in some sort marriage by capture! And, as he told himself, what man worth the name, let alone what artist, what poet—vowed by his calling to confession of the transcendental, the eternally mystic and sacred in this apparently most primitive, even savage, of human relations—would choose to capture his exquisite prey amid the blatant materialism, the vulgar noise and chaffer of the modern social highway; rather than pursue it through the shifting lights and shadows of mysterious woodland places, the dread of its

final escape always upon him, till his feet were weary with running, and his hands with dividing the thick, leafy branches, his ears, all the while, tormented by the baffling, piercing sweetness of the half-heard Pipes of Pan?

Not infrequently Adrian would draw himself up short in the midst of such rhapsodizings, humorously conscious that the artistic side of his nature had got the bit, so to speak, very much between its teeth and was running away altogether too violently with its soberer, more practical, stable companion. For, as he frankly admitted, to the ordinary observer it must seem a rather ludicrously far cry from Madame St. Leger's pleasant, well-found flat, in the center of cosmopolitan twentieth-century Paris, to the arcana of pagan myth and legend! Yet, speaking quite soberly and truthfully, it was of such ancient, secret, and symbolic things he instinctively thought when looking into Gabrielle St. Leger's golden-brown eyes and noting the ironic loveliness of her smiling lips. That was just the delight, just the provocation, just what differentiated her from all other women of his acquaintance, from any other woman who, so far, had touched his heart or stirred his senses. Her recondite beauty—to quote the phrase of this analytical lover—challenged his imagination with the excitement of something hidden; though whether hidden by intentional and delicate malice, or merely by lack of opportunity for self-declaration, he was at a loss to determine. Daughter, wife, mother, widow—young though she still was, she had sounded the gamut of woman's most vital experiences. Yet, it seemed to him, although she had fulfilled, and was fulfilling, the obligations incident to each

of these several conditions in so gracious and irreproachable a manner, her soul had never been effectively snared in the meshes of any net. Good Catholic, good housewife, sympathetic hostess, intelligent and discriminating critic, still—he might be a fool for his pains, but what artist doesn't know better than to under-rate the fine uses of folly?—he believed her to be, either by fate or by choice, essentially a *Belle au Bois Dormant*; and further believed himself, thanks to the workings of constitutional masculine vanity, to be the princely adventurer designed by providence for the far from disagreeable duty of waking her up. Only just now providence, to put it roughly, appeared to have quite other fish for him to fry. And it was under compulsion of such prospective fish-frying that he sought her apartment overlooking the *Quai Malaquais*, this afternoon, reluctantly to bid her farewell.

# CHAPTER II

# WHEREIN A VERY MODERN YOUNG MAN TELLS A TIME-HONORED TALE WITH BUT SMALL ENCOURAGEMENT

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Disappointment awaited him. Madame St. Leger was receiving; but, to his chagrin, another visitor had forestalled his advent—witness a woman's fur-lined wrap lying across the lid of the painted Venetian chest in the corridor. Adrian bestowed a glance of veritable hatred upon the garment. Then, recognizing it, felt a little better. For it belonged to Anastasia Beauchamp, an old friend, not unsympathetic, as he believed, to his suit.

Sympathy, however, was hardly the note struck on his entrance. Miss Beauchamp and Madame St. Leger stood in the vacant rose-red carpeted space at the far end of the long room, in front of the open fire. Both were silent; yet Adrian was aware somehow they had only that moment ceased speaking, and that their conversation had been momentous in character. The high tension of it held them to the point of their permitting him to walk the whole length of the room before turning to acknowledge his presence. This was damping for Adrian, who, like most agreeable young men, thought himself entitled to and well worth a welcome. But not a bit of it! The elder woman—high-shouldered, short-waisted, an admittedly liberal sixty, her arms

disproportionate in their length and thinness to her low stature—continued to hold her hostess's right hand in both hers and look at her intently, as though enforcing some request or admonition.

