

THE SECOND SUN

If there is a charming place in the world to take the waters, it is surely Spa. One finds in combination there all the picturesque qualities of wild nature and all the comforts of the most exquisite research. One can be a poet in the morning and an epicure in the evening—and only a few hours on the railway separates Spa from Paris.

Here is the approximate genre of hygienic treatment followed by one of the so-called invalids who found himself at Spa fifteen years ago. A poor writer, pursued during the winter by balls, dramatic spectacles, study and the social whirlwind, in order to cure himself he needed pure air, verdant countryside, undemanding distractions and perhaps, strictly speaking, a little water extracted from a mineral spring.

Thus, waking up late in the morning, he roamed the countryside, visited the magnificent manor of Justenville, sat down in the shade of the ruins of the old Château de Franchement, and always came back from these artistic excursions fairly early, so as not to miss the pleasures of the evening.

Among the brilliant and joyful host that gathered at Spa, an old phantom of sorts was seen wandering, whose status as an invalid no one could conscientiously contest. Lazarus emerged from the tomb could surely not have displayed a more livid and emaciated face. Sometimes he followed fervently the prescriptions of the doctor who presides over the waters and seemed to be clinging to life with all his strength. At other times he threw himself into the most dangerous excesses, drinking like four Englishmen—not water, but wine—consuming his nights gambling, and passing disdainfully by the fuming waves of the fountain of Pouchon.

The irregularity of the hygienic habits of the stranger was reproduced in his social habits. Sometimes he stayed alone and apart, and scarcely replied to the servants who asked for his instructions. At other times he was gracious, assiduous, amiable and witty with everyone, and caused the strangeness of his appearance to be forgotten by means of the section of his speech and the melodious softness of his voice.

One day, when the Parisian *feuilletonist* was walking past the spring of Sauvenièrre, preoccupied by some novel or other whose idea he was developing, the stranger suddenly accosted him.

“Monsieur,” he said, without any other preamble, “If you’re looking for a subject to write about, I’ll give you one that would, I think, lend itself to dramatic development in a singular fashion. Sit down here, if you please, and lend me your ear.

“The story opens in Copenhagen...”

The man of letters found the opening sufficiently original and unexpected for it to be worth the trouble of listening to the story. The old invalid, who expressed himself quite fluently in French, collected his thoughts for a few moments, placed his hands on his knees, and fixed the strange gaze of his large green-tinted eyes upon his auditor.

The story, as I have just told you, Monsieur, begins in Copenhagen. No city in Europe, especially if one considers its population, has a greater number of colleges than Copenhagen. In 1479, Christian I founded an *alma universitas* with statutes drawn up by the Archbishop of Uppsala, endowments of land and various privileges. Christian II enriched it with wealth confiscated from the clergy. Christian VII increased the number of professors and modified the statutes in such a way as to rejuvenate them and render them useful and practicable. Today, numerous royal or private foundations give bursaries to two hundred pupils; a cloister serves as lodging for a hundred others, who also receive free books and food.

The University of Copenhagen has a dozen extraordinary professors and sixteen ordinary ones; the rank and salary of the former correspond to the rank and salary of a major, without counting the four écus paid annually and personally by the majority of the pupils that they instruct.

Doctor Magnussen had been the Extraordinary Professor of Philosophy at the University of Copenhagen for nineteen years, eleven months and two days when he fell gravely ill and died.

The death of that man, one of the most knowledgeable in Denmark, whose modest and laborious life had been as honorable and pure before God as before men, left his widow and his daughter Stierna

in a state verging on poverty. He bequeathed them nothing for a heritage by his library, a few scientific instruments, a little house in the suburbs and a sum of three or four hundred écus, which would give them an income of a hundred livres at the very most.

In order to live, the two women had been counting on the pension to which the widows of professors were entitled after twenty years service on the part of their husbands. Alas, those twenty years were twenty-eight days short of accomplishment, and the rector, after consulting the other professors and the minister himself, declared to Madame Magnussen with tears in his eyes that the letter of the law had to be rigorously observed, and that she would not be inscribed on the pension list.

The widow received this sad response to her application with more resignation than she had expected of herself. She accepted her fate courageously and resolved to live on her industry and handiwork.

This proved more difficult to do than she thought. In vain she asked everyone she knew for embroidery work, or even dressmaking, but no one wanted to entrust a lady with work that professional seamstresses would inevitably do better and at a lower price. The resource on which the widow and her daughter were counting was therefore lacking; they decided, as a last resort, to take advantage of their house, and to let the dead man's bedroom and library to two boarders.

It cost Madame Magnussen a great deal to introduce strangers into her home in this way, and to become, in a way, their servant, but she was able to put so much dignity and noble simplicity into the manner in which she carried out her humble duties, that she only seemed more worthy of consideration and respect. Her first guests were, in any case, persons attached to the University and thus, so to speak friends.

One of them was an old Extraordinary Professor who taught Theology, the other a young man appointed, by virtue of the modifications caused by the death of Dr. Magnussen, to the Ordinary chair of Medicine. His name was Bertel Granh, and did not take long to obtain pardon from the widow for his twenty-six years, thanks to his correct conduct, the mildness of his mores and his passionate love of study. He only came down from his room at meal-times, said a few kind words to Madame Magnussen, bowed timidly to Stierna, and, on leaving the table, returned to his scientific labor—unless it was a holiday, and he was invited to take tea in company with his old colleague and two or three friends of the professor's widow.

A year after her husband's death, Madame Magnussen fell dangerously ill. Dr. Bertel Granh lavished his care upon her, so devotedly and so expertly that he succeeded in warding off the fever that had put the poor woman's life in jeopardy. The recovery of the convalescent was celebrated by a family feast. Stierna embroidered a tobacco-pouch for Dr. Granh, and the latter resumed his solitary and laborious life as before.

