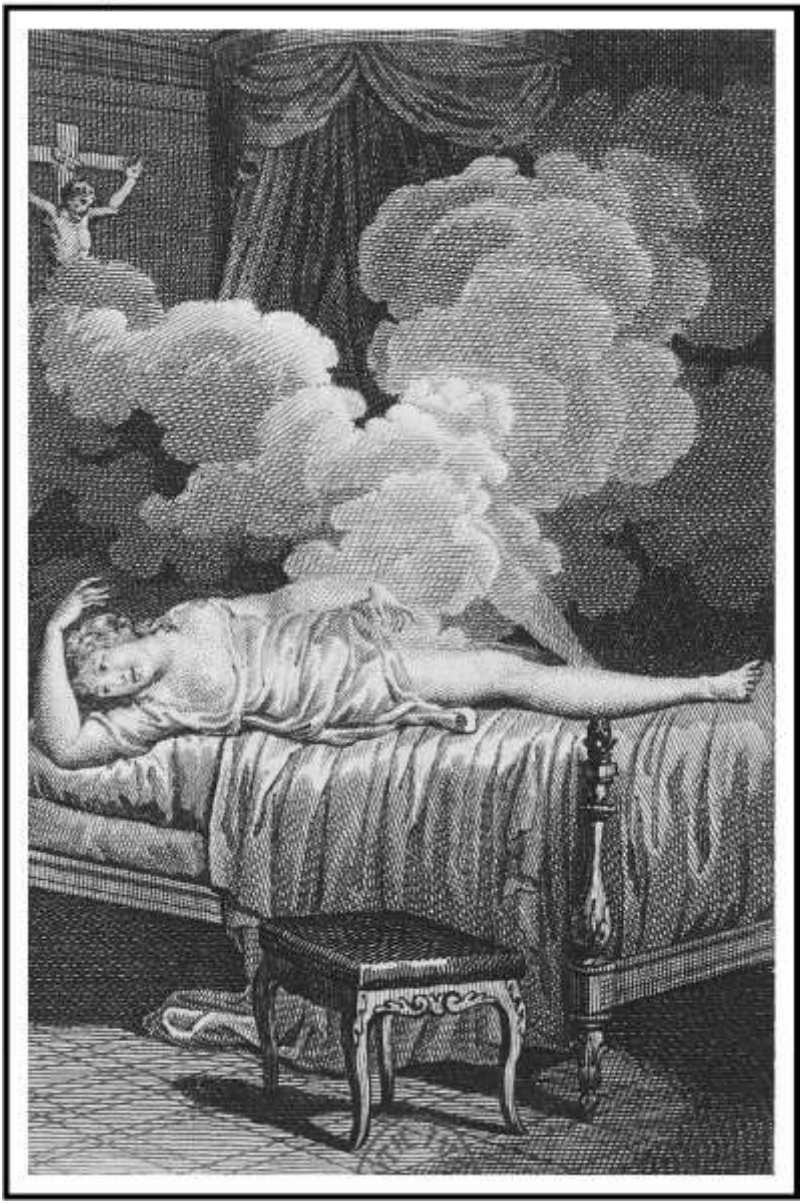
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ELÉANORE

OU

L'HEUREUSE PERSONNE

Deuxième Édition

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AVANT-PROPOS

Madame de L.... had been staying for three months at her old château. Her sole companion was a dour relative, an indefatigable antiquary, whose only interests were medals and old books. He was forever probing the secrets of nature: a physicist, botanist, naturalist and chemist, he was regarded as a sorcerer in the neighbourhood. But he afforded his cousin little amusement. Young and pretty, she greatly resented her husband for having banished her to so dreary a place, in such dismal company. "In truth, my dear cousin," she said, "I cannot imagine how you manage to live here; for my part, give me another month and I shall most certainly be dead. I brought along all the novels of the day to entertain myself, but old castles, gloomy forests, dank marshes and desolate wildernesses pursue me on every side. I shall say nothing of the eternal robbers and their everlasting caverns; I am even beginning to take a dislike to the moon and the stars. And then all these apparitions and marvels, which almost frighten me, turn out in the end to be nothing but draughts, trapdoors, doors and rather poorly contrived illusions. After a whole tissue of events more improbable than extraordinary, and adventures more dismal than interesting, the denouement reveals that the heroes are fools who cannot see what is happening right under their noses, and that the reader is scarcely wiser for allowing himself to be taken in by all the grand preparations, grandiloquent language, daggers, blood, flames and an air of mystery that conceals precious little. For my part, I should much prefer some good, honest ghosts, spirits and devils. It is not that I believe in any of them, but..." — "And why do you not believe in them?" — "Because I have never seen any, and have never met anyone who has." — "How do you know that?" — "Because nobody has ever told me of any; and certainly, if I had seen a spirit, devil or

ghost, unless it had strangled me or rendered me speechless, I should not have kept the secret." — "Perhaps." — "My goodness, what a mysterious air! One might really think you had been in communication with some ethereal spirit. With that solemn expression of yours, you surely believe in all these absurdities?" — "Why not?" — "Could you not arrange an apparition for me?" the young cousin asked, laughing heartily. "My château is just the place for it. It must be at least a thousand years old; it has lofty towers that are crumbling away, towers to the east and west; there are tawny owls and bats, vast halls that seem to go on for ever, where the wind whistles so fiercely that I fear it will carry me off whenever I have the misfortune to pass through them. And you yourself bear a quite passable resemblance to Nostradamus. The worst that could happen would be that I died of fright; but at least, if I survived, I could leave this wretched abode without anyone thinking the worse of me. At the very least, humour me in your mysterious pursuits."

The taciturn antiquary then offered a few explanations, and gradually, warming to his subject, took possession of the conversation. He went into details whose novelty held his cousin's attention, and which were already beginning to frighten her. "For example," he said, "I have discovered an adventure that befell the daughter of the owner of this château more than five hundred years ago; do not be astonished at the passage of time. It takes a generation to bring to light the secrets of sovereigns; centuries are needed to uncover those of a higher order. But this story contains details so indecent that I cannot possibly reveal them to you."

Madame de L.... assured him in vain that she had no fear of such details; he remained inexorable. But since a woman's curiosity is ingenious, she managed to spirit away the manuscript from her prudish cousin. She cut out a jumble of notes in which the learned antiquary, wholly absorbed in his erudition, had shown not the slightest consideration for the reader's modesty. She chastened the style of the severe antiquary, which was altogether too crude, and prepared for her own private use the little abridgement that we now present to the public.

ELÉONORE

OU

L'HEUREUSE PERSONNE

The convent of.... was about to witness the taking of the veil by the beautiful Eléonore. All the inhabitants of the château of L..., together with those of the neighbouring town, had gathered there. Each, according to the state of his soul, awaited the beginning of the ceremony with impatience, some in apprehension, others in eager anticipation.

The fruit of the illicit love between the Lord of L... and one of the most beautiful women in the district, Eléonore had received, under her mother's care, the finest education imaginable. At fifteen, when her accomplishments, her beauty and her father's wealth seemed to promise her the most brilliant future, she lost her mother. Two years had passed in the convent of..., where, cherished by everyone, she had awaited in sweet tranquillity the fulfilment of her father's promises. He was about to settle her in life when he died suddenly. He had no time to put anything in order; he scarcely had time to commend Eléonore to his wife. The latter was no longer young; she was devout. She came to the convent, spoke kindly to the unfortunate orphan, and assured her that she would never abandon her.

Beneath the mantle of Christian charity lurked a certain bitterness. Madame de P*** made her protégée feel the misfortune of her birth; to hear her speak, she ought to weep for her mother's sins. Alas! In the state in which the unfortunate girl found herself, she was only too

ready to surrender to every kind of sorrow. She had suffered an immense and irreparable loss; she saw all her hopes vanish. Before long, thanks to the consolations of a confessor and the good nuns, this unhappy event came to be regarded as a warning from Heaven. Entering the world with an uncertain position, all her accomplishments and all nature's gifts would have been so many stumbling-blocks, causing her to stray from the path of virtue. Madame de P*** offered to place her in a position to follow a vocation which Heaven had so clearly revealed. Eléonore resolved to take the veil.

Grief, despair, and the dreadful prospect of prostitution or destitution awaiting her in the world sustained her fervour. She longed for the moment when she would pronounce her vows; at last it had arrived. The bell summoned her; pure joy shone in her eyes, and a gentle tremor stirred her whole being. Beautiful beneath that funereal veil, she seemed an angel returning to Heaven.

The human heart is a strange compound. It desires with fury, without giving too much thought to the object of its wishes; only after they have been fulfilled does it examine and judge, and very often repent, but too late, of its haste. This day, so ardently desired, this day spent in the intoxication of happiness, had scarcely drawn to a close when Eléonore was already thanking Heaven for the blessings it had bestowed upon her; yet regret was beginning to creep into her soul, a dull, unspoken regret which she stifled as a temptation of the Evil One. The night following so beautiful a day was spent in tears. On the following day, despite all the efforts she made, it was impossible for her to divert her thoughts from the world she had just renounced.

Alas! In spite of herself, even in the midst of her most fervent prayers, ideas she had never before entertained came assailing her mind. The house in which she had been born, that house where voluptuousness held pleasure in thrall, rose before her eyes. Her unruly soul, fleeing the cloister, wandered from boudoir to boudoir. All those playful remarks inspired by a woman in the bloom of youth; all those gallantries addressed to the girl who promised to resemble her mother, came flooding back to her memory. Accustomed from her earliest childhood to the free-and-easy atmosphere of a house of

pleasure, they had made no impression upon her at the time. Now she had renounced everything, and this poison, until then dormant, awoke and spread through all her senses, kindling a fire she had sworn to extinguish.

What efforts were made to banish these fatal thoughts! Meditations, prayers, pious reading: everything was tried, and all to no avail. One day, an unfamiliar book fell into her hands; it was a novel. Her father had supplied her with such books, and by chance this particular one had remained among her devotional works, the only books she had kept. Her first impulse was to throw it into the fire. Then she remembered having read some very edifying novels; perhaps she might find consolation in this one. God sometimes works through extraordinary means. What do I know? In the end, boredom and curiosity prevailed; she picked up the book.

The novel was a pretty one, at least that was the title it bore: *Un Histoire d'un sylphe.* The book was devoured, read and reread. A nun in Eléonore's situation must surely long for the existence of Sylphs. She went further: she believed in them. By day she thought of them; by night she dreamed of them. In this charming book, she sought and found, on every page, evidence of what she wished to believe.

One morning, the weather was warm, and the sun was scarcely showing itself above the horizon. Beautiful Eléonore was lying on her bed. Never had she spent such a restless night. Her shift did little to conceal the contours of a body destined to repose somewhere other than a convent cell. Any nun, even alone, would have shuddered to see herself in such a position. She was lying on her back, her head towards the left-hand side of the bed, slightly lower than the rest of her body; her left thigh flat against the mattress, her leg slightly bent; the other leg somewhat apart, supported in an elevated position; her left forearm resting upon her head, her arm pointing towards Heaven, her hand not quite open; the other arm resting, outstretched, upon the upper part of her thigh. Her fingers were spread apart, bent unevenly by a contraction that dominated her entire body.

Until that moment, during the intervals of an interrupted sleep, dreams and thoughts of Sylphs had thrown her whole being into turmoil.

Now, her soul, weighed down by the burden of so many confused thoughts, in that apparent calm which follows the most violent agitation, and oblivious to every idea and sensation, was enjoying the mere awareness of its own existence.

Eléonore's lovely eyes were filling with tears; her blurred vision could distinguish no object. A gentle swaying animated almost every part of her body, spreading through all her senses the emotion of her soul. The illuminated fakir, the bonze who, fixing his attention upon a single point, concentrates his whole being, is no more detached from every external object in his existence within himself than the beautiful nun was at that moment. Plunged in a burning ecstasy, she enjoyed a happiness beyond definition. It consists in a perfect union of the senses and the soul, fixed upon a single idea which occupies and fills it entirely, without dividing itself into details, without joining or attaching itself to anything that is, that was, or that might be.

Oh, my readers, imagine that some happy chance has placed you at the foot of the beautiful ecstatic's bed. Picture long chestnut hair, shading a bosom rising and falling with the rhythm of an uneven breath; a half-open mouth; eyes turned towards Heaven; and that swaying which stirs every contour of an innocent girl of twenty and a half. In short, imagine everything you might see from the position in which I have placed you. With what fire, with what desire you would be consumed! No man was there, but a Sylph. A Sylph? You laugh. Listen to my story.

This Sylph, then, no less susceptible than a mortal burning with love, condensed the air surrounding him into a body of his own; and, hovering over the object of his desires, brought his lips close to another pair which seemed to await a kiss. Eléonore apparently believed that these were the pleasures of convent life. She returned his kisses tenderly, as tenderly as they were bestowed.

Meanwhile, the ethereal body was approaching that place which I dare not name, and which a nun ought never to touch. A Sylph is probably made differently from a human being. A certain part of his person, which I cannot describe, came in search of that mysterious little bud so carefully concealed by Nature. The tongue of a tender

lover is less soft, less agile, less delicate; his lips are less ardent, less amorous.

Eléonore abandoned herself to this delightful sensation. Her sighs and convulsive movements proclaimed her happiness. Her soul, too frail to sustain so intense an emotion, seemed ready to leave her. She felt herself swooning. In vain did the amorous Sylph, now pressing his lips upon her half-closed eyelids, now upon her rosebud mouth, endeavour to revive his fainting companion. Overwhelmed by the excess of pleasure, motionless, she seemed to have breathed her last. Those lips, that tongue, only moments before so eager and ardent to receive, seek out and return caresses, had now lost all movement. "I am dying!" she cried. And indeed, she was doubtless about to die; but a new sensation restored both her life and the strength to endure fresh delights.

This part of my story can only be understood by my female readers, and it is to them that I now address myself. You know well how, when a lover has kindled the fire of desire in your senses with his caresses, and, yielding in his turn to the passions that consume him, prepares to unite his transports with yours, a certain pain momentarily suspends your pleasure. There is not one of you who cannot recall those early experiences when it surpassed every other sensation, and even effaced them to a greater or lesser degree.