Miss Beauchamp, it may be noted in passing, affected a certain juvenility of apparel. To-day she wore a short purple serge walking-suit. A velvet toque of the same color, trimmed with sable and blush-roses, perched itself on her elaborately dressed hair, which, in obedience to the then prevailing fashion, showed not gray but a full coppery red. Her eyebrows and eyelids were darkly penciled, and powder essayed to mask wrinkles and sallowness of complexion. Yet the very frankness of these artifices tended to rob them of offense; or, in any serious degree—the first surprise of them over—to mar the genial promise of her quick blue-gray eyes and her thin, witty, strongly marked, rather masculine countenance. Adrian usually accepted her superficial bedizenments without criticism, as just part of her excellent, if somewhat bizarre, personality. But to-day—his temper being slightly ruffled—under the cold, diffused light of the range of tall windows, they started, to his seeing, into quite unpardonable prominence—a prominence punctuated by the grace and the proudly youthful aspect of the woman beside her.

Madame St. Leger was clothed in unrelieved black, from the frill, high about her long throat, to the hem of her trailing cling skirts. Over her head she had thrown a black gauze scarf, soberly framing her heart-shaped face in fine semi-transparent folds, and obscuring the burnished lights in her brown hair, which stood away in soft, dense ridges on

either side the parting and was gathered into a loose knot at the back of her head. Her white skin was very clear, a faint scarlet tinge showing through it in the round of either cheek. But just now she was pale. And this, along with the framing black gauze scarf, developed the subtle likeness which—as Adrian held—she bore, in the proportions of her face and molding of it, to Leonardo's world-famous "Mona Lisa" in Salon Carré of the Louvre. The strange recondite quality of her beauty, and the challenge it offered, were peculiarly in evidence; thereby making, as he reflected, cruel, though unconscious, havoc of the juvenile pretensions of poor Anastasia. And this was painful to him. So that in wishing—as he incontestably did—the said Anastasia absent, his wish may have been dictated almost as much by chivalry as by selfishness.

All of which conflicting perceptions and emotions tended to rob him of his habitual and happy self-assurance. His voice took on quite plaintive tones, and his gay brown eyes a quite pathetic and orphaned expression, as he exclaimed:

"Ah! I see that I disturb you. I am in the way. My visit is inconvenient to you!"

The faint tinge of scarlet leaped into Madame St. Leger's cheeks, and an engaging dimple indicated itself at the left corner of her closed and smiling mouth. Meanwhile Anastasia Beauchamp broke forth impetuously:

"No, no! On the contrary, it is I who am in the way, though our dear, exquisite friend is too amiable to tell me so. I have victimized her far too long already. I have bored her distractingly."

"Indeed, it is impossible you should ever bore me," the younger woman put in quietly.

"Then I have done worse. I have just a little bit angered you," Miss Beauchamp declared. "Oh! I know I have been richly irritating, preaching antiquated doctrines of moderation in thought and conduct. But '*les vérités bêtes*' remain '*les vérités vraies*,' now as ever. With that I go. *Ma toute chère et belle*, I leave you. And," she added, turning to Adrian, "I leave you, you lucky young man, in possession. Retrieve my failures! Be as amusing as I have been intolerable.—But see, one moment, since the opportunity offers. Tell me, you are going to accept those articles on the Stage in the Eighteenth Century, by my poor little protégé, Lewis Byewater, for publication in the Review?"

"Am I not always ready to attempt the impossible for your sake, dear Mademoiselle?" Adrian inquired gallantly.

"Hum—hum—is it as bad as that, then? Are his articles so impossible? Byewater has soaked himself in his subject. He has been tremendously conscientious. He has taken immense trouble over them."

"He has taken immensely too much; that is just the worry. His conscience protrudes at every sentence. It prods, it positively impales you!" The speaker raised his neat black eyebrows and broad shoulders in delicate apology. "Alas! he is pompous, pedantic, I grieve to report; he is heavy, very heavy, your little Byewater. The eighteenth-century stage was many things which it had, no doubt, much better not have been, but was it heavy? Assuredly not."

"Ah! poor child, he is young. He is nervous. He has not command of his style yet. You should be lenient. Give him

opportunity and encouragement, and he will find himself, will rise to the possibilities of his own talent. After all," she added, "every writer must begin some time and somewhere!"