In the meantime, the old Extraordinary Professor completed the twenty years that gave him the right to retire from the University, and he resolved to spend the days that remained to him in the village where he had been born. The loss of the boarder was a significant matter in Madame Magnussen's household, raising the serious question of how he might be replaced. Bertel, when consulted, proposed a new professor, a childhood friend, who had come to teach medicine in one of the University's three Ordinary Chairs. Ole Matthiesen thus came to occupy the room that had fallen vacant, and was not long delayed, like his friend, in gaining the affection of their hostess.

Good fortune seemed to have returned in full to the widow's house, and her prayers thanked God every day for the consolations he deigned to accord her; a mother would not have been happier and more contented in the midst of her children than she was in the company of the two young men. Stierna lived alongside them as if she were their sister; she supervised the bleaching of their linen, put her care and pride into keeping it in good condition, and the last thing in the world she would have wanted was to leave them the least concern regarding their material life. You should have seen her in the morning, in her little corset and a short skirt, with her lovely arms bare, putting the cravats and vests she had just bleached out to dry on the washing-line in the courtyard, and hastening to make breakfast as soon as the cathedral clock struck seven-thirty. The two professors never had to wait a minute for their first meal, and they set off for the University afterwards with their arms fraternally linked, not without having received a maternal greeting from Madame Magnussen and a smile from Stierna's rosy lips that said: "Au revoir!"

When they came back at midday, the young woman had replaced her pretty morning garb with a dress that was simple, but did justice to the suppleness of her figure and left the smooth contour of her

swan-like neck all its grace and purity. Ordinarily, she knotted her blonde hair with ashy gleams on top of her head, which thus left uncovered a forehead as white as ivory, on which an angelic serenity was ensconced. The large near-black lashes that veiled her blue eyes gave her naïve and noble physiognomy an expression of ineffable candor that had nothing terrestrial about it. That glint of another world, moreover, was evident in her entire person; her feet did not seem to be made for trampling earthly dust; her hands, before which Thorwaldsen¹ would have knelt, retained a divine whiteness in spite of her domestic chores; finally, one could not hear her vibrant and melodious voice without being moved. Everything—including her name, Stierna, which means *star* in Danish—concurred in rendering that harmony of grace and celestial virginity more complete and irresistible.

To see the two young professors going to the University, arm in arm, knowing that they had been childhood friends and were living under the same roof, one would naturally have believed them to be united by the most tender amity and the most absolute confidence. That was not the case, however. Under the appearances of a cordial fraternity, they lived more isolated from one another than if they had been separated by a great distance. Always ready to exchange the little services of which they might mutually have need, to settle a bill, to lend a book or to explain the obscure meaning of a difficult passage, they had never felt the need to say an affectionate word or to deposit in one another's hearts the slightest intimate thought. Grave and melancholy during meals, scarcely raising their eyes toward Stierna, they only spoke to her in order to reply to her questions; Matthiesen never showed her more intimacy than Granh, and Granh made every effort never to cross the respectful limits at which Matthiesen stopped.

Madame Magnussen and Stierna put no difference into their affection and their conduct with regard to the two lodgers—but in each of them, that fashion of acting was natural, while in the two young men it resulted from real calculation, tacit convention and a set purpose that would have been evident to souls less naïve and confident than those of the professors widow and her daughter.

For two entire years, nothing changed, at least in appearance, in the relationships between these four individuals—except that Ole and Bertel became increasingly somber, and an amicable reproach from Madame Magnussen or an affectionate reprimand from Stierna could not always succeed in restoring a little serenity to their brows.

The young woman and her mother attributed this sadness to the fatigue of study. As for the two professors, neither of them was unaware of the true cause of their mutual and somber depression. Each of them had read his comrade's heart. However careful they were not to meet one another's eyes, hazard occasionally brought the glances of hatred that they darted at one another into collision.

One night, Ole Matthiesen, who could not sleep, had got out of bed and tried to distract himself with study, that opium which, perhaps better than any other, can numb the passions, suspend thought and daze the mind by means of intoxicating vertigo. Absorbed in his reading, he suddenly shivered, for the door opened abruptly and Berthel's pale and somber face appeared.

"We can't go on living like this," said the latter. "Don't you agree, Ole Matthiesen?"

"Yes, Berthel Granh," Ole replied, getting to his feet to take down two pistols that were hanging on the wall. What you've just said, I've been thinking for a long time. When you came in, I was wondering whether I ought to go find you. The death of one of us, that's what's required."

"Listen to me, Ole—a duel would put the whole city in turmoil. The survivor would be lost forever, forced to renounce his title of professor, obliged to flee Demark or submit to the rigor of the law. He would only be satisfied in his hatred—and we want more than that, don't we, Ole?"

"I understand you, Bertel. Yes, let the hazards of chance decide between us. The one who is not favored must die, but die in secret, without anyone knowing his fate, without anyone in the world being able to discover what has become of him."

"That's what I wanted to propose to you. Very well, pick up that Bible and that dagger I see in your belt. Here's mine, for we've been wearing daggers for a year. In a few seconds, the cathedral bells will chime midnight. At the moment when the last chime begins to sound, we'll each bury our blade in the pages of the book. The one who picks out the letter closest to the beginning of the alphabet will dispose of the destiny of the other."

They waited for a few moments in silence, their eyes lowered and their hearts pounding; then midnight began to chime. At the final stroke, they slid the daggers between the pages of the holy

¹ The Danish sculptor Bertel Thorwaldsen (1779-1844).

volume, profaned by their sanguinary pact. Each one search avidly for the letter picked out by his adversary.

“A D!” cried Bertel.

“You have a B,” Ole replied.

A mortal silence fell between the two enemies. Ole was the first to break it. “So be it,” he murmured, in a low hoarse voice. “I will keep my word, and you shall never hear mention of me again. How much time will you give me?”

“Three days.”

“That’s more than I’ll need.” Ole added, with bitter irony: “You’re generous, Bertel—let me be.”