Sometimes, after sweet embraces, exhausted but unsatisfied, skilfully entwined, you remain closely united. Your lover is no longer capable of renewing your pleasure; and yet he cannot bring himself to leave that cherished place. He rests upon the field of victory. Soon he revives; and you feel the pledge of love growing, rising and increasing within you. From moment to moment, gradually, the sensation becomes more distinct, more intense.

Thus the Sylph, sparing the fortunate nun the melancholy preliminaries, contracting and expanding the contours of his ethereal body at will, entered into her without effort or pain. There, by imperceptible exertions, enlarging his narrow prison just enough, but never too much, he moved back and forth. His lovely companion, restored to animation, mingled with the exclamations dictated by love those of the good sisters of the convent; interrupted this singular mixture

with deep sighs; and every part of her body, bending and bending back, writhed in every direction, gently, rapidly, seeming to shrink from transports too violent, seeking to escape them. Then, yielding herself up, surrendering entirely, she pressed her lover against her breast; twenty times she begged for mercy, and each time found fresh strength.

At length, the Sylph brought his ardours to an end. Eléonore gazed with fond admiration at her celestial lover. "Beautiful spirit," she said, for she had no doubt that he was an inhabitant of the celestial realms, "by what good fortune have I, a wretched mortal, deserved the honour of your visit to my cell? When I entered this place, I believed I had renounced pleasure. Ah! I regret nothing. The world and all its charms have nothing that can move me, if such dawns as these are still to rise for me." So she spoke, and with her timid hands pressed those of the Sylph. He contemplated her in silence. At last he spoke: "Beautiful creature, do not be surprised to find an inhabitant of the air at your side. I am not the first to assume a body in order to enjoy the delights of earthly life. But no Sylph has ever known a happiness more complete than mine." He continued in this vein, mingling sweet words and even sweeter caresses with his praises.

Eléonore asked him whether he would always love her. No obstacle must stand in his way; he was to visit his beloved every day. For women, even in the midst of their pleasures, have a certain foresight, a concern for the future! The Sylph smiled, and with his delicate hands, roaming over his lover's charms, reawakened senses already thoroughly stirred.

The ear of corn supported by a trembling stalk, which scarcely allows it to be guided as it is gently passed over her lips, causes a tickling sensation less intense than that produced by his airy fingers. As skilful as they were dexterous, they wandered over every part of that beautiful body, and in a thousand places unknown to mortals awakened delightful sensations. Beside herself, burning with a fire whose cause and effects she now understood, her eyes pleaded for both more ardent caresses and fresh pleasures. Her wish was granted. The Sylph rekindled her ecstasy and delights. More abandoned this time, her tireless lover carried her, turned her and turned her again

in his arms. His celestial body, supple and light, yielded effortlessly to every movement of love or whim.

I do not know whether Sylphs grow tired of such delightful occupations, or whether Sylphs ever tire at all; but Eléonore certainly was quite exhausted. Gathering what strength remained to her, she asked for, and obtained, a respite. Motionless, plunged in a delicious languor, they remained silent for some time; then, charmed with one another, resumed their conversation.

The nun asked a thousand questions about the inhabitants of the air. She was enraptured by their happiness. "It is not so great," he replied, "as you imagine. Everywhere in this universe, evil accompanies good. We must take infinite precautions if we are to enjoy the sweet delights of a mortal woman's embraces. A woman must possess so many advantages! She must be firmly convinced of our existence; indeed, that is the chief requirement. She must have a tender and unspoilt heart, a virgin body burning with desire, and a cultivated, well-furnished mind. In short, she must unite all the charms, all the gifts of body and mind with which you, delightful creature, are endowed. Such perfections are rarely found together, but that is no misfortune; we cherish all the more what is difficult to find. Yet there is such a great difference between our existence and yours! Our lives last so much longer than yours! A single one of our days encompasses many of your years, almost your entire lifetime. And during the interval corresponding to your night, which is occupied by the sleep you need, your life runs its course; when we awake, the object of our affections no longer exists, or is no longer the same. Thus, for us, pleasure and happiness are but a dream." "What!" cried Eléonore, "I have known happiness, only to spend the rest of my life in regret! I shall never see you again." "Alas! It is only too true. You can scarcely hope to see me again. I am obliged, compelled to return to my duties. A few hours mean little to me, but they constitute a considerable part of your life. If the whole day should pass, I would lose all hope…"

"Dry your tears, my beautiful friend. Come, if I can steal even a moment from my duties, I shall spend it in your arms. My love is a sure guarantee of my promise. Before I leave you, allow me to make you a gift. I am more powerful than any mortal, and can grant all

your wishes. Speak." — "No. Since I have lost all hope of holding you in my arms again, I desire nothing, I wish for nothing but death, the end of an existence which has become hateful to me. I shall devote it entirely to memories I hold so dear. They will consume me and lead me to the grave. No other thought shall ever enter my soul. Your presence is my happiness; your absence will be my misery. But at least I shall have the consolation of thinking of you alone, of suffering..." She was about to continue, and her despair grew still greater with every effort she made to give it expression.

The Sylph dried her tears with kisses, lavished tender caresses upon her, and soothed her grief with fresh transports of passion. Then he resumed speaking. "My dear friend, in this universe it is very difficult to be perfectly happy. Heaven ought to have denied us every pleasure if the sweetest delights were to leave us with nothing but regrets. But believe me, calm your mind a little. The memory bestowed upon rational beings ought to prolong their pleasures, and even turn past sorrows into sources of well-being. Preserve in your soul the memory of one who cherishes you. Live happily, lest your grief poison your existence. Accept a gift from me: it will constantly remind you of your lover, be the pledge of my love and the assurance of my return. You will be able to say: 'I owe my happiness to him. From the heights of the air, he watches over me, follows me everywhere, rejoices in my happiness, and seeks the favourable moment to rejoin me.'"

The spirit possessed every gift needed to persuade: eloquence, feeling and gesture. He had no need to say more. Eléonore was already pondering a wish. However hard she tried, she always came back to the same conclusion: her celestial friend must never leave her, or at least must always return. At last, fully convinced that she needed to replace him, she said to him: "I should like to become a man. In that state, perhaps I might bear my misfortune more easily?" — "I can do better than that. You shall be a man for a year, then a woman for an equal period, and so you shall alternate, always remaining twenty and a half years old, unless you are foolish enough to reveal your secret; for then you will remain in whatever state you happen to be."

Eléonore had made her wish almost without thinking. When she saw it about to be fulfilled, she laughed at her own fancy. Already she was impatient to be no longer in a position to satisfy her lover's transports. Before bringing about the transformation, he wished to enjoy the charms he was about to destroy. Whether it was weariness or fickleness on Eléonore's part, I cannot say; but these pleasures, which only moments before had seemed so sweet to her, had become almost tiresome. She still caressed the Sylph, but out of politeness, out of calculation, for fear of displeasing him. At last he departed, leaving her a man.

Meanwhile, the nun had neglected some office or other. The matter was reported to the abbess.

The abbess was a woman of rank, perhaps thirty years of age. Destined by her family for the cloister and recently promoted to her position, she had until then practised the humble virtues of a sister. The exercise of authority and the luxuries of life consoled her for the loss of her tranquillity. She was beginning to live like an abbess. She sent for Eléonore and received her sternly. On any other occasion, her looks would have made the poor nun tremble. Now, however, she felt something that gave her courage. With a gaze which seemed most extraordinary to the abbess, which even made her lower her own eyes, and yet did not displease her, Eléonore requested a private interview. They withdrew to the oratory. In the world, one would have called it a little sitting room, or a boudoir.

"Madame, last night I had a very strange dream. You know that dreams are generally very confused. Most often, one could scarcely give an account of them. In my dream, a man—or an angel, I cannot tell you which—with a little wand, touched me in a certain place which I do not know how to name, and said to me, 'Be a man.' I awoke, and found myself, in fact, quite different from what I had been when I went to bed." — "What, my sister? Have you become a man?" — "Alas, Madame, I do not know how a man is made; but certainly I have changed considerably." — "But what is this change? Let us see… No, God is indeed all-powerful. Perhaps your dream has come true. My conscience…" As she spoke, she was looking at Eléonore with evident satisfaction. Never had she found her so pretty,

so captivating. He, for his part, discovered a thousand charms and attractions in the abbess to which he had hitherto paid no attention. Her fresh, rested complexion, her splendid teeth, her small, plump white hand, her shapely figure, her grace and nobility, her exquisite neatness and refinement: all these details suddenly appeared to him as though they had never existed before.

"Madame…" Her voice trembled. "How can I describe such a thing? Never have the servants of God found themselves obliged to hold such a conversation… In the arrangement Nature has made of our bodies, there is a place which she carefully conceals, doubtless to show us that modesty must keep it hidden from every eye. Well, it has disappeared altogether. In its place there is something almost round in shape. A little above it is a fleshy protuberance, rather like a finger. Before I came here, it was smaller and no thicker. At this moment, as I speak to you, it is becoming extremely hard. It even seems to be swelling, growing larger. I feel a violent tension there. I am experiencing a discomfort, a kind of pain, which nevertheless gives me pleasure." — "Indeed, my dear child, there is something extraordinary in your eyes as I listen to you; your words move me far more than is natural. I think we ought to recite a few psalms."

We had scarcely begun when the abbess broke off: "My sister, do you feel any relief?" — "Quite the contrary; my pain continues to grow. Give me your hand; feel for yourself." One offered her hand, the other supporting it. It seemed as though some talisman held it enchained to that fatal spot. Amid such passions, it was difficult to judge. Nevertheless, it was enough to cause considerable astonishment. "You are quite right. This is something extraordinary. We must absolutely send for a doctor." — "Oh no, I beg you. I could never bring myself to show my affliction to a man." — "But it must be done; what if you were to die? I should reproach myself for it all my life." — "I feel sure I shall not die of it." — "One does not always know the nature of one's own affliction. See for yourself." — "What good would that do? I am no doctor…" — "I could nevertheless be of some use to you; I could speak to the doctor on your behalf, and spare you an awkward interview." — "Yes, you are right. Oh, look, look! You will give me back my life!" — "Can that really be so? It is

a very hazardous undertaking." — "And why? What harm could there be?" — "Suppose we were to call the prioress. She is a woman of good counsel." — "Call no one. Before anyone but you I should die of shame. It is only the complete confidence you inspire in me that has enabled me to reveal such a secret."

At the same time, Eléonore threw herself back on a sofa, revealing two white thighs, their muscles only faintly defined. The abbess paid no attention to them. All her gaze was directed elsewhere. "Ah!" she cried, rooted to the spot with fright. The other gave her a sharp tug, causing her to lose her balance and sit down beside her. The hand was once more seized and brought back to the spot it had so recently left. Curiosity, desire, and above all the ardent young man, were all striving to keep that hand there. An unreflecting impulse, modesty demanded that it be withdrawn. From this conflict arose an alternating movement, and the patient was beginning to experience the approach of a most intense pleasure, very much like that which she had recently enjoyed in an entirely different position. The sensation grew stronger, the breathing became laboured, and the susceptible abbess could not help sharing in so powerful an emotion. How captivating she looked, how animated her eyes! "Go on, do not abandon me! I am dying!" Indeed, she was reaching the very height of pleasure. She closed her eyes and seemed to expire. At this spectacle, and at all that she was still able to observe, the abbess was greatly alarmed. Fortunately, Eléonore looked at her very tenderly at that moment. "Good heavens! You frightened me! I thought you were going to die. Were you suffering?" — "No, my dear friend. Quite the contrary; the most exquisite pleasure was coursing through my veins." — "I too was deeply moved. I felt myself united with you. Even now, at this very moment, I feel an extraordinary sensation in that place which you no longer possess. What if the same thing were to happen to me as happened to you? What if your affliction were contagious?" — "Let us see." — "No, I can feel it quite distinctly. Nothing has changed." — "You may be mistaken. Let me look," and she attempted to examine it. Resistance was offered for a while, but she was not the stronger, and finally allowed it.

Remembering the lessons he had received from the Sylph, Eléonore prepared to put them into practice. His hand soon became familiar with the terrain; before long, all power of refusal had vanished. He then set about completing the lesson.

"You are not thinking clearly; suppose you really were a man. Consider what harm, what sin!" Eléonore pursued his design, while the other, instructed by nature, was moving towards her conqueror, unwillingly, unwittingly, and almost without realising what she was doing. The repetition was complete. It seemed that the departed nun had concentrated all the fires of genius in her new form. They continued, began again, uttered a great many exclamations, and indulged in very little reflection.

Delighted and satisfied with one another, they parted, determined to meet again as soon as possible. The abbess was glad to be alone. She went over everything in her mind, once more savouring all the exquisite sensations with which she had just been filled. Remorse at first came to disturb so sweet an ecstasy. But after giving the matter considerable thought, she regarded the event as a blessing from Heaven, intended to help her bear the duties of her office. She then decided that it was a privilege, one of the rights attached to the gold cross she wore—and perhaps this was a rather better line of reasoning. Finally, she found all these arguments detestable; but Eléonore was nonetheless the most charming of all the nuns, and she could not make arrangements soon enough to be as little separated from her as possible, and to make her her own. Accordingly, she made arrangements to have her lodged in her apartments.

For her part, Eléonore felt quite transformed. A sense of satisfaction animated her. She was pleased with herself. Her first thought, when making a wish, had been to leave the convent. Now she felt no inclination whatever to do so. How could she leave this good abbess, so tender, so loving, so pretty! Besides, the place was inhabited by novices and young nuns, charming and innocent creatures. What a delight to live like a sultan in this little flock! And then there was the vanity of displaying herself in her new condition; for she believed herself to be worth considerably more now that she had changed sex.

Already she had formed a lofty opinion of herself, together with a taste for domination and a liking for inconstancy.

The abbess had taken such good precautions that her friend was scarcely ever out of her sight. The nights were spent in delights, the days in the pleasures of living; but this was not quite enough for Eléonore. He had set his sights on an eighteen-year-old novice. He was closely watched, and it required no little manoeuvring to obtain a private interview.