"But not necessarily in the pages of my Review," Adrian protested. "With every desire to be philanthropic, I dare not convert it into a *crèche*, a foundling hospital, for the maintenance of ponderous literary infants. My subscribers might, not unreasonably, object."

"You floated René Dax."

"But he is a genius," Madame St. Leger remarked quietly.

"Yes," Adrian asserted, "there could be no doubt about his value from the first. He is extraordinary."

"He is extraordinarily perverted," cried Miss Beauchamp.

"I am much attached to M. René Dax." Madame St. Leger spoke deliberately; and a little silence followed, as when people listen, almost anxiously, to the sound of a pebble dropped into a well, trying to hear it touch bottom. Miss Beauchamp was the first to break it. She did so laughing.

"In that case, *ma toute belle*, you also are perverse, though I trust not yet perverted. It amounts to this, then," she continued, pulling her long gloves up her thin arms: "I am to dispose of poor Byewater, shatter his hopes, crush his ambitions, tell him, in short, that he won't do. Just Heaven, you who have arrived, how soon you become cruel!" She looked from the handsome black-bearded young man to the beautiful enigmatic young woman, and her witty, accentuated face bore a singular expression. "Good-by, charming Gabrielle," she said. "Forgive me if I have been tedious, for truly I am devotedly fond of you. And good-by to

you, Mr. Savage. Yes! I go to dispose of the ill-fated Byewater. But ah! ah! if you only knew all I have done this afternoon, or tried to do, to serve you!"

Whereupon Adrian, smitten by sudden apprehension of deep and possibly dangerous issues, followed her to the door, crying eagerly:

"Wait, I implore you, dear Mademoiselle. Do not be too precipitate in disposing of Byewater. I may have underrated the worth of his articles. I will re-read, I will reconsider. Nothing presses. I have to leave Paris for a week or two. Let the matter rest till my return. I may find it possible, after all, to accept them."

Then, the door closed, he came back and stood on the vacant space of rose-red carpet in the pleasant glow of the fire.

"She is a clever woman," he said, reflectively. "She has cornered me, and that is not quite fair—on the Review. For they constitute a veritable atrocity of dullness, those articles by her miserable little Byewater."

"It is part of her code of friendship—it holds true all round. If she helps others—"

Madame St. Leger left her sentence unfinished and, glancing with a hint of veiled mockery at her guest, sat down in a carven, high-backed, rose-cushioned chair at right angles to the fireplace, and picked up a bundle of white needlework from the little table beside it.

"You mean that Miss Beauchamp does her best for me, too?" Adrian inquired, tentatively.

But the lady was too busy unfolding her work, finding needle and thimble to make answer.

"I foresee that I shall be compelled to print the wretched little Byewater in the end," he murmured, still tentatively.

"Did you not tell Miss Beauchamp you were going away?" Gabrielle asked. She had no desire to continue the conversation on this particular note.

"Yes, I leave Paris to-night. That is my excuse for asking to see you this afternoon. But I feel that my visit is ill-timed. I observed directly I came in that you looked a little fatigued. I fear you are suffering. Ought you to undertake the exertion of receiving visitors? I doubt it. Yet I should have been desolated had you refused me. For I leave, as I say, to-night in response to a sudden call to England upon business—that of certain members of my father's family. I am barely acquainted with them. But they claim my assistance, and I cannot refuse it. I could not do otherwise than tell you of this unexpected journey, could I? It distresses me to find you suffering."

Gabrielle had looked at him smiling, her lips closed, the little dimple again showing in her left cheek. His eagerness and volubility were diverting to her. They enabled her to think of him as still very young; and she quite earnestly wished thus to think of him. To do so made for security. At this period Madame St. Leger put a very high value upon security.