Bertel went back to his room, his heart gripped by an iron hand. He felt a thousand times more miserable than before. Far from soothing the distress he was suffering, the loss of Ole added to its harsh violence. He wanted to go back to his old friend and release him from his fatal promise, but he found the other’s door locked, and when he knocked and begged him to open it, not only did he receive no response, but Madame Magnussen, woken up by the unaccustomed noise came running, hastily clad in a dressing-gown, to ask anxiously whether Bertel felt ill. The latter, disconcerted, admitted an indisposition, and was obliged to resign himself to drinking strong herbal tea and submitting to the care of the worthy and obstinate woman until the moment when he could, without implausibility, assure her that he was no longer feeling poorly and that his illness had dissipated. Only then did Madame Magnussen go back to bed, congratulating herself on the success of her cure, and not without admiring more than ever the marvelous virtue of centaury² tea for curing stomach cramps and nervous spasms.

The next day, Ole and Bertel went to the University arm in arm, as usual. They did not exchange a single word, but that often happened, especially when one of them had an important lesson to prepare.

When Ole came back at midday, he found a letter; it had arrived during his absence. He opened it, and as soon as he had cast his eyes over its contents, he manifested an excessive joy.

“Good news!” he cried. “I’m rich now! A distant relative has left me a considerable fortune: a hundred thousand écus. I have to leave tomorrow morning for Holstein, where my new domains are located. I swear that I shall only have one regret in leaving Copenhagen—the pain of leaving friends like you, Madame Magnussen and Mademoiselle Stierna; you too, my dear Bertel—give me the pleasure of employing with you, before leaving, the language of a brother.

“I will write my resignation as professor, Bertel; you shall hand it to the Rector yourself, begging him to excuse me for the precipitation of my abrupt departure. You will inform him of the necessity that obliges me to leave Copenhagen immediately. I shall not take any luggage; that will permit me to go more quickly. Then I shall exchange a poor life for another—a life brilliant with pleasures, no doubt. I want to make legacies and write the testament of my agonizing poverty. Madame Magnussen will inherit my two sets of silver cutlery; Mademoiselle Stierna will accept this ring that my mother gave me; and Bertel shall have all my books, for which I shall henceforth have no further use!”

He said this with so much gaiety and frank folly, that even Bertel wondered whether Ole’s supposed fortune might be real.

“To table!” Ole went on. “To table! Let Mademoiselle Stierna serve us her best preserves; let French wine be brought out of the cellar, as on high holidays! Is not the great news of my fortune and my liberty a celebration for us, my friends?”

They sat down at the table, and when the meal was over, and the two women had clinked glasses with the traveler, the latter offered a large glass of brandy to Bertel.

“How pale you are, friend,” he said. “What? The one who is staying is sad, while the one who is going away rejoices? Away with tears and grief! Let us embrace, brother, and say farewell.”

As he said that, he kissed Bertel on the cheeks, then hugged Madame Magnussen. Stierna, who was emotional, came forward and presented her forehead to Ole’s lips. All the young man’s false gaiety collapsed then; tears filled his eyes, sobs punctuated his voice and he almost fainted. He struggled visibly against that cruel emotion, but he soon mastered it, brushed the beautiful child’s hair with his lips, and went away precipitately.

² *Centaureum erythraea*, an herb of the gentian family.

Having arrived at the extremity of the suburb of Copenhagen, he stopped, waved his handkerchief in a gesture of farewell, and disappeared.

He had been out of sight for a long time, but Bertel was still standing on the doorstep, motionless, pale and exhausted.

“What a nice young man!” murmured Madame Magnussen. “And to think that we’ll never see him again!”

“We’ll see him again!” cried Bertel. “I’ll run after him; I want to stop him from carrying his fatal journey to its conclusion.”

He had already set forth when he heard Stierna sobbing, and saw that the young woman’s cheeks were streaming with tears.

“It’s too late!” he said, stopping. “The carriage is carrying him away along the Holstein road.”

Either by virtue of fatigue or emotion, the old man interrupted his narrative momentarily, but he resumed it in these terms.

After Ole’s departure, Madame Magnussen’s house was overtaken by a profound sadness. Be it understood that the house did not lose its gaiety, for it had been very rare for the four people previously inhabiting it to have emerged from the melancholy habits that two of them owed to the loss of a father and a husband, and the others to the passions that were tormenting them, but it lost its movement and its life. Bertel proposed to the widow that he should take over, for his own use, the room left empty by Matthiesen’s absence; he offered as a pretext the impossibility of devoting himself, in his small cell, to the studies in physics that he intended to undertake. In reality, his sole objective was to prevent any other person from coming to live under the same roof as Stierna.

By virtue of a seemingly-inexplicable contradiction, however, he had never been less inclined to seek the young woman’s company. He even seemed to be avoiding her, and let entire days go by without addressing a word to her. Sometimes, nevertheless, the naïve young woman would catch sight of Granh’s gaze furtively attached to her, without her being able to explain or understand what motives brightened that gaze with a dark and almost sinister fire. At times she wondered anxiously whether the departure of his friend might have disturbed the young man’s mind, for he was subject to strange fits that seemed not far from madness. At table, he forgot to put the food into his mouth; he let his pale head slump on to his breast, and it was necessary for Madame Magnussen to call him by name three or four times before extracting him from that waking sleep. At night, he was heard wandering around his room, and opening the window to spend entire hours gazing at the sky. He often wept, yielding to fits of despair, and Ole’s name escaped his lips convulsively.

One morning, he came down so pale and disfigured that Stierna’s heart was moved to profound compassion. She went straight up to the young man, and stopped him when he tried to go around her and go outside.

“Don’t run away from me like that, Dr. Bertel,” the gentle creature said, in her ineffable voice. “I need to talk to you. For a long time now, you no longer talk to me; you seem to be avoiding me. Have I offended you unwittingly? If so, tell me, in order that I can avoid committing the same fault again. Above all, forgive me, for I deeply regret having injured you.”

“You haven’t offended me at all, Stierna. If I no longer speak to you, if I avoid you, it’s because I feel unworthy to address you, ashamed to soil you with my presence.”

“What do you mean, Monsieur Bertel? For the sake of the friendship that my mother and I have for you, put an end to this sad mystery—explain it.”