Thérèse, such was the young lady's name, had a tender gaze and a voluptuous air such as one rarely encounters; and that gaze, that air, became even more pronounced in the presence of Eléonore. Not that she suspected the mystery concealed beneath that skirt, but the engaging novice had inclinations that were entirely in keeping with her appearance. One of her companions, less pretty and darker-haired—for Thérèse was so fair and blonde as to dazzle the eye—helped her endure the tedium of the cloister. Endure it, did I say! I believe it was for fear of leaving her that she was taking the veil. Brought up together, they had early embarked upon the pastimes of Sappho.

Insatiable for pleasure and caresses, Thérèse was burning to include the piquant and charming Eléonore in her amusements. Despite all the precautions taken by the abbess, she could not prevent a conversation so ardently desired by both parties. It was lively and brief. A few mutual compliments made up its substance. A few kisses interrupted it, and the most decisive gesture brought it to an end. But how astonished Thérèse was, believing herself to be celebrating the mysteries of the good goddess, to discover a victim so different from the one she had been seeking! She gave a cry, then recovered herself, then wanted to see what a man was like. She had read too well, and pondered her reading too carefully, not to recognise what she was touching for the first time. She could not tire of examining it, of handling it, yet dared not bring herself to endure what Eléonore was requesting with such insistence and ardour.

Although learned in theory, she would never have believed that so small a place could provide so much room. At last she let him have his way, found that a man caused pain, then grew accustomed to it, and eventually took pleasure in it. But, whether through force of

habit or because Nature had fashioned her that way, she did not consider this game worth abandoning the one that had occupied her until then. Indeed, she went further: she wanted her good friend to make the same experiment. She brought Eléonore into their private tête-à-tête, and her companion was most grateful for the attention. The ardent Thérèse discovered that a handsome young man, full of fire and complaisance, who would learn anything one wished and accommodate himself to anything, lent a precious perfection to the pleasures of two recluses. Eléonore found it delightful to have so many charms, so many caressing hands at his disposal, to share in so many transports, sighs and amorous frenzies.

More than eight months passed in this fashion, and happier than they were wise, they gathered the flowers without any fruit disturbing the pleasures so carefully enclosed within a cloister, where the principal actress enjoyed absolute authority. An impenetrable secret concealed these voluptuous mysteries from everyone.

Meanwhile, the abbess grew suspicious; she was furious. Then she became almost certain; she was plunged into mortal anguish. But her love, which sought to blind her, and her lover, who wished to deceive her, restored her to uncertainty. One day the assurance of being happy enchanted her; the next, the pleasure of thwarting and vexing her rivals satisfied her; on another, she sacrificed even her jealousy to her unfaithful lover. For his sake, she provided Thérèse and her friend with a thousand little comforts. Their presence pleased her lover; that was enough to make her wish them well. The happiness of her dear Eléonore was her sole aim: if she believed another could love him more, could make him happier, she would sacrifice even her own love.

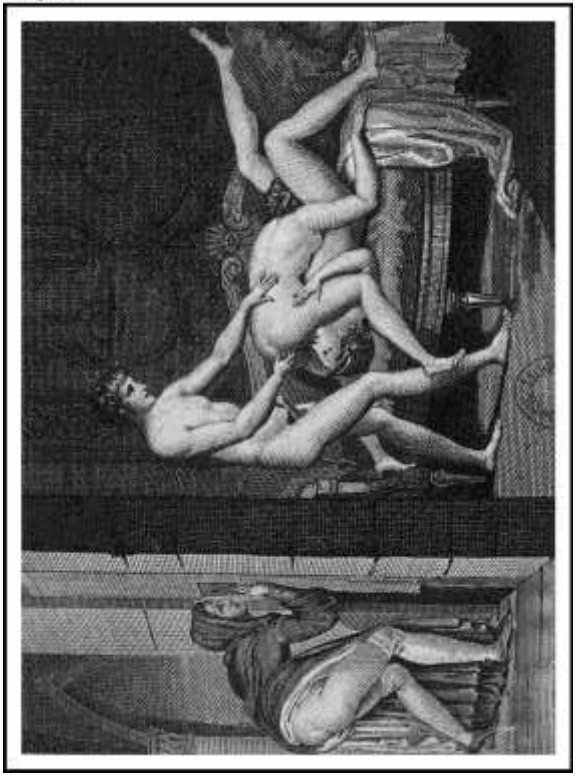
The ungrateful, fickle fellow, taking advantage of his mistress's tenderness and blindness, stole from her devoted love as many moments as he could, in order to devote them to debauchery. Every day the perverse trio invented fresh stratagems and discovered new hiding places to deceive the vigilance of the poor abbess; and in this cloister, as in the world outside, jealousy, love and fidelity were continually made fools of by inconstancy and libertinism.

One day, the lecherous band had shut themselves up in the oratory. An immense sofa, with cushions of every shape and size, was its only furniture. They laughed, chatted and indulged in mischief. Soon they shed all those cumbersome clothes. Eye, hand and mouth were free to roam, caress and kiss without restraint. The oratory had a door. It opened into a kind of gallery overlooking the choir. It had been built by an abbess of former times. It was seldom used nowadays; they had quite other matters to attend to.

A lay sister, occupied in the choir, heard a noise. Yielding to the demon of curiosity, she came quietly to peer through the keyhole. She saw three naked bodies and recognised their features perfectly well. She could scarcely believe her eyes, and was on the point of fleeing and raising the alarm, but curiosity held her stubbornly fast to the door.

Thérèse and Ursule, lying on the sofa, lavished upon one another the tenderest caresses, the most lascivious kisses and the most provocative gestures. Their arms lovingly entwined, their legs lasciviously disposed, they brought their whole beings into intimate union. The two friends, taking turns above and below, presented Eléonore, in constantly changing positions, with a variety of charms. His libertine hands roamed over them, caressing them, and, continually swept along by fresh desires, flew from one to the other, unable to settle anywhere or bring an end to so delightful a game.

Lying stretched out, the two women had entwined themselves in such a way that they were now touching only at one point, unquestionably the one most intimately concerned with their present occupations. Their mouths were as far apart as possible. Their eyes could no longer communicate; their hands scarcely touched. Had it not been for handsome Eléonore, who carried to each of those loving mouths, in turn, the kisses he had just gathered from the other, communication between the two friends would have existed at only one point: it was indeed a means of union, but one considerably less superficial than the union that existed at that moment.



Soon impatient Thérèse abandoned this position once more. She moved to the edge of the bed, sat down and leaned backwards; then, taking hold of her companion, she slipped one thigh between those of her accommodating friend, drew her down upon herself, pressed her against her breast, and found pleasure in uniting herself, through voluptuous kisses, with the pleasure she was giving her.

Meanwhile, Eléonore moved his hands alternately over two globes, whose very different positions varied his sensations, and scattered a thousand kisses over so many charms. He brought his finger towards a spot which already seemed to have received so much attention, and pushed it right in; then withdrew it, put it back again, moved it a little higher, and there pushed it in just the same.

Without doubt, the face is the seat of expression; but this particular part, which the lay sister was observing so attentively, is by no means devoid of expression, and a watchful eye can read it. These rounded forms, at first glance, all seem alike; but they differ in a thousand ways. Some are pretty, some charming, and one can never tire of handling and kissing them. Such was the one upon which the curious sister's attention was then wholly fixed. Watching the slightest movements, a small contraction told her quite plainly that this last penetration had at first caused a certain pain; then a yielding told her that pain had given way to pleasure.

The poor lay sister was a virgin, yet she knew how a man was made and how a child was conceived. Being a pious person, she turned her thoughts away from such matters, and saw in the carnal act nothing but the sacrament. Thus, everything that passed before her eyes seemed exceedingly strange. Her vow of chastity was explicit: she could not, in conscience, touch that place through which one enters the world. As for what she saw being done, that was quite another matter. When taking her vows, she had never given a thought to that particular aspect of things. How could one imagine that such an operation might afford any pleasure! But since this place was permitted, and chance had revealed its use to her, she could take advantage of it without any impropriety.

In accordance with this admirable line of reasoning, the lay sister, without leaving the keyhole, lifted her skirts and did to herself what

she had seen being done. A fairly sharp pain did not deter her; she pressed on, and experienced pain, pleasure and an intense desire all at once, a desire which she aroused without satisfying. Yet another spectacle now turned all her ideas upside down. Eléonore stood up and showed her quite unmistakably that he was not a woman. At this sight she could no longer doubt the diabolical nature of what she was witnessing, and was about to abandon, much against her will, the game that had occupied her.

Meanwhile, the handsome young man was drawing very close to the couple. Recalling everything she knew about the sacrament, the sister could not quite understand how this grouping could be arranged, for everyone remained in the same position. Then she saw, or thought she saw, that instead of taking the route she had imagined, he was taking the one which had already astonished her so greatly.

It is impossible to say with certainty what was actually happening. These are matters on which people are not generally very forthcoming, and through a keyhole it is easy to be mistaken over so short a distance. Besides, who can calculate all the fancies of these cloistered folk, occupied day and night with scandalous reading, libertine ideas and, above all, the single preoccupation of increasing, multiplying, varying, prolonging and rekindling their pleasures? Perhaps Ursule, wishing to lose none of her friend's attentions, was quite content for matters to be as the sister imagined; or perhaps, too, this latter interpretation better suited the sister's own ideas, and everyone knows how greatly our ideas influence our judgements.

Whatever the truth of the matter, this sight strengthened the onlooker in her original suppositions. She remained in her grotesque posture. Soon she heard sighs; she saw convulsions and hurried movements. Her eyes followed them, she mingled her sighs with those she heard, and imitated the movements. At last, what she saw, what she imagined and what she herself was doing so powerfully affected her imagination and her senses that she experienced everything the others were experiencing. And at the very moment when this libertine edifice was coming apart and collapsing, leaving them motionless and stretched out upon the sofa, she nearly lost consciousness, fell upon a

bench that happened to be there, and then departed, firmly resolved to return another time.

Hardly had she reached her cell when she began to reflect deeply. In truth, reflection is a sorry business. The poor girl reproached herself for the innocent pleasure she had procured for herself. She considered absurd and senseless all the arguments she had advanced during that splendid expedition. And indeed, she was not wrong; but what did it matter whether her reasoning had been sound or otherwise? She had enjoyed herself enormously, and had done nobody any harm. Far from entertaining any such reflections, alas, she thought only of the enormity of her sin. That alone was enough to plunge her into despair; and yet something still more distressing added to her torments: the question of confession.

The confessor had never appealed to the sister. He had always treated her in a harsh and severe manner, without that unction, that evangelical gentleness which it is so comforting to find. The truth was, she was not pretty; and however saintly a man may be, he is more indulgent towards a pretty face. At all events, whatever the reason, she regarded it as the greatest and most terrible of misfortunes to be obliged to recount a sin of such magnitude to the spiritual director. Besides, could she in conscience tell him what she had done? That would mean telling him what she had seen; it would amount to confessing another person's sins; it would be speaking ill of a Mother Superior, perhaps even slandering her. For, after all, was she quite certain? One can be mistaken when looking through a keyhole. The whole affair was so extraordinary; who could say it was not an illusion? And what if those she had seen, or thought she had seen, were themselves going to confession? What an embarrassing position she would put the confessor in! Yet, indignant as she was, she still needed absolution.

Thus reasoned the good sister, and she concluded that this nasty, disagreeable priest could not possibly be entrusted with such a story. He surely lacked the necessary authority. But to whom, then, was she to confess? She was still pondering this question, in considerable perplexity, when word was brought that His Lordship had arrived. He was making his visitation to the convent. The abbess was with him,

and everyone was in a flurry of excitement at the prospect of so great an honour. She hurried to meet him, firmly convinced that Heaven had arranged this event expressly to extricate her from her predicament.

This Bishop had recently been appointed by the Court. He was forty years old, had an imposing appearance and led an exemplary life. His vicars-general modelled themselves on his bearing and his entourage; his appearance and conversation were an edification to the convent. He treated the nuns with kindness, and showed due respect to an abbess of noble birth. The sister came forward and asked to speak privately with His Lordship. There was considerable astonishment that a lay sister should dare to make such a request. His Lordship consented.

Once they were alone together, she found herself unable to speak. She did not know where to begin her account. At last, plucking up courage, she related everything she had seen, from beginning to end, point by point. The Bishop scarcely knew what countenance to assume. Twenty times he was on the verge of bursting out laughing at the sister's descriptions and circumlocutions. There were a thousand things she did not know how to name or describe. Nevertheless, and not without difficulty, he managed to maintain an imperturbably serious expression. "My child," he said kindly, "you have done well to confide so strange an affair to me alone. Continue to show your mothers all the respect and obedience they deserve. It is not for you, my child, to sit in judgement upon your superiors. It is so easy to see things wrongly; we are all liable to error. We must always be wary of accusing our neighbour. If she is guilty, God will doubtless forgive her; the treasures of His mercy are infinite. As for ourselves, we shall find grace in His sight only by distrusting ourselves, our own understanding and our senses. I grant you absolution, and forbid you to repeat to anyone what you have told me." He accompanied this speech with the appropriate gestures and the requisite expression. He added a few more words, and left the good girl delighted that she would not have to confess to the disagreeable spiritual director, doubtful of what she had seen, and rather inclined to believe that the tempting angel, having dazzled her eyes, had polluted her imagination

with all the illusions she had witnessed, and had transformed, in her eyes, an exercise in piety into a spectacle of debauchery.

A few days later, His Lordship came to the convent. He took the abbess aside, told her what he had been told and what he had surmised. She, bewildered by such a conversation and overcome by jealousy, confessed everything she knew. The story seemed scarcely credible. But without investigating whether Eléonore had always been a man, or had become one, the bishop had him removed from the convent, ostensibly to transfer him to another.