"But, indeed," she said, "I am quite well. The corridor is chilly, and I have been going to and fro preparing a little *fête* for Bette. She has her friends, our neighbor Madame Bernard's two little girls, from the floor below, to spend the afternoon with her. My mother is now kindly guarding the small flock. But I could not burden her with preliminaries.—I

am quite well, and, for the moment, I am quite at leisure. Bring a chair. Sit down. It is for me to condole with you rather than for you to condole with me," she went on, in her quiet voice, "for this is far from the moment one would select for a cross-Channel journey! But then you are more English than French in all that. Hereditary instincts assert themselves in you. You have the islander's inborn sense of being cramped by the modest proportions of his island, and craving to step off the edge of it into space."

The young man placed his hat on the floor, opened the fronts of his overcoat, and drew a chair up to the near side of the low work-table whence he commanded an uninterrupted view of his hostess's charming person.

"That is right," she said. "Now tell me about this sudden journey. Is it for long? When may we expect you back?"

"What do I know?" he replied, spreading out his hands quickly. "It may be a matter of days. It may be a matter of weeks. I am ignorant of the amount of business entailed. The whole thing has come upon me as so complete a surprise. What induced my venerable cousin to select me as his executor remains inexplicable. I remember seeing him when, as a child, I visited England with my parents. I remember, also, that he filled me with alarm and melancholy. He lived in a big, solemn house on the outskirts of a great, noisy, dirty, manufacturing town in Yorkshire. It was impressed upon me that I must behave in his presence with eminent circumspection, since he was very religious, very intellectual. I fear I was an impertinent little boy. He appeared to me to worship a most odious deity, who permitted no amusements, no holidays, no laughter; while

his conversation—my cousin's, I mean, not that of the Almighty—struck me as quite the dullest I had ever listened to. I cried, very loud and very often, to the consternation of the whole establishment, and demanded to be taken home to Paris at once. I never saw him again until three years ago, when he spent a few days here, on a return journey from Carlsbad. As in duty bound, I did what I could to render their stay agreeable to him and his companions." Adrian's expression became at once apologetic and merry. "My efforts were not, as I supposed, crowned with at all flattering success. My venerable cousin still filled me with melancholy and alarm. In face of his immense seriousness I appeared to myself as some capering harlequin. Therefore it is, as you will readily understand, with unqualified amazement that I learn he has intrusted the administration of his very considerable estate to my care. Really, his faith in me constitutes a vastly embarrassing compliment. I wish to heaven he had formed a less exalted estimate of my probity and business acumen and looked elsewhere for an executor!"

"He had no children, poor man?" Madame St. Leger inquired, sympathetically.

"On the contrary, he leaves twin daughters. And it is in conjunction with the—briefly—elder of these two ladies that I am required to act."

Gabrielle moved slightly in her chair. Her eyelids were half-closed. She looked at the young man sideways without turning her head. Her resemblance to the Mona Lisa was startling just then; but it was Mona Lisa in a most mischievous humor.

"In many ways you cannot fail to find that interesting," she said. "You are a professional psychologist, a student of character. And then, too, it is your nature to be untiring in kindness and helpfulness to women."

"To women of flesh and blood, yes, possibly, if they are amiable enough to accept my services," Adrian returned, somewhat warmly, a lover's resentment of any ascription of benevolence toward the sex, merely as such, all agog in him. "But are these ladies really of flesh and blood? They affected me, when I last saw them, rather as shadowy and harassed abstractions. I gazed at them in wonder. They are not old. But have they ever been young? I doubt it, with so aggressively ethical and educative a father. I was at a loss how to approach them; they were so silent, so restrained, so apparently bankrupt in the small change of social intercourse. If they did not add sensibly to my alarm they most unquestionably contributed to my melancholy—the humiliating, disintegrating melancholy of harlequin, capering in conscious fatuity before an audience morally and physically incapable of laughter. All this was bad enough when our connection was but superficial and transitory. It will be ten thousand times worse when we are forced into a position of unnatural intimacy."

During this tirade, Gabrielle had shaken out the thin folds of her needlework and begun setting quick stitches methodically. Her hands were strong, square in the palm and the finger-tips, finely modeled, finely capable—more fitted, as it might seem, to hold maul-stick and palate, or even wield mallet and chisel, than to put rows of small, even, snippety stitches in a child's lawn frock. If the fifteenth

century and the voluptuous humanism of the Italian Renaissance found subtle reflection in her face, the twentieth century and its awakening militant feminism found expression in her firm hands and their promise of fearless and ready strength.