“When you know, Stierna, it will be you who turns away from my presence, you who will no longer want to see or hear me.”

“Me, Bertel? The person who has lived close to you for so many years? The person who loves you like a brother?”

“Like a brother, you say? Well, if that brother had committed a crime, would you not expel him from your presence forever?”

“A crime! Oh, that’s not possible!”

“And yet I have committed a crime! Blood soils my hands! I’m a murderer.”

“Oh, be quiet! Be quiet! I’m afraid. Let me go away.”

“You shall hear me out now, Stierna. Now that you’ve forced me to open the abyss, your gaze shall penetrate its depths. Listen, then! I loved a young woman; another also loved her...I staked my life against that of my rival. I won; he has killed himself.”

“Horror! Horror!”

“Don’t you want to know who that young woman is, Stierna?”

“Oh no! Don’t tell me. Let me go!”

“That young woman is named Stierna Magnussen.”

“Take back those fatal words, Bertel—take them back, I beg you on my knees. See my anxiety, my despair! Tell me that you’re playing with me, that all this is nothing but a cruel game! I’d be your accomplice. For me, someone would shed blood! For me, someone would commit murder! Oh, something more frightful still! An unfortunate has been reduced to suicide! He has lost his body and soul at the same time! Tell me that it isn’t true!”

“It’s true.”

“It’s true, and you haven’t yet fled this place? Father, in the Heaven where you reside, your gaze must be turned away from me that such shame should afflict your house and soil your child! Back, Bertel! Back, murderer! Can’t you see that you horrify me?”

Obstinately, Bertel remained standing before the poor desperate girl. “Before repeating the order to go away and never see you again, before telling me again that you’re horrified, Stierna, listen to what I have I say: if I leave this house, it will be to die.”

“To die?”

“Yes. You’ve already damned one soul; you will damn another.”

“My God! My God! What have I done that you should subject me to such cruel ordeals?”

“Can you believe that I have struggled against my remorse, that I have repelled the thoughts of suicide that pursue me, for any other motive than the love I feel for you? In the midst of the inferno of my heart, a joy sometimes gleams that suspends its suffering. That joy is seeing you, hearing your soft voice. You’re sending me away; perhaps you’re doing the right thing, and being charitable—I shall now have the courage to die.”

“You’re right, Monsieur—stay. You must. Since I am the involuntary cause of your crime, I must submit to its expiation, and accept my share of your remorse. Stay, and may God grant you repentance, as he has given me eternal despair.”

“Repentance! Remorse! Oh, God did not wait for our prayer to give me that. You don’t know, then, that the nights are sleepless for me, that a slow fever is devouring me incessantly, that a name sounds incessantly in my ears? That that name is constantly on my lips, ready to escape with the confession of my crime? Remorse! If you could understand the remorse that I suffer, instead of the horror I inspire in you, you would take pity on me; you would hold out your hand to console me, and you would mingle my name in the prayers you address to God. You would cry out, saying: ‘Lord, have mercy on him!’”

Compassion was indeed the sentiment that Stierna did not take long to experience for Bertel. After the initial moments of horror and fright, she reflected that he was unhappy, and unhappy because of her. From then on, a dangerous pity preoccupied her keenly, and kept her thoughts relentlessly fixed on the young man, day and night—for sleep had quit the maiden’s room henceforth. She was distressed by Bertel’s sin and remorse, asked God for forgiveness on his behalf, and sought by a thousand affectionate means to give the guilty man some hope in divine mercy. She lavished interest and indulgence upon him. To render his sin less burdensome, she generously took half of it upon herself, and tried to bear it with him.

That community of secrecy and repentance, the sublime and voluntary complicity, did not take long to become a sentiment more tender than Stierna herself believed, against which she did not protect herself. No tender word ever emerged from their lips, but whenever Stierna saw Bertel paler than usual and prey to spasms of despair, she furtively took his hand and fixed her large blue eyes upon him, shining with celestial compassion.

In the meantime, Bertel’s mother fell dangerously ill. He was obliged to leave abruptly in order to see her one last time before death separated her from her son forever. He wept so bitterly, and suffered so keenly, that Stierna promised of her own accord to write to him for as long as his absence lasted, and kept her promise. She only talked, in her letters about the dying woman, God, hope and Heaven’s

forgiveness, but she nevertheless wrote every day, and, so to speak, devoted the entirety of every day to Bertel.

When the professor returned, his mother was dead; there was no longer a single wretched person in this world to love him. Stierna tried to render that isolation less cruel—so successfully that one day, sitting next to the large fireplace in which a fire of pine-logs was blazing, forgetful of the past, with their clasped hands, they found themselves talking hopefully of happiness and the future.

Many trials and years separated them, alas, from the day when they would be able to realize the beautiful dreams they forged. They were both too poor to be able to marry for some time to come. Bertel possessed no other fortune than his professorial salary, and he still had to pay off, with the same revenue, the rather considerable debts that his mother had left in dying. But what did time and trials matter to those in whose hearts hope had succeeded despair, and who could at least glimpse, however distantly, future felicity? The memory of Ole sometimes returned to trouble them, like a reproach, but it seemed to them nevertheless that forgiveness descended on them from the heavens, drop by drop. Before the magnificent splendor of love, the somber glow of remorse faded away.

A year went by in that fashion, for Stierna and for Bertel, in the ecstasy of a powerful and chaste tenderness. Madame Magnussen knew and approved of the secret engagement of the two young people, although they had never taken her into their confidence. It was thus that she had loved her husband for a long time before marriage became possible. Such mystical unions are common in the North, where poverty reigns so harshly. With a noble pact of love in the heart, a young man struggles courageously against the difficulties of life, and conquers, if not a fortune, at least a measure of ease. Then he comes to kneel at the feet of the one who is waiting for him without mistrust, even when time and distance separate them.

Uncomplainingly, Stierna and Bertel lived under the same roof, beside one another, and although they never exchanged a kiss, they looked forward desirously, but not impatiently, to the distant epoch that would bring about their marriage.