How many tears accompanied his departure! The good sisters, young and old alike, all mourned the loss of their charming companion. But nobody knew quite so well what they were losing as the abbess and her two rivals. As for Eléonore, although he mingled his tears with those of his friends, deep down he felt a secret satisfaction at leaving the cloister. Regret tore at his heart; hope presented the future in flattering colours. These illusions soon vanished. His habit was changed, and, as nobody knew what else to do with him, he was sent to a monastery of monks in a remote place, there to begin a second novitiate.

It was not solely out of indulgence and sympathy for the weaknesses of others that the Bishop had taken such precautions. He returned to the convent and regarded the three pretty sinners with a less severe eye. He explained to them the dangers to which they had exposed themselves with an inexperienced young fool. His Lordship possessed wit, charm, a desire to please and a certain boldness—a formidable advantage. Somehow or other, he took the place of the exile, and looking after this little flock was by no means the least agreeable of the shepherd's occupations.

The poor Eléonore, meanwhile, found his new way of life very different, and above all exceedingly dull. Alas, how he regretted his good abbess! How he reproached himself for having felt even the slightest pleasure at leaving her! He remembered those delightful days, and the memories made his present situation all the more painful. With no family, no friends to whom he could turn, what was he to do? Particularly as he was a timid young man, and in this respect still something of a nun himself. But how could he possibly remain

with four or five monks, veritable animals who thought of nothing but eating?

"Really," he said, "it was hardly worth the trouble of a spirit finding me worthy of its love, making me acquainted with the sweetest pleasures, and fulfilling the finest wish a mortal being could ever conceive, only for me to vegetate in a cloister and then fall into the hands of a bunch of boorish monks! At least one could live in that other convent; but here—ah, if I cannot get out of this place, I shall die!"

He had been there for a fortnight, still tormented by gloomy thoughts, when the prior arrived. He was a jolly fellow, a man who knew how to enjoy life. He had just come from the bishop's residence, where Eléonore's story had been related to him in confidence. He began teasing Eléonore about his adventure, congratulating him on his exploits in terms so unrestrained that the innocent youth blushed at every word. The other, amused by his embarrassment, only redoubled his efforts.

In the afternoon, when the prior had restored his strength and a good old wine had spread warmth through his veins, his eyes gleaming with lust, he gave himself over to the most licentious merriment. Eléonore blushed and lost his composure; and although these jovial remarks reminded him of the delightful moments in the convent, the charms of those memories were eclipsed by the embarrassment of the conversation.

But this was not yet the moment when the handsome novice was in the greatest danger. In the evening, when he returned to his cell to sleep, or to dream of the nuns and the Sylph, the prior always found some way of accompanying him. He no longer had the lecherous air he had displayed in the afternoon. "My poor Eléonore," he would say, taking him by the arm, "do try to shake off your melancholy. This place is not as pleasant as the one you have left, but believe me, one can find pleasures here too. As charming and pretty as you are, it is easier than you imagine to make the most of your situation. Look at me: do I seem a melancholy fellow? My good humour proves that I am happy. The concern I feel for your troubles is the only thing that has dampened my spirits these past few days. But I

shall dispel your melancholy. Your engaging little face makes it impossible to approach you without feeling affection for you. I am absolutely determined to make you happy. I want you to love me too."

How sweet it is to be praised! Eléonore listened with pleasure; he forgot the remarks and indecent gestures of the afternoon. The cell was neat and clean, adorned with flowers. The deceased nun had retained her tastes, and the prior's friendship placed at her disposal everything that could soften and embellish her solitude. Whenever he entered this little room, he experienced a pleasant thrill. The orderliness, the arrangement of every object, reminded him of the wimple and the veil; but the fresh complexion, languorous eyes and lily-and-rose complexion of its present occupant, together with the enamel-like whiteness of his beautiful teeth, disturbed his imagination far more. Every day brought fresh attentions from the prior: the finest fruits, the choicest preserves, the most delicate liqueurs and the most fragrant sweetmeats. While inviting the novice to sample these delicacies, the monk continued his conversation; and the novice, as weak as a woman, as vain as a man, and as greedy as a nun, had no reason to dread the evening.

"One must," the Prior said to him one day, "break the monotony of the life you lead here. I want to introduce you to some ladies from the neighbourhood." At the mention of ladies, Eléonore started. "Are they young?" he asked, with an interested look. Through some lingering sense of modesty, which the monk's conversation was eroding a little more each day, he tried to conceal part of the emotion he was feeling; but this did not escape his companion, who never missed an opportunity to read the expression of his pretty face. "Not very young, my dear fellow. They are no match for the beauties you have left behind. It is unfortunate to begin by being too happy; one can never settle down anywhere afterwards. They are good souls, they will give us a warm welcome, and make your stay here less dreary. Tomorrow we shall go and dine with them."

Indeed, at about eleven o'clock in the morning they set out. They travelled for roughly half an hour, in the finest weather imaginable, along delightful country paths. The Prior laughed and teased his companion, who had made himself smarter and more presentable than

usual. They arrived at a modest-looking but well-kept house. A cheerful servant ushered them into a neatly furnished, orderly, but old-fashioned sitting room; she invited them to sit down, brought them some chilled wine, told them that the ladies would be down shortly, and missed no opportunity to linger and chatter.

Half an hour later, the door opened and the two ladies appeared, making very formal curtseys. The Prior returned their greeting rather cavalierly and introduced his protégé. "Prior, anything that comes from you is always welcome," said the elder of the two. Both ladies regarded handsome Eléonore very attentively, while he lowered his eyes. "Your protégé has the most engaging expression. He is very young; he will find us rather grave." — "Bah!" said the Prior. "Are you going to start talking to us about age and youth? Nothing saddens me more than that subject of conversation. There is only one good time of life, and that is when one enjoys good health; only one good manner, and that is being in good spirits." As he spoke, he sat down, and the four of them formed a sort of circle.

The Prior continued with jokes that were somewhat coarse; but although the ladies scolded and disapproved of him, they nevertheless found considerable amusement in his remarks, without, however, abandoning the prim expression they had worn when first making their curtsey.

Eléonore began to study his new acquaintances, looking at each of them in turn when the other was not looking at him. They were sisters, and bore an unmistakable family resemblance; they were unmarried; they habitually kept their eyes lowered, held themselves very upright, and never leaned back in their armchairs. Their hair was curled and powdered, they wore no rouge, and not the smallest part of their dress was in the slightest disarray. They were a good forty years old. These were not the women Eléonore sometimes saw in his dreams; nevertheless, they resembled them more closely than did the monks, his fellow brethren. He felt quite at ease in their company, and was beginning to grow accustomed to them.

One of the two called the maid. "Marie, do tell my niece to come downstairs; she is never ready." At the word *niece*, the young man drew closer to the aunts and became more animated in conversation.

From time to time he cast a furtive glance towards the door; at last, the sound of heels and little footsteps, followed by the opening of the door, made him turn his full attention towards it. He saw the niece enter: small, hunchbacked, misshapen, and ridiculously dressed, walking and speaking with an air of pretension. He no longer knew what to say to the old aunts, who had a niece so ugly.

Dinner was served. The little hunchback said a thousand impertinent things; the two ladies took particular care of their guests, each in turn offering them choice morsels. Eléonore began to make himself at home; the aunts dropped their prim manner; the niece, to whom no attention was paid, kept silent. The Prior, who was not being scolded, made his jokes more gently. They left the table in the best of spirits; coffee and liqueurs prolonged in the drawing-room the freedom of the meal.

The Prior was made to promise that he would bring his young charge again; the latter readily promised to accompany his protector. They escorted their guests part of the way home, each of the two ladies taking an arm. As they changed places during the walk, the young man often found himself between them, and was very pleased to be there. At last they parted. After supper, the Prior took a stroll with his handsome friend, accompanied him back to his cell, and stayed while he went to bed. They chatted together with such good fellowship that it was very late before they parted.

Each time they went to visit the neighbours, Eléonore felt more at ease with them. The niece did so much to discredit youth that he no longer noticed the aunts' age. That age, nevertheless, caused him a certain embarrassment; he did not dare to speak plainly. The ladies, though very cheerful and attentive, always maintained a great air of propriety and considerable reserve in their conversation. He felt no greater inclination towards one than the other; indeed, he felt more need than inclination. He had no experience, insufficient familiarity with such matters to dispel false scruples, and not enough passion to defy genuine ones. Nevertheless, he enjoyed their company immensely; it put his mind in the way of agreeable thoughts, and provided him and the Prior with a constant subject of conversation.

The monk, who never lost sight of the object of his desires, and whose passion grew stronger by the day, took advantage of this pleasant intimacy to increase his familiarity. Eléonore's eyes, forehead and cheeks had already received kisses of the kind an aunt might bestow. Even his beautiful chest had passed, time and again, beneath lascivious hands. The Prior drew his attention to how high and white it was, and what a fine triangle was formed with his navel by the two rosy buds of his breasts. He admired the shape of the muscles that supported them; he wondered whether the most beautiful bosom of a woman could possess more graceful contours, but, in his opinion, none could rival Eléonore's in beauty.

Never did Hadrian lavish such praise upon the beautiful Antinous. If the blending of strength and grace still delights us when seen in unfeeling marble, let the Prior be forgiven for being unable to contemplate these beautiful forms of virile youth without guilty desires; and let poor Eléonore, too, be forgiven for failing to perceive, beneath the flowers of praise and indulgence, the serpent seeking to rob him of the last remnants of his innocence.

The two aunts had come to dine at the abbey. Nothing had been overlooked to make them welcome. The wine, the liqueurs and the gaiety of the meal had almost intoxicated the guests. The niece, in whose presence everyone always felt somewhat constrained, was not there, and they had indulged in almost outrageous high spirits. They escorted the ladies home, and on the way they were even less restrained than they had been at the house. Had the foursome not been disturbed by the presence of the other monks, who knows what might have happened? The aunts were so merry, and the novice so excited.

The heat was excessive. Eléonore's first act on entering was to undress from head to foot. The Prior was there to help him, and the two of them, intoxicated with gaiety, desire and lust, were less restrained than ever in their speech and less decent in their behaviour.

The young man lay almost naked on his bed. The monk, wrapped in his cassock, was sitting on that same bed. "My God," said the latter, "my dear fellow, how excited you were today! If our respectable brethren had not been with us, the aunts would have been in for it.

The good ladies could not have wished for anything better. The way they talked, the way they answered, the way they listened! What fire! You are the man to turn old women young again." "Oh, old or not," replied the shameless young man, "today I am capable of anything; and the niece herself, if she were here, I would..." A remnant of modesty made him finish the sentence under his breath, between his teeth; and if the Prior heard him, it was because he could well guess what he meant. Picking up the conversation where it had been left off so promisingly, he said: "It certainly shows. One can see very well, you young rascal, what you would be capable of if you were left alone with the ladies." At the same time, he made one of the most indecent gestures that one man can make towards another.

We must remember that Eléonore was lying on his bed in his shift. Before that gesture, ordinary observation was enough to judge the state into which the merriment after dinner had brought him. Afterwards, things were quite another matter, and the Prior did not content himself with looking. His lascivious hand was where the hands of the abbess, Ursule and Thérèse had played before. Eléonore endured everything: he was still capable of shame, but no longer of resistance. He kept his eyes closed; his body was burning with desire, his mind filled with licentious thoughts, and he dared neither flee nor seek pleasure. The moment was nevertheless approaching, though slowly, for the seducer's hand had abandoned its first undertaking and turned its attention to less sensitive parts, bringing him closer to the true object of his desires.

"Look at me," he said. "Open those beautiful eyes of yours. Ah, our aunts would surely not have been able to resist you. Never has such a handsome young man paid them any attention; and never have you looked so pretty as you do today. The good ladies would have been far more inflamed if they had seen everything I see, touched everything I touch, and kissed everything I kiss." As he spoke, he covered the beautiful boy with kisses. His mouth pressed against Eléonore's. The kiss was not returned, but it was endured. His mouth moved towards the place his hand had just left, and further inflamed desires that no longer allowed the slightest reflection. Then the monk

took off his cassock; beneath it he wore nothing else. He threw himself down beside Eléonore, who felt against his thigh a burning, solid heat which proved to him that he was not alone in experiencing violent desire; but the other man's desire was of a very different nature from his own.

The prior, inflamed with lust, craved with frenzied impatience the pleasures he had long contemplated in his thoughts. He would have resorted to anything to achieve his purpose: prayers, tears, threats, fury; he would have violated, crushed, destroyed the object of his unbridled passion rather than abandon his designs. Yet he remained silent and motionless, holding his handsome friend against his breast, trembling lest, if he revealed his intentions, a refusal should rob him of hope, reason, and that happiness whose intoxicating prospect his delirious imagination embellished from moment to moment.

Eléonore's senses were no less inflamed, but his mind was not subject to such violent agitation. He desired gratification; gratification alone could soothe the fire consuming him. But this desire had no particular object. He was resigned, ready to endure anything to attain it. Incapable of resistance or of making any effort, he was entirely under the dominion of his senses. His mind, vanquished by them, formed no thoughts of any kind. For him there was no past, no future; only the present existed.

The prior, however, soon abandoned a repose so contrary to the tumultuous stirrings of his whole being. He took off, tore away from the beautiful Eléonore the shift that still covered certain parts of his body. He lifted him in his arms and laid him back on his bed, entirely naked, and doubtless in the position in which Nicomedes delighted in contemplating Caesar, the position in which so many gods and heroes placed their young companions. Without lingering any longer to kiss, praise and caress what lay before his eyes, he laid his bold hands upon two globes that rivalled those of Love. His finger, bolder still, was already attempting to prepare the way. A formidable obstacle stood in the way of his efforts. In vain he tried to ease its entrance by moistening his fingers. He could not succeed; he feared that violent efforts might cause too much pain and render forever rebellious to

his desires the charming object who, until then, had patiently and submissively endured both his caresses and his attempts.