"I believe you do both yourself and those two ladies an injustice," she said, her head bent over her stitching. "It will not be the very least in the character of harlequin that they receive you, but rather in that of a savior, a liberator. For you will be delightful to them—ah! I see it all quite clearly—tactful, considerate, reassuring. That is your *rôle*, and you will play it to perfection. How can you do otherwise, since not only your sense of dramatic necessity but your goodness of heart will be engaged? And, take it from me, the enjoyment will not be exclusively on their side. For you will find it increasingly inspiring to act providence to those two shadowy old-young ladies as you see age vanish and youth return. I envy you. Think what an admirable mission you are about to fulfil!"

She glanced up suddenly, her eyes and the turn of her mouth conveying to unhappy Adrian a distracting combination of friendliness—detestable sentiment, since it went no further!—and of raillery. Then, her face positively brilliant with mischief, she gave him a final dig.

"What a thousand pities, though, that there are two of these abstractions whom it is your office to materialize! Had there been but one, how far simpler the problem of your position!"

The young man literally bounded on to his feet, his expression eloquent of the liveliest repudiation and

reproach. But Madame St. Leger's head was bent over her needlework again. She stitched, stitched, in the calmest manner imaginable, talking, meanwhile, in a quiet, even voice.

"Did I not tell you we are *en fête*? Bette has her friends, the little Bernards, to spend the afternoon with her. It is an excuse for keeping her indoors. The modern craze for sending children out in all weathers does not appeal to me. I do not believe in a system of hardening."

"Indeed?" Adrian commented, with meaning.

"For little girls?" she inquired. "Oh no, decidedly not. For grown-up people, especially for men when they are young and in good health, it may, of course, have excellent results."

"Ah!" he said, resentfully.

"They—the children, I mean—are busy in the dining-room making rather terrible culinary experiments with a new doll's cooking stove. Shall we go and see how they are getting on? I ought, perhaps, to just take a look at them and assure myself they are not tiring my mother too much. And then they will be distressed, my mother and Bette, if they do not have an opportunity to bid you good-by before your journey."

For once Adrian was guilty of ignoring his hostess's suggestions. He stood leaning one elbow upon the chimneypiece, and—above the powder-blue Chinese jars and ivory godlings adorning it—scrutinizing his own image in the looking-glass. He had just suffered a sharp and, to his thinking, most uncalled-for rebuff. He smarted under it, unable for the moment to recover his equanimity. But,

contemplating the image held by the mirror, his soul received a sensible measure of comfort. The smooth, opaque, colorless complexion; the pointed black beard, so close cut as in no degree to hide the forcible line of the jaw or distort the excellent proportions of the mask; the thick, well-trimmed mustache, standing upward from the lip and leaving the curved mouth free; the straight square-tipped nose, with its suggestion of pugnacity; let alone the last word of contemporary fashion in collar and tie and heavy box-cloth overcoat, the cut of which lent itself to the values of a tall, well-set-up figure—all these went to form a far from discouraging picture. Yes! surely he was a good-looking fellow enough! One, moreover, with the promise of plenty of fight in him; daring, constitutionally obstinate, not in the least likely tamely to take "No" for an answer once his mind was made up.

Then, in thought, he made a rapid survey of the mental, social, moral, and financial qualifications of those who had formed the circle of poor Horace St. Leger's friends, and who, during the years of his marriage, had been permitted the *entrée* of his house. A varied and remarkable company when one came to review it—savants, artists, politicians, men of letters, musicians, journalists, from octogenarian M. de Cubières, Member of the Senate, Member of the Academy, and Chevalier of the Legion of Honor, to that most disconcerting sport of wayward genius, vitriolic caricaturist and elegant minor poet, René Dax, whose immense domed head and neat little toy of a body had won him at school the nickname of *le tetard*—the tadpole—an appellation as descriptive as it was unflattering, and which—rather cruelly