This situation, which would seem impossible and perilous in our French mores, became quite simple and full of charm in Copenhagen. The two lovers spent their life in a sweet and mild intoxication; the body slept, only the soul lived.

In any case, they saw one another only a little more frequently than in that past. Only meal times and the occasional family occasion brought them together.

Bertel devoted a large part of his evenings to studies in physics—an interest inspired in him by the instruments left behind by Stierna's father and long forgotten in a little room where things the family did not use were stored. He loved to talk about the phenomena of the science to which he was passionately devoted, and he initiated the young woman into the mysteries of that fantastic new world and that unknown nature.

All of that was marvelous to Stierna, whom her father's prudence had wisely left in a charming ignorance, and who only went out of the house twice a year, and even then with her mother. The past, the present, the future—real life, in sum—consisted for her of Bertel, her mother, her little house and the memory of Ole, the last of which became vaguer and more distant every day.

The sweeter such an existence is, the more painfully the blow that overturns it strikes. Madame Magnussen fell gravely ill, and there was soon no more hope of a recovery. According to the Gospel, a strong woman who has long been prepared for a holy death by a life of virtue only feels anxiety, in that redoubtable moment, for the child she leaves behind on Earth. That anxiety was consoled by the thought of the love she knew Bertel to have for Stierna. One morning, she summoned them to the bed in which she would soon die, and took them both by the hand.

"Bertel Granh," she said, in a faint but distinct voice, "you love Stierna, and Stierna loves you. I therefore leave her a protector down here, and can quit the Earth without dread. I know that you have tried to conceal many mysteries from me, my children, but I know that secrets, even the most innocent, love to remain in the darkness. May God bless you as I bless you, my son...Stierna!"

They fell to their knees, for it was before a cadaver that they were praying and weeping.

The day after the day on which Madame Magnussen's mortal remains were buried in the cemetery, Stierna, leaning on Bertel's arm, went in tears to the house of an aged female relative, to spend the period of her mourning there and await the moment when she might marry her fiancé. That moment need not be far away, for Bertel hoped to pay off all his mother's debts within the year, and it

would then only remain for him to amass the small sum necessary for him to establish a household. The lovers therefore separated on the old aunt's threshold.

It was agreed, before the separation, that the professor could make occasional visits to his intended. Admittedly, Bertel also promised to pass beneath Stierna's window every day, while travelling to and from the University, and that Stierna added that she would always be at the window.

The fiancés, therefore, saw one another twice a day, at eleven o'clock in the morning, when the professor came back from the University, and at two o'clock, when he returned for the afternoon classes. During his first departure and his second return, darkness pitilessly deprived them of that happiness.

Stierna was able to invent ingenious pretexts to be leaning on her windowsill when one of these sweet moments of the day, so keenly anticipated, drew near. From some way off she watched Bertel approaching, only walking slowly in order to allow his eyes to linger on the young woman for longer. When he arrived before her, they exchanged a long, tender gaze; then, hearts beating, one of them continued his route while the other, smiling and excited, pretended to work fervently at some dressmaking project, while actually following the sound of footsteps drawing away with her ears.

For six months, the life of the lovers was entirely encapsulated in these two daily rendezvous and in the visits that Bertel made about once a fortnight. They liked their rapid but free encounters at the window much better than the solemn visits, during which it was necessary carefully to lock their love away in the depths of their hearts, in order that the secret of their souls did not fall into the power of a bourgeois and meddling curiosity. Stierna therefore counted down with the charming anguish of expectation to the moment when Bertel would bring her happiness all day long. Bertel forgot the fatigue and annoyances of his laborious profession beneath the consoling and tender gaze that he received in passing beneath the balcony.

Monsieur Magnussen's widow had died in the autumn. At the end of summer, Stierna felt herself becoming vaguely anxious and sad, for several times, Bertel, in going to the university, had arrived several minutes late, and had passed under his fiancée's window almost at a run, in order not to arrive after the beginning of classes that was being signaled by the last strokes of the bell. Another day, she felt her eyes fill with tears on remarking the preoccupation of the young man, who only remembered to look up at her window after leaving it five or six paces behind him.

These evidences of distraction and lack of enthusiasm were repeated several times. The guilty party seemed only to be carrying out a duty or following a habit in coming to receive the tender greeting of his fiancée. Stierna struggled for a long time against her own conviction before accepting that painful thought, but in the end, she could not mistake the fatal reality, for Bertel passed by without raising his head on two consecutive days.

While she sought despairingly to explain the cause of this deadly change, a few friends of the aged relative came to dinner in the old lady's home at Christmas. The majority of the guests were at the University.

In the evening, when they had left the table to surround the fireplace, the conversation turned to an Extraordinary Professor's chair that had become vacant. They talked about the competitors who had applied for it, but no one mentioned Bertel's name. Now, if he had acquired that position, the young man's honoraria would have been doubled, and nothing would any longer have opposed their marriage.

"I thought that Dr. Bertel Granh had more right than any other to apply for that chair?" objected the blushing Stierna, who could not master her emotions, and could not bear the crushing weight of doubt any longer.

"You're quite right, my pretty maid," replied one of the old professors, "but since Dr. Granh has come into a considerable inheritance, he is no longer concerned to occupy a chair that would necessitate new and laborious studies. He is even disposed to enjoy his fortune more freely, for he came to ask for an unlimited leave of absence yesterday, while I was with the rector. It's my nephew Christian who will take over Dr. Granh's chair in medicine in the interim."

"Doctor Granh has only received news of this inheritance in the last few days, then?" asked Stierna, who could not yet believe in such ingratitude and treason.

"All of Copenhagen has been talking about it for four months. It's not at all astonishing that you don't know anything about the news. You live in such a profound and reclusive solitude."

Pale, beside herself and bewildered, the young woman hurtled out of the apartment and ran, mad with despair, to the house where she had once spent so many happy moments, and where Bertel now lived alone.

She knocked, but no one opened the door. She called out, but no one replied.