His fear of causing suffering to the one he loved did nothing to interrupt his sodomitical undertaking. It was only the fear of failure, the certainty that any attempt at still more difficult things would be in vain, that checked the violence of his desires; far from diminishing them, however, the difficulty only sharpened them. His two hands pressed the round white forms they had seized, spreading them apart and exposing to his lascivious eyes the narrow retreat into which he was striving in vain to penetrate. At the sight, filled with lustful frenzy, he brought his mouth close and tickled it with his tongue. Eléonore, whose desires had for a moment ceased to intensify under the influence of pain, fear and suspense, now experienced a gentle, delightful sensation. His exclamations told the Prior that, while preparing his own pleasures, he was already making Eléonore experience them. By almost imperceptible degrees, his handsome friend seemed to drift away, felt himself dying, and surrendered. The other, delighted to give sweet sensations to the one he loved, pursued his undertaking with greater ardour. He kissed, sucked and caressed, until at last his lover expired with pleasure. He did not leave him, but continued his tender caresses in order to prolong the delirium of his senses. He was afraid—for desire is ingenious in finding grounds for fear—afraid that the young man, now exhausted by gratification and no longer sustained by his own desires, might refuse to satisfy his. His strange caresses, together with Eléonore's youth and vigour, soon dispelled his fears. He made a few successful attempts and prepared for the great undertaking: he exerted the most violent efforts, but made little progress.

Eléonore was experiencing the most acute pain; he was being torn apart and implored the mercy of his cruel conqueror. But his prayers, complaints and groans were useless. As though some talisman chained the sufferer to the one who desired him so violently, as though pain and pleasure were mutually connected, the Prior became only more ardent, more delirious, while the victim made no attempt to escape such terrible transports. Great tears streamed from his eyes. The pain had made the disappearance of everything that had resisted pleasure

complete. The monk, redoubling his efforts in vain, and thereby increasing the torments of the all-too-compliant novice, at last abandoned his undertaking. He assumed the position that had given so much pleasure, and sought, by renewing his caresses, to make amends with the one he had just treated so cruelly, and whom all these difficulties made dearer and more desirable to him than ever.

Eléonore soon recovered his desires, and the prior believed that, after so many attempts and so much care, he could at last hope to triumph. Indeed, he achieved victory in part. The resistance was extreme, the pain very severe; but his efforts were so violent, and he was seconded with such good grace, that complete victory could no longer elude him. At the height of his triumph, pleasure brought the conqueror's progress to a halt.

Many others, no doubt, strong in adversity but weak after happiness, would have stopped at such a promising point; this man, however, as proud after victory as before, took scarcely a moment's rest to savour his pleasure. That pleasure itself made his triumph easier, and he found himself still capable of pursuing it with equal vigour.

His accommodating hand guided the victim towards the same goal; it shared in his transports. Soon it, too, experienced pleasure. The monk hastened to join it; with rapid, varied movements he pursued a fresh gratification. He attained it, but, still untameable, he did not abandon the position he had taken such pains to conquer.

"My handsome friend, what pleasure you have given me! Let me seek still more. If only I could make you experience pleasures just as intense, unite you with me, and make the fire that consumes me pass into your being!" As he spoke, he brought his mouth close to Eléonore's, pressed it against his, and gave him burning kisses. "I, who have so often, with women none of whom was ever your equal, run the course of pleasure three times over without a pause—should I stop now? No, my charming creature!" And he began again that game which ladies find so pleasing.

No doubt, if the deceased nun had still possessed what the Sylph had made disappear, and if, in that veritable chapel of Love, she had received the rich gift with which Priapus had endowed the prior, she would gladly have endured this fresh proof of affection. It lasted so

long, and the movements were so rapid and hurried, that even the coldest beauty would have swooned more than once. But Eléonore was in a different position, and impatiently awaited the conclusion. At last it came: deep sighs announced it, terrible convulsions preceded it. The Prior was no longer master of himself; he lost all control, thrust furiously, shook violently, died, expired, and pressed his burning lips against lips that came forward to meet his, for so many transports had passed into even the previously unresponsive Eléonore, rekindling the fire of concupiscence. He himself guided his seducer's hand and set it in motion; his loving mouth received a lascivious tongue, pressed it with his lips, and returned his own; he lavished the tenderest caresses of love. He lost all control; he was no longer master of himself. His conqueror, raised above himself by so many proofs of love and surrender, boldly embarked upon a fourth course. Aided by the companion of his pleasures, he completed it; their sighs mingled, their convulsions reinforced their mutual efforts; the bed groaned; everything resounded with their cries. They bent and twisted, clung to one another and embraced with abandon; their heads were lost. The chill, forerunner of supreme gratification, passed through all their limbs, and at the same moment they were both annihilated in the immensity of a shared pleasure!

One may imagine that after this scene they at last rested, and it is easy to suppose, too, that their intimacy had become complete. "No, you are not a man," said the prior; "you are not a woman; you are an angel, surely one of those who came to save Lot. The inhabitants of Sodom preferred them to the good man's virgins, and they were quite right. Never did any woman or virgin compare with you; none ever carried me so far along the course of love; none ever gave me such intense and such abundant pleasure. And you, my angel, if you had taken the thing particularly well, especially in those final moments, I envied your position; I would have wished to receive, take and give pleasure all at once. Yet I was very well placed, perfectly well placed, better than I have ever been in any other position. How pretty you are! How fresh your mouth is! What beautiful contours! How fair you are! How I love to see your muscles so well defined, yet so graceful. You are my mistress, my master, my idol. You shall

love me; I shall share your bed; I shall die upon you again; I shall feel you swoon in my arms. This night is not over; we shall begin again. Meanwhile, come into my arms, sleep upon my breast; we shall wake only to surrender ourselves to fresh pleasures." He kept his word, and more than once again enjoyed his new conquest.

Each day the monk adored the charming Eléonore more and more. No doubt it was because Eléonore was destined to become a woman again that he took pleasure in making someone happy in this particular way; but it is certain that he very willingly accepted the most repeated proofs of affection, and even sought them out. When the Prior announced that he had a journey to make, Eléonore was greatly distressed; the journey, however, was to last only a fortnight. Eléonore would gladly have accompanied his friend, but that was impossible. The prior was going to attend a congregation; so pretty a novice's face would have scandalised the discerning sinners there.

To console himself, the handsome young man left behind conceived the idea of trying his luck with the neighbours. The very next day he went to see them. They had been somewhat neglected since he had discovered that he could do without women; nevertheless, he was warmly received. He sought a private conversation, being indifferent as to which of the two he chose. The elder, whether through greater willingness or by chance, was the first to find herself alone with him. She reproached him for not coming more often. "What can you expect?" he said. "For us poor recluses, seeing women turns our heads. After spending the day laughing with you, we are unable to occupy ourselves with anything for three days; at night we can no longer sleep. You women are very fortunate: nothing disturbs your tranquillity; your complexions are always fresh and rested. One can see that you have had a good night's sleep. Do you never dream, then, about what you have seen during the day?" — "Oh yes, sometimes!" — "Well, does it not excite you? A man you saw the day before—do you not see him again in a dream, and…? You are laughing; I wager you have had a few dreams of that kind. Tell me about them." — "But I never talk about such things… You are losing your wits." And this was what they were saying—not so much because of what Eléonore was saying as because of what he was doing; for the

brazen novice, without so much as a preamble, was taking liberties in a quite unmistakable fashion. The lady resisted, but he was ardent and she was weak. "There are people in the next room," she said. "Well then, do not make a noise"; and he continued to ply his fingers. "Someone is coming," she said, and indeed the sister was approaching. He had to stop; but evening came, and with it darkness. They took advantage of it for a few familiarities, and even to arrange a rendezvous. It was fixed for the following night: the garden key was handed over, a ladder was pointed out, and it was just the right length to reach the window. He left, well pleased with himself, and leaving the aunt intoxicated with the hope of possessing so handsome a young man for an entire night.

The following day, alas! Eléonore was no longer in a condition to fulfil so delightful a dream; the year had run its course, and he awoke a woman. On seeing herself thus transformed, her first thought was of the neighbour; she regretted not having at least one day ahead of her in which to satisfy her curiosity. That thought quickly gave way to another, which plunged her into despair.

Now Eléonore is a woman. The Prior will soon return; there is no way of concealing such a secret from him, and he will insist on knowing the cause of so strange a transformation. He knows of the convent adventures; she knows how weak she is; she may be discreet, but she can no longer doubt the Sylph's power or the fulfilment of his promises. She will remain a woman, a woman subject to the whims of a monk, a slave in this place, with no hope of leaving it, perhaps one day destined to become the plaything of the convent. These thoughts unsettle her mind. As a man, the beautiful Eléonore had suffered things at the Prior's hands that no one ought ever to suffer; now, as a woman, she shudders with horror at the thought of enduring caresses that are far more in keeping with the natural order.

Though endowed with a sex that called for, that demanded resistance, she had yielded. Foolish creature! Now, when she is weaker than before, when her heart is more open than ever to seduction, she is making plans to defend herself through strength and virtue.

Thus Eléonore, who had had occasion to make a few observations in the course of her life, always regarded modesty as a condition inherent in the female sex, and one that prevented many disorders in the world. "To begin with," she would say, "whether we take the initiative or merely respond, we are never entirely powerless. But our greatest danger is that we are far more easily than men swept into falling in love with the first man who comes along." More unfortunate still is the fact that it is rarely good qualities that win us over. A man desires a beautiful woman; but, generally speaking, he does not fall in love until repeated sight of her charms and graces, or the amiable, endearing and seductive qualities of her heart or mind, have conquered and subdued him. With us, an involuntary impulse, quite unrelated to reason or reflection, carries us away, without our distinguishing between good and bad, between what may attract us and what may repel us. We fall in love at first sight; in a single moment we are conquered.

"If the modesty inherent in our sex did not conceal from men the effect they have upon us; if that same modesty, once their vanity or their cleverness had revealed to them the secret of our weakness, did not make us flee instinctively; believe me," she would say, "there is not a woman on earth who would not have succumbed, and men would have to be more on their guard to preserve themselves than we are at present to preserve our honour."

While the change of sex was thus bringing modesty back to life in Eléonore's heart, that same modesty had deserted the poor aunt, leaving her prey to the most ardent desires, sharpened by the sweet hope of seeing them soon fulfilled. She went up to her room early, and made every possible preparation, both outward and inward, for her toilette, neglecting nothing that she thought might please her handsome young lover. As she passed before her looking-glass, she congratulated her forty-three-year-old face on having supplanted her sister, who was two and a half years younger; for her dear self-esteem persuaded her that it was her graceful appearance and lively wit that had won her so sweet a preference. It never occurred to her that the

same chance which distributes crowns blindly had, with equal blindness, arranged this piece of good fortune for her—or rather, this misfortune.



The poor woman was far from indulging in any philosophical reflections; the most flattering hopes delighted both her soul and her senses. An extract of Saturn, diluted in a suitable quantity of fresh water, had firmed her secret charms; an egg yolk beaten into lukewarm water had softened her neck, her breasts and her arms; the same extract of Saturn, in a carefully measured dose, had been applied even to her innermost charms. Her feet, which were soon to be warmed between those of the charming Eléonore, had been rubbed with the same paste that perfumed her hands; coral had whitened her teeth; an elixir had refreshed her gums, perfumed cachou her breath, vinegar had lent colour to her cheeks, and a sweet-smelling water had been sprinkled over her clothes, in her room and, above all, in her bed. A fine handkerchief, edged with a little lace, had been prepared for her young friend's head; others, without lace, were there for a quite different purpose. As she placed them beneath her pillow, she had kissed them, saying: "I envy your lot—or rather, envy mine. I shall not have everything, but I shall have the pleasure." An old wine from Alicante stood on the mantelpiece, and beside her bed a vessel of cold water, intended to contain fires all too quick to evaporate. She lay down. At last, delighted to have completed her preparations before the arrival of the dear object of so much attention, she had scarcely got into bed when her clock informed her that the appointed hour was still more than three-quarters of an hour away. She reproached herself for not having set it earlier, and hoped that he might arrive ahead of time. Meanwhile, she counted the minutes, passed a caressing hand over her own body, and anticipated the delight of feeling another's hand, and of putting her own to other uses. She felt herself burning; she would have liked to heighten the flames still further. She feared that she might feel the pleasures she anticipated less keenly, but above all that she might undo the effects of all the pains she had taken with her toilette. While she thus wavered between desire, expectation, lewd gestures and licentious thoughts, she caught sight of a scourge hanging beside her bed. She seized it and struck herself with it, on the point of yielding to temptation; but she resisted by resorting to the water, quenching a fire that, as it smouldered within her, only grew more violent. She lay down again, and at last heard the longed-for

hour strike. Her heart beat and her whole being trembled; but, alas! the appointed hour arrived, then another passed, and still no one appeared.

She went to the window. The wind, the trembling leaf, the insect stirring everything about it, all seemed to her to be her lover. Alas! She saw nothing, returned to bed, and did not sleep. Now she imagined herself deceived, scorned and humiliated; now she worried about the fate of her handsome friend: some misfortune, some untoward accident must have brought his love to a halt. At times she imagined that her sister was more fortunate. She thought she heard noises in her room; she held her breath, straining to hear more clearly, and very early in the morning went into her sister's room. Examining everything carefully, she saw nothing to confirm her suspicions; yet she remained no less anxious, jealous, distraught and terrified.

The virtuous Eléonore had not enjoyed a better night, her sleep disturbed by agitation. She imagined she saw the lecherous Prior rejoicing in his new treasure, profaning one without relinquishing the other. She would wake with a start at the monk's shameless advances. So great was her agitation that she developed a fever and remained in bed, not knowing what to do, what would become of her, or what course to take.

For her part, the aunt was pondering how best to obtain news from the convent. Nothing could have been simpler: they sent someone there every day, for one reason or another; but today the Prior was not there. His sister might notice something, and a thousand other considerations of the kind that hold up the most ordinary actions once they have become matters of interest, and prompt precautions which reveal what would otherwise have remained hidden had none been taken. At that moment a carriage arrived. It was carrying a cousin of the ladies, a twenty-six-year-old abbé. He was coming to take possession of the neighbouring abbey, and invited his cousins to accompany him there, congratulating himself on his good fortune, which had brought him a handsome income and the opportunity to pay court to such charming relations.