—had stuck to him ever since. Adrian marshaled all these, examined their possible claims, and pronounced each, in turn, ineligible. Some, thank Heaven! were securely married already. Others, though untrammeled by the bonds of holy matrimony, were trammeled by bonds in no wise holy, yet scarcely less prohibitive. Some were too old, others too young or too poor. Some, as, for example, René Dax, were altogether too eccentric. True, Madame St. Leger had just now declared herself warmly attached to him. But wasn't that the best proof of the absence of danger? A woman doesn't openly affirm her regard for a man unless that regard is of purely platonic and innocuous character. And then, after all—excellent thought!—was it not he, Adrian Savage, who had been admitted even during the tragic hours of poor Horace's agony; who had watched by the corpse through a stifling summer night, a night too hot for sleep, restless with the continual sound of footsteps and voices, the smell of the asphalt and of the river? And, since then, was it not to him Gabrielle and her mother, Madame Vernois, had repeatedly turned for advice in matters of business?

Fortified by which reflections, stimulated, though stung, by her teasing, defiant of all other possible and impossible lovers, the young man wheeled round and stood directly in front of Gabrielle St. Leger.

"Listen, *très chère Madame et amie*, listen one little minute," he said, "I implore you. It is true that I go to-night, and for how long a time I am ignorant, to arrange the worldly affairs of my alarming old relative, Montagu Smyrthwaite, and, incidentally, to adjust those of his two

dessicated daughters. But it is equally true—for I vehemently refuse such a solution of the problem of my relation to either of those ladies as your words seem to prefigure—I repeat, it is equally true that I shall return at the very earliest opportunity. And return in precisely the same attitude of mind as I go—namely, wholly convinced, wholly faithful, incapable of any attachment, indifferent to any sentiment save one."

The corners of his mouth quivered and his gay brown eyes were misty with tears.

"I do not permit myself to enlarge upon the nature of that sentiment to-day. To do so might seem intrusive, even wanting in delicacy. But I do permit myself—your own words have procured me the opportunity—both to declare its existence and to assert my profound assurance of its permanence. You may not smile upon it, dear Madame. You may even regard it as an impertinence, a nuisance. Yet it is there—there." Adrian drummed with his closed fist upon the region of his heart. "It has been there for a longer period than I care to mention. And it declines to be eradicated. While life remains, it remains, unalterable. It is idle, absolutely idle, believe me, to invite it to lessen or to depart."

Madame St. Leger had risen, too, laying her work down on the little table. Her face was grave to the point of displeasure. The tinge of scarlet had died out in the round of her cheeks. She was about to speak, but the young man spread out his hands with an almost violent gesture.

"No—no," he cried. "Do not say anything. Do not, I entreat, attempt to answer me. When I came here this

afternoon I had no thought of making this avowal. It has been forced from me, and may well appear to you premature. Therefore I entreat you for the moment ignore it. Let everything between us remain as before. That is so easy, you see, since I am going away. Only," he added, more lightly, "I think, if you will excuse me, I will not join that interesting conference of amateur chefs in the dining-room. My mind, I confess, at this moment is slightly preoccupied, and I might prove a but clumsy and distracted assistant. May I ask you, therefore, kindly to express to your mother, Madame Vernois, and to the ravishing Mademoiselle Bette my regret at being unable to make my farewells in person?"

He picked up his hat, buttoned his overcoat, and, without attempting to take his hostess's hand, backed away from her.

"With your permission I shall write at intervals during my unwilling exile," he said. "But merely to recount my adventures—nothing beyond my adventures, rest assured. These are likely to possess a certain piquancy, I imagine, and may serve to amuse you."

Something of his habitual happy self-confidence had returned to him. His air was high-spirited, courteous, instinct with the splendid optimism of his vigorous young manhood, as he paused, hat in hand, for a last word in the doorway.

"*Au revoir, très chère Madame*," he cried. "I go to a land of penetrating fogs and a household of pensive abstractions, but I shall come back unaffected by either, since I carry a certain memory, a certain aspiration in my heart. *Au revoir*. God keep you. Ah! very surely, and with what a quite infinite gladness I shall come back!"