In the end, a neighbor put her head out of a widow and shouted: "There's no longer anyone in the house. Dr. Bertel Granh left a little while ago by mail coach, for a long journey."

Stierna collapsed in a faint.

The old man interrupted himself, but did not notice that he had stopped speaking. His gaze wandered vaguely through empty space, and seemed to be pursuing memories full of bitterness and despair. Sweat was streaming down his forehead, laden with profound wrinkles; his green-tinted pupils burned with the sinister flame that the accursed angel emanates. Several minutes went by.

Suddenly, he woke with a start from that sleepless dream, and looked around in astonishment, as if he were surprised to find himself in Spa, beside a stranger. He needed some further time to get his ideas in order and reconnect the present with the past that had earlier come to live before him. A smile, full of sarcasm for the weakness of the human organism and for himself, creased his lips, while an impulse of shame and anger made him shrug his shoulders.

"Do you know Stockholm?" he asked the Frenchman, abruptly, with the evident intention of extracting himself, by means of a violent effort, from the dolorous thoughts that were assailing him.

"No," replied the man to whom the question was addressed.

If I were a poet, like you, I could make a brilliant description of the Capital of Sweden. I'm not a poet, and I shall only tell you that there is, on a hill in Stockholm, a quarter inhabited by the city's poorest inhabitants, named Mosebacke. Steep, muddy, narrow, plunging paths, sometimes mere wooden stairways—such are the roads of Mosebacke. I leave you to imagine the houses. In particular, there was one there more wretched and hideous than the rest, but in exchange, it had the advantage of standing in the most isolated spot, and the only inhabitants it sheltered were workmen who go out at daybreak and return after nightfall. At the summit of the hovel, like black eyes, were two round windows. They served to provide air and light—my God! what air and what light!—to two miserable lofts. No one in the quarter knew who lived there, and no one wanted to know.

An old woman, a kind of cretin, half-sorceress and half-idiot, was the only living creature who had any relations with the tenants of the mansards. Every morning, she deposited food at the thresholds of their doors and received a coin in exchange.

One evening, a terrible explosion burst forth in one of the lofts, and a huge flame escaped through the window, in a manner that threw the entire Mosebacke quarter into alarm. People came running, broke down the door, and found a young man lying motionless in the midst of strangely formed instruments, some of which had been smashed by the explosion.

The occupant of the next room had not been disturbed by the frightful shock that had nearly caused the old house to collapse. Partly out of anxiety for him, and partly to seek help for the dying man, the rescuers knocked on his door; he did not open it and they called out without obtaining any response. Common people do not usually exhibit great patience, so they had begun to break the door down with an axe when it finally turned on its hinges and revealed a face in which nothing human remained. Terrible scars streaked it in every direction, scarcely leaving anything intact but the eyes and mouth.

This being—for no one dared give him the name of man—went into the room where his neighbor as lying, and at the sight of him uttered a cry that resembled the sinister call of a hyena. He went to the dying man, revived him, bathed his face with fresh water and leaned over him to make certain of his awakening.

When the other, having emerged from unconsciousness, got to his feet and suddenly found himself face to face with the individual who had brought him back to life, he turned his head away, put his hands together and cried: "My God, have pity on me! Do not bring your just anger down on me! Do not deliver me to the eternity of Hell!"

"You're still alive, Bertel Granh," said the hideous unknown. "It's not face to face with Satan that you find yourself, but face to face with Ole Matthiesen. Pull yourself together! In exchange for a frivolous amour, you have given me genius—and soon, I hope, a glory without rival. I forgive you

everything, including the hideous scars inflicted by the pistol-shot that I fired at my head to keep the promise I had sworn to you. Someone lifted me up, dying, as I lifted you up just now, and saved my life as I am saving yours, and since then, a sublime obsession has preoccupied me and cause me to renounce, joyfully, all the ridiculous passions of human beings. I shall be the benefactor of the entire universe. Statues of me will be erected; the face of the world will be renewed, and it is Ole Matthiesen who will work the miracle. The work is complete! The light will not be long delayed in shining.”

All this was said rapidly in Latin. Ole then turned toward the people the explosion had attracted.

“We thank you, Masters,” he said to them in Swedish. Your care is not longer necessary. I have rediscovered one of my old friends in the man you have come to rescue, and if he needs help, he will obtain the most active and prompt assistance from me. As you see, though, he is standing up, recovered from the shock caused by the explosion that alarmed you.”

Everyone withdrew. Ole and Bertel remained alone. Ole silently paraded his gaze over the broken objects that lay in the loft. They were apparatus used in chemistry and instruments used in physics. The explosion had been caused by a flask of hydrogen gas that had suddenly ignited.

Mathiessen remained plunged in a mute and bleak reverie for some time. Finally, he broke the silence.

“Listen to me, Bertel!” he said. “Because of you I attempted suicide. If you’re still alive, it me to whom you owe your life!”

“Yes, Ole—and I ask your forgiveness on my knees. I would like to be able to prove my gratitude, even at the price of my own existence.”

“Well, you can.”

“How?”

“By making once again the pact that we made before in Copenhagen.”

“Stierna is free, Ole,” Bertel interjected, with a sigh. “You can marry her.”

“Stierna!” said Mathiessen, violently. “Stierna! Is it really a matter of a woman? Tell me why, Bertel Granh, you have trampled underfoot that insensate passion that drove you to stake your life against that of a friend? You say nothing? I know why! It’s for love of science and thirst for glory.”

“Yes, I admit it.”

“An idea—a great idea—is preoccupying you.”

“Yes! Like the one you mentioned to me just now, it will regenerate the universe and make the name of the man who realizes it eternal.”

“Do you know, Bertel, the thought that has occurred to me in the presence of all this debris of scientific instruments? It’s that we’re pursuing the same idea. A secret and accursed voice is murmuring in my ear that, once having been rivals in love, we are now rivals in glory. If that’s the case, Bertel, one of us has to die!”