A church benefice-holder going to inspect a new possession, and a woman sustained by love, are not people who dawdle on the way.

And so, in the twinkling of an eye, they reached the abbey. The sister, who had no such powerful motives, was quite out of breath. On their arrival, they learnt that Eléonore was ill. While regretting such unfortunate news, they were nevertheless relieved to see that it was sheer impossibility that had brought her progress to a halt; and, without much ceremony, taking advantage of their cousin's company, they made their way to the sick woman's room.

How great was the aunt's distress! She was not even given a glance. This is another little failing of ladies: they treat one another with scant consideration as soon as they have no further obligations towards each other. Eléonore had a rather different reason. At first sight, the abbé had pleased her immensely; he, for his part, had no inkling of it. Certainly, he could never have been accused of neglecting the fair sex; but a pretty face, wherever it may be found, is a pleasure to behold. He was struck by the novice's appearance.

While Eléonore's clothing afforded some protection to the modesty which, as a woman, she could not help feeling, reflection, love and reason made her realise that this young abbé was a deliverer sent by Heaven, and that she ought to take advantage of him. At once she announced that she was not very ill, that she would get up and show Monsieur l'abbé around. The ladies withdrew, and the cousin, whose ears had been enchanted by the pretty monk's voice, remained behind and witnessed a dressing which was conducted with such skill that he saw things which aroused his intense curiosity.

During the walk, Eléonore paid the two aunts such outrageous neglect that one was scandalised and the other utterly distressed. She contrived to find herself alone with the abbé. There she confessed to him, tears in her eyes, that she was a nun. She detested the state of life which her parents had forced her to embrace against her will. The Prior, whose soul she had believed to be honest and compassionate, had taken advantage of her trust in order to abduct her. She had been here for three months, up to the present moment; she had preserved her innocence… A bold assertion, indeed. She hoped that the Sylph, who had done so much for her, would not have forgotten this favour. It was undoubtedly a favour at that particular moment; but, in truth, considering the course of life she seemed intent on pursuing, I am

not sure she ought to rejoice in it, for it is somewhat exhausting to lose one's virginity three times every two years.

For the rest, she did not speak in this fashion without hoping to prove her claim. Since her last transformation, she had examined herself carefully and was so satisfied with what she found that she could easily persuade herself that no man would have cause for complaint. Meanwhile, innocent as she was, amid her tears and sobs, she displayed such abandon, such artlessness, such graces, expressions, glances and indulgences that the abbé was quite beside himself. He declared his love. Quite certain that she had captivated him, Eléonore once again assumed the role of woman, and of woman in love: she resisted and yielded, as one resists and yields when in love, with sincerity, tenderness, abandon and passion.

The abbé encountered all the difficulties he had been warned about. To overcome them, he employed every art of love, and was assisted by his beautiful mistress with all the patience, goodwill and gentleness that love alone can inspire. He was no less delighted by the unexpected treasure he had discovered in his abbey than by the abbey itself, and departed for Paris with his dear Eléonore, intending to share the Church's revenues with her there.

She was suitably lodged and furnished. Thus she returned to the station in life of her mother, and once again saw the world she had left so long ago. How charming she found it! Decency, gratitude and love—for she loved her charming deliverer—would all have demanded constancy. When she left, she had sworn it, promised it from the bottom of her heart; but she was so pretty, she had so many admirers, and once one has tasted inconstancy, it is very difficult to renounce it. Besides, she had only a year, and must make the most of it.

Those days passed swiftly. To the happiness of loving and being loved, she added the pleasure of deceiving. Alas! It must be admitted, to the shame of humanity, that deceiving is a satisfaction which neither man nor woman can resist. A hundred times, cursing her heart, her weakness and the circumstances, she came close to confessing her misdeeds and renouncing them; but why distress her friend? Had he been wise, would he not have exclaimed: why reveal what it is so

delightful not to know? A pleasant illusion is better than a sad truth. Such excellent reasons, such pure intentions reassured her. And so she continued.

I shall not attempt to enumerate all the pleasures, all the delights that embellished this blissful year. I should never finish if I had to recount all her tricks; describe with what skill she knew how to satisfy, rekindle desire, sow jealousy, dispel suspicion, attract and dismiss. Doubtless, had she been less greedy for pleasure, had she mastered her senses, disciplined her imagination and guided her heart, filling it with a single love, tender, constant and faithful, she would have been happier. But each must fulfil their destiny. Hers, it must be admitted, was to change; and Heaven had endowed her with a heart perfectly suited to the task. Loves were born, grew and multiplied within it without interfering with one another.

"It is delightful," she would say, "to be a pretty woman. One is a cherished divinity, cosseted and flattered by a thousand admirers. With a gesture, a glance, one makes them happy. The slightest favours have all the value one knows how to attach to them. When one deigns to make a choice, a mere grain of hope is enough to turn a man's head. They burn, they die for you, and live only for you, while making you share their divine, exquisite transports."

At certain moments she was tempted to remain a woman. All she had to do was reveal her secret. Her celestial lover, whom she found so difficult to replace, had assured her of this, and she had experienced his power sufficiently to believe him. But, all things considered, to make an informed decision, she needed to try the state of man once more. In truth, that state has its attractions; besides, she was a woman, and this sex, which is accused of indiscretion, is much more discreet than ours in certain matters. Its pleasures are more keenly felt, more genuine, more real; they have no need to be seasoned with the satisfaction of vanity. Only secrecy, at most, can add a few further charms. Be that as it may, she kept silent and managed to construct a story for the abbé and all his friends, weaving it so skilfully into what he already knew of her life that nobody ever suspected a thing.

The year was drawing to a close; it was almost over, and Eléonore had scarcely given it a thought. Around this time she made the acquaintance of Adèle, a young girl barely eighteen, who was cheerfully pursuing the same course of life. A languid blonde, dazzlingly fair, with a tender, loving expression and a voice that went straight to the heart, she was far from having received as brilliant an education as her beautiful friend. She had no particular talents, little learning, but possessed that charm which attracts and is almost impossible to define: an air of trustfulness, interest and abandon that inspires affection.

Eléonore became passionately attached to Adèle. The two friends could hardly bear to be apart, and confided to one another their escapades, their love affairs and their pleasures. This last subject gave rise to some particularly rewarding details. One enjoys the happiness one recounts a second time; one is moved and stirred anew by the recollection. The fire rekindled in one's own senses passes into those of a tender, attentive friend, and a conversation so keenly felt becomes exceedingly pleasurable. Accordingly, the two beauties had long and frequent conversations of this kind together.

"Whatever became," said Eléonore, "of that young man I used to see here so often?" — "Business obliged him to go away." — "What a cold reply! Would you hide from me the sorrow his departure caused you? You are wrong, my dear friend. If my heart and imagination are fired by hearing of the happiness of those I love, my soul also finds a thousand pleasures in sympathising with their misfortunes and sharing their sorrows." — "I have neither misfortunes nor sorrows." — "How so? I thought you loved him?" — "Yes, I loved him; but I was not particularly distressed by his departure." — "He certainly loved you. Oh, how plainly one could see the happiness he enjoyed in your company! Try as he might, he could not conceal from even the least discerning eye that you alone occupied his every thought. I am sure he misses you terribly." — "And I am quite sure of that myself." —"Then what more do you require in order to miss someone who is away? What! This man loves you with adoration, you know it, you believe it; you say you love him too, and yet his departure has caused you not the slightest distress." — "It is true that

all this may seem rather extraordinary; nevertheless, nothing could be more genuine."

"Listen, my dear friend, I have a livelier mind than people suppose, much livelier than my languid appearance might suggest. I was separated from someone I loved. I had made up my mind, and firmly promised myself that I would be faithful to him." — "Who does not make such resolutions? And who keeps them?" — "Not many, my dear Adèle. The truth is, it is difficult for a young, pretty, much-admired woman who knows the pleasures of life not to be tempted; and unless one finds some way of dampening those temptations, one is almost certain to succumb." — "Do you know, you are speaking far more truly than you realise? A woman of feeling has great difficulty in resisting, even when she employs every possible means to do so." — "It was already a long time since I had been separated from the man who occupied my thoughts." — "And that long time had passed without a single act of infidelity… You are laughing, you little rascal." — "I am laughing at the opinion you have of our poor sex." — "Ah! I know a thing or two about it. All sorts of little incidents and trifles occur in life, things one does not count, and yet which nevertheless… In short, you had been away from the object of your affections for a long time. Then you met the young man we were speaking of just now." — "He was handsome and charming; I liked him. He took an interest in me, and I in him. I shall not tell you whether it was my imagination or my senses that betrayed my heart; but in his company I was still very weak. He noticed it, and I yielded. He was delighted. He enjoyed his happiness as best he could, both for his own sake and for mine."

"This pastime greatly appealed to me; it amused me and helped to dispel the tedium of absence. Nevertheless, I felt remorse at having thus broken my promises of fidelity. From time to time I would make fresh resolutions, only to give rise to whims which his love, our desires and my own weakness would never allow to last very long.

"One day I took it into my head that it was extremely dangerous for me to become pregnant, that all the precautions one might take were inadequate, and that the only sure way was to renounce pleasure

altogether. You can imagine how this latest fancy was received. Despair, tears, passionate protestations of love: everything was brought to bear to make me abandon such a project. All to no avail. I was adamant. 'In truth,' he said to me, beside himself with anger, 'ever since you intoxicated me with the happiness of possessing you, it seems you have had but one idea, constantly recurring in a thousand different forms and arising from the most frivolous pretexts. This fatal idea, this wretched whim, is to deprive me of favours whose loss I shall never grow accustomed to.'

"His distress moved me. I was sorry to cause him so much pain. Nevertheless, I stood firm, though I was too deeply affected to resist him altogether, and allowed him to bring me to pleasure by means that involved no danger. After that, without ever formally agreeing to anything, we settled into this arrangement, and, taking turns or sometimes both together, we enjoyed pleasures that were sweet enough, and entirely without risk.

"I do not know whether I might have taken some new whim into my head, but this time it was his turn. We had spent the night together, and he was more smitten, more passionately in love than ever. 'My lovely friend,' he said to me, 'when, whether through caprice or fear, you refused me half your favours, I thought I could never survive the loss. The tears with which I so often bathed your pretty hands, your face and your bosom were but a tiny fraction of those that streamed from my eyes when I was alone, in the silence of the night. Until then, I had imagined that love and happiness were born and increased amid favours and pleasures. I discovered quite the contrary. If you knew, my lovely friend, how sweet those tears were, you would have envied my lot!

'Whatever the love one feels, however ardent it may be, the pleasures enjoyed in the arms of one's beloved must eventually come to an end. They have their limits, and our weary senses, despite ourselves, compel our souls to long for rest. Away from her, our transports cannot last for ever; and prudence and foresight often prevent us from surrendering to them. But the pain born of caprices and refusals has neither limit nor end. It renews itself and grows through its very existence. Tears call forth more tears; exhaustion cannot dry

them up; our ingenious, tireless imagination supplies us with a host of fresh reasons for despair. Among the images it conjures up, that of the beloved object is always to be found. All her charms, all her attractions, rise before our eyes. Nothing is forgotten: we recall both the pleasure we experienced and the happiness we hoped for. But a sorrow born of such sweet images, nourished by such enchanting memories, is no sorrow at all; and the happiness of thinking of one's beloved, of dwelling upon her with an agitation and ardour that nothing can soothe, outweighs and obliterates every suffering one may endure.'

"As he spoke in this fashion, he showered me with a thousand kisses and shed a torrent of tears, as though all my caprices and refusals were overwhelming him at once. And I, who had never been less inclined to treat him harshly, began to weep too." — "Undoubtedly, fair Adèle, it was through sympathy." — "It must have been, for really I cannot see why else I was crying. But you know how contagious tears can be." — "And how dangerous! A woman who weeps is halfway conquered. I foresee that, taking advantage of such a touching display of tenderness, your lover will make all your fine resolutions vanish and rediscover with you pleasures which neither of you should ever have neglected." — "You are quite mistaken. Listen…"

'My lovely friend,' he continued, 'you made me promise never again to demand the ultimate favour; and you, in return, granted me every consolation I could possibly hope for. You know how deeply I appreciate them. How often your pretty hands, your soft white skin and your loving tongue have plunged me into the sweetest delirium! Well, I renounce all those pleasures. I want none that you do not share. My dear friend, if you love me, promise that, surrendering all your charms, your entire being to my transports, you will allow your lover to exhaust every resource of sensual pleasure in order to give you the most delightful sensations. Asking and hoping nothing for myself, I shall be wholly and absolutely absorbed in you, in you alone, and in your enjoyment. I shall know how to make your pleasures more intense, and savour the kisses of my enraptured friend. To feel you happy will be quite enough for my own felicity.'

"Such a proposal astonished me, and so much love touched me deeply. I was on the point of abandoning my whims; but there are certain thoughts which we women allow to be guessed at, but never express. He was hardly likely to understand what I did not tell him. Indeed, I believe that, so carried away was he, I might have explained myself quite plainly in vain. Besides, I was being offered the treatment due to a goddess. The worship I allowed my adorer to pay me was to be his sole reward. This idea appealed to me in turn, and I lent myself to everything he wished. I found it very much to my liking: my lover kept his promise. He applied himself assiduously to entertaining me, and succeeded admirably. Burning constantly with desire, since gratification never extinguished it, his caresses were always ardent and passionate. Even in those final moments, so precious to us, when a lover so often takes only a languid interest in our pleasure, my handsome friend was still as ardent and as caressing as when we began our delightful exercise." — "You were then in much the same position as you would be if you sought pleasure in the arms of a tender female friend. The impossibility of two women entirely and completely satisfying their mutual desires prolongs almost without limit both the duration and intensity of a fire which they fan into a frenzy, and which even the utmost exhaustion can scarcely dampen." — "I know nothing of that kind of pleasure," said Adèle. And the two friends were so engrossed in their conversation, so absorbed by the subject, that they were as close to one another as two lovers could be, and gazed at each other almost as intently.

Adèle continued her story: "The transports of my young friend were too ardent, too tender, not to electrify my whole being. I was burning. However great my pleasures, my desires always outlived them; and, lovely Eléonore, there was no impossibility here of bringing them to an end. Everything I could wish for was within reach of my hand. My hand began to wander. 'Leave me,' I was told, 'do not destroy the illusion that sets me ablaze. At this moment, when I am doing everything for you, it seems to me that you refuse me everything; that I am your slave, rewarded for the most sincere and tender devotion by the cruellest severity. The more I abase myself, the more I annihilate myself before you, the more I ennoble in my own eyes

the object of my love, and love itself.' He added something else, which I scarcely heard. But these sublime ideas did not give him the strength to wrench my hand from the place it occupied, any more than his fine speeches could divert my mind from the one thought that could now interest it.

"We were both more or less motionless, he doubtless fearing that the slightest movement on his part, given the position of my hand, might destroy his illusion; and I, for my part, equally afraid of weakening my hopes. The trembling that shook his limbs was sufficient warning that he could not long contain the fire consuming him. Indeed, he assumed a fairly suitable posture. I was lying stretched out, in a state of complete abandon. I kept silent, for fear that some ill-judged word might make him abandon an undertaking of which I was far from disapproving. I gazed at him most tenderly. Begging, imploring as my eyes might be, they still expressed only faintly the ardour and excess of my desires. My body advanced to meet my conqueror. My imagination anticipating my delights, I already fancied I could feel him within me, when suddenly, abandoning an enterprise almost completed, he threw himself down beside me, exclaiming: 'No, you would think I had meant to deceive you. I can love you, adore you, without hoping for any reward.' — 'Ah!' said Eléonore, eagerly interrupting her friend, 'tender and loving as that exclamation may have been, my dear, it was really quite out of place.' — 'Oh, certainly! He had no time to say anything more. The violence of his desires, the restraint he had imposed upon himself for so long, the movements he had just made, who knows what else! His imagination, his love, were enough to bring him, all by himself and without assistance, to the height of pleasure. But the spasm was so violent and prolonged, the convulsions so powerful, the delirium so intense, that the sight almost made me forget that he had been wrong to flee from my arms. I leaned over him and covered him with kisses. I dare say that, deep down, the hope of rekindling a fire that had died away at such an inopportune moment helped to make my caresses more ardent and more tender; but I wasted my time.

"In vain, with the finest handkerchief, wiping away the traces of his pleasure, did I seize every opportunity and employ every means

to revive my lover. Nature, in bringing him to his climax unaided, had made such an effort that she was utterly exhausted. The spasm itself had not yet subsided, and the delirium continued unabated. He was no longer master of himself. This lover, only moments before so ardent, so eager, so anxious to please me, was no longer capable of rendering me the smallest service. The slightest indulgence was beyond his strength.

"You know, my dear, that a woman, even when quite sure of her ground, rarely tells a man what she wants. You can imagine how little inclined I was to reveal what was in my mind. So I kept silent. He left me as soon as he had recovered a little, and I was left firmly convinced that love and delicacy can sometimes be carried too far.

"However, I no longer knew how I ought to behave towards him. I was too certain that he loved me, that he loved me with idolatrous devotion, to bring myself to torment him, even for his own happiness; and my favours, now lavished upon him, would soon have become insipid. I had carried my caprices so far, and he had raised his love to such heights, that we could only both decline from there, and consequently grow bored with one another, perhaps even end by quarrelling. Business matters obliged him to go away. We shall both retain charming memories which indifference or boredom might perhaps have erased."

As the two young friends chatted in this way, they had allowed the hour of the performance to pass. It was too late to dress for the occasion. They settled down, or rather remained, on a sofa, and continued their merry conversation. They talked a thousand follies. In recounting the transports of a lover, it was necessary to repeat his praises, his raptures over the charms he had been permitted to see. To convey the intensity of his sensations, they described how susceptible they were to being moved, and to what excesses they carried their delirium and self-abandonment. They spoke of how sweet, in those delightful moments, was a tender, loving kiss, plucked and received by a voluptuous mouth. As they talked of kisses, their lips happened to come very close, and instinctively pressed together. Two wanton tongues began to play with one another in that little space. In a simultaneous movement, the two friends slipped aside their fichus, which

had been very carelessly arranged, examined those globes that had been the object of a lover's praise, touched the soft skin, kissed the little rosebuds, and brought them close together. Then Eléonore, more fully developed as a result of her transformations, bolder but no more inflamed, stretched her obliging friend out on the sofa and exposed her most secret charms.

It is delightful to be praised by a connoisseur, by a rival; but Eléonore's compliments were far less sweet to Adèle than the caresses of a loving hand. Soon, having freed themselves of every encumbering garment, and equally inflamed by the pleasures they experienced and those they gave one another, they abandoned themselves to all their transports. This sweet play lasted so long, and their caresses were so ardent, that at last, exhausted, they lay still, gathering into their souls the memory of the delights that had just flooded their senses.

Eléonore interrupted this charming reverie. "What! Are your senses already weary? Are you no longer capable of responding to the transports of your good friend? I know a way to revive you, lovely languishing creature. Leave it to me." Adèle was tired, but she was only too willing to regain her strength. Besides, she had found her companion so charming and so skilful that she readily believed in her talents. She therefore submitted to everything. Eléonore made her get down on all fours, took up a handful of birch rods intended for the correction of a little dog, and now put them to a much merrier use.

She began by striking gently those white, rounded buttocks; the two plump cheeks drew together, moved apart and quivered, while a faint flush was already beginning to animate that alabaster skin. Meanwhile, a caressing hand massaged the area around the thickly wooded retreat; a wanton finger alternately tickled its upper part or probed its depths. She struck harder. The patient could no longer distinguish pain from pleasure; twisting and writhing in every direction, she fled from one as much as she sought the other. "Leave me alone!" she cried. "That is enough. I can bear no more. Ah! Go on, do not abandon me!" And a thousand other exclamations, apparently very contradictory, yet all entirely appropriate. The beautiful flagellatrix, herself greatly excited by what she was doing, by what she saw and by what she heard, carried out very badly the request that she

should continue, and far too well the request that she should stop. "Enough! It is too much. Come, my senses no longer need to be aroused. If you wish to consume me, to burn me with desire, you have succeeded admirably. Come, bring your loving lips close to my burning ones. Your tongue alone is sweet enough to make me experience pleasure without mingling it with pain. Come, let my tongue, caressing your most secret charms in its turn, repay you for the pleasures with which you are about to overwhelm me." Eléonore made no reply; but, yielding to the invitation, she found herself lying on her side, and the enflamed Adèle, without wasting a moment, proceeded to do as she had just promised, stretching herself beside her in equally convenient fashion.

Then they lay together most comfortably, responded to one another perfectly, and said no more. Taking turns to press between their lips, kissing, sucking and tickling with the tip of the tongue that little prominence which love brings into bloom, the intensity of their pleasures heightened the ardour of their caresses. Each was eager to bring her sweet friend to the point she herself was on the verge of reaching. Both too excited, too ardent not to feel their desires rekindled, they continued; four times they attained that goal which an inept lover, and above all a husband, so rarely enables his cold better half to reach. After this, as though Nature had lost every other faculty save that of experiencing the utmost pleasure, they remained in a state of intoxication, a delirium seldom attained and perhaps even more difficult to describe. Every part of their being needed nothing but rest. A deep drowsiness weighed upon all their limbs. Only one spot, amid their general exhaustion, still preserved the sacred fire. Each gathered together what little strength remained to her, afraid of depriving her companion of such sweet sensations, afraid of giving the signal for retreat.

Everything must end for mortals. Weary and exhausted, the two friends at last gave way, intoxicated and utterly spent. "Good God!" cried the fair-haired Adèle, "what a torrent of pleasure you have poured over my whole being! No, I have never experienced sensations so intense, so sweet, so manifold. Your voluptuous caresses have fixed them in my memory. You have left me, and yet it still seems to

me that you are here; you are still here. I feel quite sure that it is now impossible for me to seek any fresh pleasures. A weariness, a total exhaustion, has annihilated my desires; and yet... Ah, my lovely friend, why are you not a man? Surely no man has ever made me experience such immense happiness. I can imagine nothing greater; and yet it is not over. I can bear no more!... I am dead. You could dispel this utter prostration, if..." As she spoke, she laid her hand upon her companion, moving it towards the place where the thing she was referring to ought to have been; and at that very instant the year came to an end, and Eléonore changed sex.

I shall not tell you whether Adèle's surprise was greater than her joy; but, without troubling herself to explain so strange a phenomenon, she hastened to take advantage of it. Like a gourmand who, having satisfied his hunger with the first course, finds a fresh appetite at the sight of a second, she too seemed to recover her strength for a new exercise, and stoutly held her own against her lover, who, quite fresh and in the flower of his youth, took a very long time to bring his transports to an end.

Women, as we know, are always prey to one temptation or another. Scarcely had a gentle sleep soothed the demon of lust when the demon of curiosity came to awaken the pretty blonde. She gazed at what had so opportunely come beneath her hand; although it was in a less splendid condition, she could still see enough, and above all she had done enough to be thoroughly convinced of its existence. But how could such a prodigy have come about? For, after all, she was quite certain, absolutely certain, that she had seen and touched something quite different there, undoubtedly very pretty, but which, in her eyes at least, was not worth what had taken its place.

With a very tender kiss, she awoke the sleeper, and then put to him the questions suggested by her demon. Eléonore was inexorable; he absolutely refused to reveal his secret. He withdrew, leaving her more curious than ever and determined to try everything. She resolved to refuse him every favour until he had satisfied her curiosity; but he was so charming, so loving, and knew so well what suited ladies, that there was no way of maintaining such a resolution. And

so they continued, one allowing herself to be enjoyed, the other keeping silent.

One day, after some sweet dalliance, Eléonore, whether to amuse himself or to revive his own spirits, was exploring his mistress. He admired a plump, fleshy back, and kissed in turn the thousand little dimples which Love, seeking a place in which to nestle, had doubtless hollowed out while trying his strength. His wanton hand pressed those round, white, soft and yielding forms: they were a delight to behold, a rapture to touch. His hand was between them, precisely where there is a little retreat, frequented from time immemorial in Greece and Italy, but more neglected in our own climes. In some of our ladies, pain extinguishes every other sensation; in the greater number, shame, prejudice and laziness forbid entry. A small number, more accommodating and wiser, persuaded that one can never open too many doors to pleasure, allow a lover to introduce there an exciting finger, or something even better.

I cannot tell you whether the charming Adèle knew this final resource of love through experience or theory, or whether her consent sprang from sheer complaisance, curiosity, or even confidence in her friend's intentions. Be that as it may, she allowed a finger, even more wanton than the hand to which it belonged, to detach itself and explore this narrow retreat. Indeed, she submitted to it so graciously that the finger entered to its full length, remained there, and made a few movements.

That was quite enough to reveal how constricted this prison was, and how tightly its elastic walls pressed upon the prisoner from every side. These reflections naturally gave rise to certain desires. Eléonore's imagination was at work, growing ever more inflamed. There are some proposals one scarcely knows how to make, and when one has been a man for so short a time, one is more embarrassed than most. He did not realise that, in truth, the hardest part was already done, and that in the game of love a gesture expresses far more than words. Yet words must be spoken, and he really did not know where to begin. He remained in the same position, giving a few kisses on her shoulders and her ear, and saying nothing. Adèle said no more; she allowed him to proceed, and her acquiescence was sufficient proof

that the game did not displease her. Another finger was introduced elsewhere; whether because the position was not favourable, or because of the irresistible attraction of novelty, it made little progress, and would have produced even less effect had not another hand, abandoning all those contours which her lover's eyes and lips could never tire of caressing, come in search of charms more sensitive, more easily excited, and already moistened by the tears of desire.

Learned both through his own experience and through the study he had made of his friend, Eléonore increased or diminished, as occasion required, the liveliness and gentleness of his tickling caresses. Adèle's sighs became numerous; almost as numerous, and even more ardent, were her exclamations and entreaties. Her movements and convulsions grew rapid and hurried. Unable to remain in a position in which her chest, already wearied by the pounding of her heart, could scarcely keep pace with her breathing, and in which the most excited part of her body could hardly move, she bent her knees, supporting her body on her arms; she raised her hips, and placed herself so as better to satisfy her lover's lustful gaze, and even the secret desires he did not dare confess.

Adèle had completed that course of pleasure which our reckless ardour almost always hastens too quickly. Eléonore, who knew that the happy female sex is always willing to begin again with a little gentle touching, was preparing his lover for another round. He soon realised that the time had come to offer her a more substantial tribute. Indeed, however intense and deeply felt the preceding pleasures had been, they were imperfect because they had not been shared; for good Nature, among her many blessings, has ordained that friendship should lighten our sorrows through sharing, while love should multiply our pleasures a hundredfold.

Eléonore knew too well both the art of loving and the art of pleasing to be ignorant of these consoling truths. But, wholly absorbed in his own desires and in everything he saw, uncertain whether he should act or speak, and even what he ought to do, he remained suspended in indecision, leaving Adèle waiting. She turned her head; her half-open mouth, the tip of her tongue, invited a kiss. Her moist eyes pleaded even more eloquently. He abandoned everything to give

her that kiss, and then assumed a posture suited to the occasion. His stubborn finger alone had retained its position; at last he withdrew it. How tempted he was to replace it! Whether from shame or timidity, he did nothing. Adèle afterwards maintained that she would never have allowed it, but Eléonore was always convinced that, at that moment, she would have let him proceed.