“You’re right,” Bertel replied, unhesitatingly. “Listen to me. Haven’t you groaned sometimes, on thinking about the long nights that desolate Denmark? Haven’t you thought that the man who could create a second sun with take a place second only to God in the admiration and gratitude of men?”

“That’s your idea?” jeered Matthiesen, shrugging his shoulders. “I feel reassured—it’s ridiculous and impossible, that’s all.”

“Impossible!” cried Bertel, picking up two jars that the explosion had spared. “One of these two vessels, each of which terminates in a narrow tube, contains oxygen, the other hydrogen. The two flames, combining in combustion, only give a bluish light, but let me bring in a refractory body—this piece of chalk, for instance—and watch!”

Immediately, a resplendent light sprang forth, at which the eye could not look directly, even furtively. Dazzled, Ole turned his head away. Bertel was exultant.

“You see, my second sun already appears to you to be more than a hollow dream! But this is only a rough and imperfect work. The light does not reproduce itself; the gases are exhausted; the refractory body loses its properties. It requires a man versed in science to watch over the apparatus incessantly, to prevent an explosion. I shall create a sun that will be, in approximate proportion, as bright and as durable as God’s sun. Listen closely, Ole.

“The solar fluid behaves like the electrical fluid. It produces the phenomena of light and heat when it strikes objects and finds any obstacle whatsoever in its rapid movement. Thus, the sun is an opaque body which surrounds an atmosphere of luminous electricity.

“Starting from this principle, I have discovered that bodies become phosphorescent by virtue of the effect of heat and electrical discharges. I recognized, too, that bodies non-conductive of electrical fluid retain that phosphorescence longer than others.

“Given that—mark me well, Ole! This time, follow my operation with all the attention of which you are capable, for a prodigy will become manifest. I place a morsel of carbon, a refractory body, in the middle of this glass globe. I attach to that carbon two platinum wires, which are connected to the poles of a dry Voltaic pile.

“Take note: these metal wires are secured to the mysterious columns of the pile—columns enclosed in a cylinder of sulfur and made up of alternate leaves of zinc, silver and paper.

“I obtain a vacuum in the globe with the aid of a pneumatic pump. On your knees, Ole—here is a sun!”³

Ole could not suppress a cry of admiration. It was a sun, a true sun.

“You see,” Bertel continued, “that I am approaching the completion of my work. It’s no more than a matter of applying my sublime discovery on a vast scale. This is the means of ensuring that execution.

“I shall construct, in sheets of copper, a balloon five hundred feet in diameter. The balloon will be filled with hydrogen gas, purified with extreme care, and purged, as far as possible, of all foreign bodies.

“Beneath the balloon I shall attach an apparatus similar—in with gigantic proportions—to the one you see, in which a small sun will shine. A veritable sun, moreover, like the sun in the sky, since it is similarly composed of an opaque body and an envelope of luminous electricity.

“The Voltaic piles will be alimented easily; the Earth is nothing but a vast reservoir of electricity. Do not two eternal magnetic currents pass from one pole to the other? And has not our great Oersted demonstrated that magnetism is nothing other than electricity in one of its transformations?”⁴

“My balloon has nothing to fear from external agents, since it is constructed of solid metal, rendered unalterable and indestructible by a chemical preparation that is easy to compose. I shall coat it with this preparation, which will protect it against the slightest oxidation.

“The hydrogen will not be able to escape from the interior, because the envelope that keeps it prisoner remains impenetrable from the inside as from the outside, even for the most subtle gas.

“Finally, a metal cable, which will also serve as a conductor to the galvanic piles, will suffice to hold my apparatus anchored in the atmosphere.

“You see, Ole, these theories are certain. I have created a sun! Soon, there will be no more nights for Denmark. Liberated henceforth from obscurity, Denmark will have almost nothing to fear from the rigors of winter. What do you say, Ole?”

“I say that your invention seems beautiful, great and useful to me, and that it will astonish Europe—but that it’s nothing compared with mine.”

“What’s yours, then?” Bertel demanded, feeling jealousy bite into his heart as he saw the serenity with which Ole had listened to him.

“It will distress you, for my discovery will render yours almost useless.”

“Speak.”

“I’ve found a means of living without eating.”

“Without eating?”

“Yes, I’ve discovered that nourishment is a prejudice.”

“And with what are you going to replace alimentation?”

“With nothing. For a long time I’ve been meditating on this problem. Finally, I tried not to eat, that’s all—and I succeeded. As the Greek philosopher did to prove movement, I walk. For twelve days already nothing has approached my lips. I feel a little corporeal weakness, it’s true, but in compensation, my intelligence has never been more brilliant and richer! Freed from physical shackles, the soul acts in all its powerful liberty.”

³ What Berthoud has in mind is a carbon arc lamp, although his description is faulty, partly because his theory of solar light-production is mistaken. The principle of the carbon arc lamp had been demonstrated by Humphry Davy in the first decade of the century, but all attempts to produce a viable version of any sustained electrical light-source had been frustrated before Berthoud wrote this story. It was not until the 1870s that the first viable carbon arc lamp—the so-called “Yablochkov candle”—was developed, and not until 1878 that Joseph Swan patented the first electric light-bulb with a carbon filament.

⁴ Hans Christian Oersted (1777-1851) discovered that electric currents create magnetic fields in 1820.

“But your idea is extravagant, Ole! You’ll die of starvation.”

“I haven’t eaten for twelve days, and I’m doing admirably.”

“It’s an insane idea.”

“No more insane than your sun.”

“But my sun exists, and I’ve given you proof of it.”

“And have I give you none? I, who am speaking, thinking, reasoning and acting, liberated from the inconvenience of nourishment for twelve days? Farewell, Bertel.”

“No,” cried the latter. “No, I won’t let you complete an insane suicide, Ole. I won’t leave you until I’ve made sure that you’re taking some nourishment.”

Ole took out a dagger. “Do you recognize this weapon?” he asked, with a sinister smile. I held it in my hand the night when you came to find me in my room on Madame Magnusson’s house. You want to destroy my glory now, as you wanted to destroy my life then. If you take a step, I’ll strike you. I’ll kill you.”