No doubt few people will be inclined to pity this lover for being in the position in which we have left him. But who does not know that the human heart, avid to satisfy new fancies, forgets all the blessings it possesses, thinking only of the things it longs for and lacks? What more could Eléonore have asked of the gods? A charming mistress, intoxicated with love and burning with desire, was surrendering herself entirely to him. How could he compare what he desired with what he already possessed? The weakest finger could penetrate there without difficulty, though not without some effort. Thin, pink, rounded lips, like those of a young child, concealed a little bud of a more vivid colour, quite distinct from the surrounding parts. Only when pleasure reached its highest pitch did it shed into this pretty retreat the tears it brings forth. And the white satin surrounding it, the rounded shape of the little mound that bore it (one might have taken it for something else), the softness, delicacy and modest quantity of what shaded it: everything was just as one could wish. And if the rosebud nipples gleaming on Adèle's cheeks, and the alabaster globes stirred by her breathing, did not exhaust his caresses, there were still, close beside the cup of love, two other enchanting apples, surpassing everything in softness. No mishap had ever withered them; no indifferent person had ever penetrated so far. Only the most beloved and favoured lover could take them in his hands, and could scarcely even see them. Yet, with his mind filled by another object, for the first time in the arms of his charming friend he tasted imperfect pleasures. He left her, still preoccupied with the same fancy, and began to ponder how he might satisfy it.

When, smitten with a young beauty who is still innocent, or when you yourself are timid, whether through inexperience or excess of love, and you seek a moment that will not too greatly alarm her innocence or your own timidity, you choose one when a company,

inattentive or too occupied with its own concerns, saves you from the embarrassment of being alone together. There you speak, and the fair one, quite sure that you cannot venture any further, listens to you. You yourself, less troubled by the prospect of how things will end, speak more freely. Sometimes, indeed, this situation, which seems so harmless, has served more than one bold fellow; and the hand that is pushed away when the two are alone often manages to secure a pledge when they are in company.

Eléonore became convinced that, to make the proposal he had in mind to his mistress, he could choose no moment more favourable than one when, quite sure that he could not possibly carry it out, she would listen to him calmly. In truth, feeling ashamed and not knowing how to broach so extraordinary an idea, he felt more reassured and chose a moment when she had company to talk to her about it.

Adèle listened without taking offence. Deep down, she was curious; besides, her lover assured her that, even if this method did not entirely satisfy their desires, it gave them an extraordinary intensity: it spun them out, prolonged them and sustained them. The experiment she had made a short while before gave her some reason to believe these claims. Eléonore could see that she was listening, and that she was taking pleasure in what he said; he grew more animated. Hope inflamed him; never had he been so tender, so importunate; never had his beautiful friend granted him any favour to equal this last one. He did and said so much that Adèle realised he would do anything to obtain what he was asking, and she recalled the secret he had so obstinately refused to reveal. She began by concealing her willingness, then, adopting a playful tone, said: "You surely cannot be serious, proposing such a thing to me! And I am very foolish to have listened to such nonsense for so long. How can you desire pleasures which I would not share? Do you imagine that I need any stimulants to be happy in your arms? My love for you is enough to set my senses ablaze." One can imagine how ill-timed these tender words were. They were promptly interrupted. "What, my lovely friend, are you astonished that I wish to pay homage to every part of you? There is not a nook in your entire charming person into which I would not wish to penetrate completely. You are my lover; your whole being

belongs to me, and to deprive me of the smallest part of it is to rob me of my property, and of my most precious possession."

Adèle, whose mind was occupied with quite another idea, scarcely listened to him; and, without answering his speeches, she brought up the secret he had so often refused to disclose. Eléonore explained, as best he could, without compromising himself, that this secret was of such a nature that it absolutely could not be revealed to anyone. Then, returning to his favourite subject: "You know Julie! You know how M... had abandoned her. Their quarrel was most serious, and seemed destined to last for ever. Well, I have it on good authority that, by submitting, under the guise of innocence, to a certain game which she nevertheless knew very well, everything was settled, to the great astonishment of those who were unaware of what was going on behind the scenes. And Hortense—can you imagine it?—that eternal friend who has lavished his fortune upon her for so long. Could anyone be less young, less pretty? But she has certain secret charms which not everyone knows how to make use of. I could go on for ever if I wished to tell you all that can be said on this subject. How many women have thus succeeded in winning back and keeping faithless husbands! Certainly, when, after ten years of marriage, one sees attentions, consideration and tender words returning to the household, one can wager that the lady, by means of certain new favours, has rekindled her husband's senses and imagination. Nothing is so flattering as what one has no right to demand; and the proverb about a mouse with only one hole is soon caught..." Eléonore continued in this vein, explaining his ideas rather poorly, for one never speaks well when one is not being listened to. In vain did he employ all his skill to turn the conversation away from the secret he wished to keep hidden, and all his eloquence to present his beautiful friend with libertine ideas that might bring her attention back to the subject that occupied his thoughts. He achieved nothing. He was reproached for not being in love, and came close to a complete falling-out.

It has always been said that women cannot keep a secret; yet it is certain that, for as long as Eléonore belonged to that sex, she never revealed the one on which the destiny of her life depended. Now he was very weak; and, as is customary with the male sex, he produced

the finest arguments imaginable. The malicious Adèle, who could read his soul, allowed him to examine closely the object of his fancy; she let him repeat this game, the prime mover of all his thoughts, time and again, and each time it renewed his desires. Neither cunning nor force was any longer practicable; the matter was so badly placed that he needed her explicit consent, or else he was clinging to a condition impossible to fulfil. Had he been wise, had he been a woman, he would have abandoned, or pretended to abandon, his ridiculous project. By ceasing to dwell on it, his desires would have become less impetuous, or at least would have seemed less intense to his adversary; she would not have been so much on her guard, and he could have pursued his plans with greater calm, perseverance and, consequently, success. But presumptuous man does not know how to keep quiet and wait for the favourable moment; he wants to take everything by storm. Constantly he returned to what was called his persecution, repeating arguments, tender protestations and outbursts of passion whose futility he had experienced a hundred times, always flattering himself that this time, at last, they would move her and persuade her.

Meanwhile, curious, mischievous Adèle asked a thousand questions which, by one more or less roundabout route, always tended towards her goal. "Really," she said, "I cannot understand you. If you have decidedly acquired such an eccentric taste, why address yourself to me? As handsome as you are, and remembering, no doubt, your former profession as a woman, it is impossible that you should not find some obliging friend who, seduced by your charms, would indulge all your caprices. Believe me, your pleasures would be much more intense."

I once knew a man who, claiming that all tastes were natural, made no secret of his own. The women used to tease him, saying jokingly: "No doubt, in order to bring him gradually back to the right path, they would show him extraordinary indulgence; but he maintained that, charming as we might be, we were no match for a boy, and gave us arguments on the subject which at the time made us laugh, and which I should have forgotten had you not reminded me of them. So do not be surprised if I am so knowledgeable; draw

no unfortunate conclusions to the detriment of my innocence. All my knowledge is theoretical."

Eléonore was not particularly pleased with Adèle's bantering tone; he would gladly have interrupted her, but when one is pleading, one does not take the floor away from another. Besides, he was quite content with the subject of the conversation. Adèle continued: "I quite believe that, if one considers only one aspect, a man is rather like a woman. As I am, having none of the physical disabilities of the female sex, I can seduce a novice such as yourself; we have some agreeable details with which one may amuse oneself; but for a connoisseur, we lack what is essential.

"The pleasure experienced in love is made up of two parts: that which one gives and that which one receives. The latter is increased by the existence of the former, and the hope, the certainty, of the happiness we cause almost without limit increases the happiness we ourselves experience. Perhaps it is possible, as you claim, for a woman to endure this operation without pain, and even with pleasure; yet you will agree that there is another, the outcome of which seems much more certain. And yet, in every situation, it is only through excess of love or self-love that a man persuades himself that he is making us happy. What proof has he? Our demonstrations, our movements, our sighs, our words, our convulsions! Is none of this acted? Art, indeed, usually surpasses nature. How many women are there who find enjoyment only in the most tranquil contemplation, for whom the slightest movement, a single word, is a distraction that utterly destroys the work of the most tireless and considerate lover? And whatever our manner of enjoyment, the moment of our supreme happiness almost always escapes you.

"With a man, things are quite different. His happiness is visible, tangible. They say that most men are better suited than we are to this particular fancy; but whether the effect is pain or pleasure, it is certain. At every moment, my friend, you will be able to ascertain it for yourself. You will have no need to fear the slightest deception. A thousand signs, whether burning or easily discerned, will tell him at precisely the right moment whether pleasure is increasing or diminishing. And more than that! When I think of it, I envy your happiness. Knowing

through your own experience the pleasure that will arise beneath your fortunate hands, no subtle nuance will escape you; you will be able to hasten it or suspend it at will, unite it with your own, and, certain of the sensations you are causing, always enjoy yourselves together. In short, whatever the flash of supreme happiness may be, you will seize two of them and die at the same moment."

Eléonore had no answer to all this nonsense. It served the malicious Adèle's plans admirably. Skillfully concealing her curiosity while feeding her lover's desires, she came within a hair's breadth of achieving her aim twenty times over. "What!" Eléonore kept saying to himself, always on the verge of giving in. "Could I renounce the sweetest advantage a mortal can desire? And why? Ah! I should have no excuse. Nothing would remain to me but the shame and regret of my weakness. If I yielded to love, to an imperious and irresistible feeling, then love, you who bestow every blessing and make us endure every suffering, would console me. Could I regret a sex that would change all my affections? Every day I would bless a fortunate indiscretion that had prevented me from seeing the happiness of my life destroyed. But what excuse, what consolation would remain to me today? Shamefully weak, I would have yielded to a shameful whim. The moment that saw it fulfilled would also see it disappear and die away.

"Charming sex, sex I have no wish to lose, it is for you that the treasures of love are reserved. A single glance, the slightest attention, is enough to set ablaze the heart you wish to charm. The man consumed by desire and love languishes between hope and fear; he does not know whether to let his heart or his reason speak, whether to listen to prudence or passion; he trembles at every moment lest, through excessive boldness or excessive timidity, he lose the one thing that can embellish his destiny. Meanwhile, the woman who causes so many torments, anxieties, hopes and ardent wishes, deliciously stirred, confident in the power of her charms, delighted to have touched and subdued the man she has chosen, already enjoys her victory. She allows her soul to grow warm in the flames she has kindled, savouring the pleasures of vanity and the voluptuousness of sentiment; she waits for the day, the moment, when, no longer able

to resist her lover's desires, or those with which she herself is consumed, she will surrender to the man she loves and allow him to find happiness by showering her with pleasure. And you, then, ardent and passionate lovers, what are you beside your mistress? Delighted to hear, happy to elicit those lively exclamations, those sweet words from a lover in delirium, can you doubt that her transports are repeated more often, prolonged further, and are greater and sweeter than all your own?"

All these fine reflections did not give poor Eléonore the strength to resist curious, skilful Adèle. Day by day he grew weaker; day by day his ridiculous longing became more violent. Twenty times his secret had almost escaped him. It was a miracle that Adèle still did not know the mystery of the transformation, but this miracle could not last much longer. Fortunately for Eléonore, the year was drawing to a close, and she was becoming a woman. From that moment there was no more weakness; her secret became inviolable. Shuddering each day at the ridiculous danger she had run, the lovely Eléonore passed this new year in a succession of pleasures; and, wise and discreet from then on, she enjoyed in turn, under these different forms, all the pleasures of humanity.

Young beauties, if ever you meet this all-too-fortunate Proteus in his male form, do not resist him. Believe me, you will never have a lover more attentive to your pleasure; no one will know your tastes and caprices better, or satisfy them more completely. Love him without fear; he knows so well the full worth of a loving woman. To him, his mistress is an inexhaustible treasure of happiness and delight. If your happiness cannot last for ever, pity him, for his inconstant nature compels him to burn with desire for another sex. But imitate the voluptuous Eléonore, separated from the Sylph who taught her such sweet pleasures. Though she never ceases to regret him, she has not renounced mortal lovers. Her soul, opened by him to the most exquisite sensations, still seeks and finds them; and the memory of enchanting moments spent in his arms will teach you to find similar ones and prepare you for the most intoxicating illusions.

As for you, men, flee the lovely Eléonore. If a single day of perfect happiness is enough to embellish your existence, you may surrender

yourselves to charms of too great a power. But if the misfortune of an entire lifetime frightens you, flee her! A single day of bliss, a single kiss from Eléonore, and you will love her for ever. The memory of her charms will never fade from your mind; you will desire her always. You will see the faithless creature nourish, through deceitful tokens of friendship, the sweet hope that you may possess her again; but she will laugh at your torments and your tears. She sharpens your desires, yet has no wish to satisfy them. Ungrateful woman! She has forgotten the pleasures she tasted in your arms; other arms are open to her, and she flies to them. Soon you will see that fortunate rival just as unhappy, but no less in love, than yourself.

The audacious Eléonore scorns the tactics of ordinary women, who believe that it is only by refusing their admirers that they can keep them, and who, once conquered, have no further means of defence. She yields to whoever knows how to please her; she yields to the man she wishes to enslave. Confident in her charms, confident in the intoxicating sensuality of her embraces, she fears neither being forgotten nor being abandoned. Having granted everything, she knows how to refuse; to grant everything again, and refuse once more; and thus to keep the man she has made happy perpetually sighing for her.

She delights in seeing herself surrounded by intoxicated admirers; her glances, her words, her slightest movements remind each one of them of the perfections of her entire person. It is no fantastic imagination that presents them with the ideal perfection of the beauty they adore; they have seen that enchanting beauty, held it in their arms, pressed it to themselves. They accuse their treacherous memories of giving them only a faint impression of so many charms; they wish only to see them once more, so that they may never forget them. Alas! Perhaps they will again enjoy this inestimable happiness; but their thirst for love will not be quenched. They will have renewed the poison flowing through their veins, increased their desires, and will remain just as uncertain of the success of their wishes. Fools! They would have been far better off fleeing and never having known such happiness, since it was not destined to last for ever.

Eléonore has too much experience, is too learned in the art of love, and is convinced that men soon abandon the constant and faithful mistress. She knows that a woman has more ways of loving, a greater certainty of victory, and that it is therefore folly to content oneself with a single happiness and a single conquest. Flee her, then, for it is impossible to see her without falling in love, impossible to keep her, and still more impossible to forget her once you have been intoxicated by sensual pleasure in her arms.

THE END