As he said this, the unfortunate madman left Bertel, went back into his loft, locked himself in and barricaded his door from the inside, with the aid of some enormous wooden beams.

For two days Bertel heard the noise of Ole’s voice and footsteps through the wall that separated them. When that time had elapsed, he heard nothing more. Full of alarm, he had warned a magistrate of his anxieties. The door was broken down and Ole Matthiesen was found dead on his paltry bed. A manuscript was lying at his feet, entitled: *On the Prejudice of Nourishment*.

When Bertel went back to his cell, he fell on to the pallet that served him as a bed, devoid of strength. A frightful doubt had gripped his heart, his thought, his entire being.

In the presence of Ole’s insane conviction, and the obstinate perseverance with which the unfortunate had believed in his absurd theory until his final death-throes, Bertel wondered whether he too might not be pursuing a lie, a demented utopia. That doubt—and what torture is more rightful than doubt, Monsieur?—squeezed him in its execrable claws, choked him and ended up disturbing his reason.

His torment was horrible.

Suddenly, he threw himself furiously once again into the culpable dream to which he had immolated his duty, his conscience, his happiness, his entire existence. He clung to it; he wanted to sacrifice everything to it, to the last faculty of his life, the last thought of his soul. A moment later, he cursed his mad obsession, and, laughing bitterly, he repeated: “Insane! Insane!”

In that struggle, that doubt, that fever, he actually felt his mental strength weaken and his reason lose its lucidity. Inconsequential words escaped his lips involuntarily: truncated, aborted, incomplete, incoherent ideas were passing through his brain and filling it with tumult and disorder.

The peril was deadly and immense. If he did not put an end, by a prompt and energetic resolution, to that redoubtable crisis, his life and intelligence would succumb! Then, Monsieur, by a superhuman effort, Bertel desperately trampled his ideas of science and glory underfoot. He swore, by the salvation of his soul and on Ole’s corpse, to renounce them forever, to turn his head every time the demon evoked them before him! But those ideas, more obstinate than ever, pursued him, harassed him, surrounded him with an infernal circle, and whirled around him, repeating:

“The second sun! The second sun!”

In the hope of freeing himself from that torture, Bethel departed in all haste for Copenhagen. There, he knew, he would find a celestial creature, the one who had already protected him against remorse! He wanted to renounce his prideful errors at her feet, to ask for a forgiveness that he would obtain, and shelter from despair and madness beneath the wings of an angel...

Alas, Stierna was dead. She had died praying to God for Bertel.

Since then, Monsieur, many years have gone by without Bertel having found a moment of peace and rest. Hunted by a horde of invisible demons, he still marches on without stopping, like Ahasuerus. To his right and his left stand two equally fatal ideas: the memory of Stierna, full of remorse; and the crazy conviction that the creation of a second sun was a great, wise, sublime work! In vain, Monsieur, since the day when he renounced that ridiculous folly, has he refused to open a book of physics; in vain has he carefully avoided contact with the scientists he has met on his travels; everywhere a voice repeats to him:

You could have created a second sun!

And that voice is right, Monsieur—at least, I think so. Do we not live in a century in which physics is progressing with great strides and working miracles? Electricity and its study have opened up a new world. With the aid of electricity, Monsieur Becquerel,⁵ that illustrious scientist, has created veritable precious stones. I have seen little sapphires that have emerged from his laboratories; even for the most expert and experienced lapidary, they do not differ and any respect from the precious stones that nature produces. Monsieur Jacobi⁶ has made veritable statues by means of electricity, which bear the imprint of the most delicate work with a precision impossible for a skillful sculptor. Finally, Monsieur Bertel's sun itself, while the Danish professor rejected it as an absurd dream, was invented by Humphry Davy and perfected by Faraday. Those two celebrated physicists have used means very similar to Bertel's methods, and arrived at the same results.

As for the copper balloon, it has been imagined and proven possible by one of the most skillful physicists of our time, Monsieur Prechtel,⁷ the director of the Polytechnic Institute of Vienna. That scientist has even drawn up plans for the balloon's construction; in order to realize it, it would be necessary to expend the cost of a frigate.

If Stierna's lover had not been discouraged, you see—if he had repelled his doubts, if he had not given in to fear, if he had had an unbreakable faith in himself, and if, finally, Ole's madness had not disturbed him—given the time, the patience and the will, he would certainly have immortalized his name and created a second sun.

The stranger, who had let his head fall into his hands and was holding it hidden therein, finally raised it again, displaying features more deeply scored, more downcast and more livid than ever.

"Bertel, such as he is," he said, in a sepulchral voice, "accepts his discomfiture with resignation, in expiation of his treason in regard to Stierna. If his sin was great, its punishment is terrible!"

As he finished these words, he got to his feet, turning away to hide the tears that were running from his lifeless eyes over his sun-bronzed cheeks, and hurriedly walked away.

The French journalist searched for him in vain that evening during the seven o'clock walk, at the ball, in the gaming halls, and the theater—in sum, everywhere. He did not find the unknown anywhere; no one could give him any information about him.

The next morning, it transpired that the old man had left the waters of Spa, not only without telling anyone, but also leaving all his luggage and a considerable sum of money behind in the room that he had occupied in the inn where he had been staying.

⁵ The reference is to Antoine César Becquerel (1788-1878), the grandfather of the more famous Henri. Initially a mineralogist, his investigation of the application of electricity to chemical analysis and synthesis, following in the footsteps of Humphry Davy, allowed him to produce tiny precious stones in 1823.

⁶ Moritz von Jacobi (1801-1874) invented electrotyping, or "galvanoplastic sculpture," in 1838; the technique was rapidly adapted for relief printing, which remains its primary application.

⁷ Johann Joseph Prechtel (1778-1854) made numerous contributions to electrical physics and technology in the 1820s and 1830s, but the idea of making balloons from copper sheets had first been proposed before the end of the eighteenth century and several experimental models were constructed in France in the 1840s, although none proved practicable.