THE HORLA REVISITED

By

Sandrine Bessancort

A Female-Led Revisiting of a Short Classic

By

Guy de Maupassant

An SFPG Publication

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INTRODUCTION

Looking back to my time as a little girl, growing up in a tiny village in the foothills leading to the Mont St Victoire, I realise that the darkness keeping me such imaginative company in the present was no less vibrant in my unformed past; a *darkness*, I firmly believe, brought about by the advanced reading age that led me (when I could access them at such an age) to those titles of a more adult nature.

Not pornographic, I hasten to add as, without being judgmental, such material is of little or no interest to me.

No, my adolescent interest was piqued by titles from writers as diverse as Dumas and Hugo to Rachilde and Pierre Louys; each of whom could be guaranteed – if only in miniature in the case of the former duo – to populate their tales with a strong female character.

Thus was my interest in reading stories with a strong commanding heroine born and, those stories being few and far between, my re-imagining of many such tales from a female-led, so to speak, perspective. A tinkering for my own pleasure that has led to the pleasure of friends (yes, I do have them and this darkness I give air to is but a necessary correlative to the decency I find imperative in my day-to-day life) and, now, and hopefully, to the pleasure of a wider range of readers with a passion for stories of strong, commanding and dominating, women who enjoy nothing more than to rule the lives of those men who fall into their toils.

Hence my revisiting of these classic tales from the masters of antiquity.

When we domesticate the imagination we lose the joy of life.

But, sometimes, our more private thoughts should *not* be acted upon and should remain either written or perceived.

But *always* as *imagination.*

Sandrine Bessancort
Honfleur
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PROLOGUE

JUNE 6TH

As with most significant events in our lives they usually find themselves preceded by an event or circumstance utterly normal in its bearing. Thus it is unlikely to engage our suspicions in regard of the hand of fate about to rest itself upon our shoulders and change forever the very fabric of the day-to-day existence. An existence we have helped, albeit partly, to fashion, along with the happenstance of fortune, and come to expect for ourselves.

My name is Paul Dussatoir, and so it was with me.

On the morning of May 6th I received the following telegram:

Fine day tomorrow. In accordance with my predictions. Belgian frontier. Baggage and servants left at noon at the social session. Beginning of manoeuvres at three. So I will wait for you at the works from five o'clock on.

Jovis.

And so it was that, with this mundane and completely unthreatening missive, and on the next day, the events that would ensure my descent into physical and mental servitude would begin.

For you, whoever you may be, who stumble across these words - for I have neither the will nor, more crucially, the permission to make them freely available - be assured that the fact I am allowed to air my thoughts at all is no more than yet another example of *her* cruelty towards the creature flailing around in her toils so abjectly. The female whose yoke I labour under capable of taking delight in the hatred of one human being for another; even as he is compelled obey her; and finding much amusement in the reading of his thoughts on the subject.

Difficult to believe? Then I suggest you read on. If only to assure yourself that the author of this exercise in shame and humiliation is *not* of a kind prone to outbursts of fantastical hyperbole.

What is conveyed to you here is no more than the simple truth of your author's existence as he now knows it.

An existence that has become a hell in full view and one I find myself prevented from ending and finding the deliverance I so desperately seek.

Though you may be sure I have attempted to do just that on many an occasion.

Attempts I will, and despite the certainty of failure, make again in the future remaining to me.

Telle est ma vie…..

JUNE 7TH

The following day, acting upon my friend's note, it was at five o'clock sharp that I entered the gas works of La Villette.

It might have been mistaken for the colossal ruins of an old town inhabited by Cyclops, so dark and foreboding were its forms and surroundings. Immense black avenues separated heavy gasometers that stood behind another like monstrous columns, unequally high and, undoubtedly, in the past the supports of some tremendous and fearful iron edifice. A wholly suitable place, in fact, for the wretched adventure on which your unknowing author was about to embark.

The balloon I had come to see was lying in the courtyard and had the appearance of a cake made of yellow cloth, flattened on the ground under a rope; a process that is called placing a balloon in a sweep-net, and, in fact, it appeared truly like an enormous fish.

Two or three hundred people were looking at it, sitting or standing, and some were examining the basket, a nice little square basket for a human cargo, bearing on its side in gold letters on a mahogany plate the words that are now, with the simple replacement and addition of one lower case vowel with another, etched onto my beleaguered soul:

"Le Horla."

Suddenly the people began to stand back, for the gas was beginning to enter into the balloon through a long tube of yellow cloth which lay on the soil, swelling and undulating like an enormous worm.

But then, other thoughts and other pictures occur to every mind and it is with such mysteries of individual perception that nature itself nourishes beings until their birth.

The creature that will rise soon begins to move and, along with it, the attendants of Captain Jovis.

As Le Horla grew larger, spread and put in place the net which covers it, so it was ensured that the pressure would be regular and equally distributed at every point.

The operation is very delicate and very important, for the resistance of the cotton cloth of which the balloon is made is figured not in proportion to the contact surface of this cloth with the net, but in proportion to the links of the basket.

Le Horla, moreover, has been designed by M. Mallet.

The whole constructed under his own eyes and made by himself in the shops of M. Jovis and assisted by his own working staff.

Nothing was made outside.

We must add that everything was new in this balloon, from the varnish to the valve, those two essential parts of a balloon. Both must render the cloth gas-proof, as the sides of a ship are waterproof. The old varnishes, made with a base of linseed oil, sometimes fermented and thus burned the cloth, which in a short time would tear like a piece of paper.

The valves were apt to close imperfectly after being opened and when the covering called "cataplasme" was injured - the fall of M. L'Hoste in the open sea during the night proving the imperfection of the old system with more efficacy than any learned pamphlet on the subject.

The two discoveries of Captain Jovis, the varnish principally, are of inestimable value in the art of ballooning.

…For some reason now, as I describe the lead up to what I can only describe as *"my fall"*, my writing hand transcribes my thoughts in the present tense, probably because the nightmarish existence I lead is in the present and my thoughts on the subject as one homogenous whole.

I digress to mention this that you, the reader, may not be confused by my change of tense. The events I mention have, of course, already transpired and if I describe them in the immediate it is only because that is how they continue to appear to me.

Immediate *and* inexorable.

So, with the intent to return to a tense more representative the moment it seems apt…

The crowd at this point has begun to talk and some men, who appear to be specialists, affirm with authority that we shall come down before reaching the fortifications. Several other things have been criticized in this novel type of balloon with which we are about to experiment with so much pleasure and success.

It is growing slowly but surely now. Some small holes and scratches made in transit have been discovered, and we cover them and plug them with a little piece of paper applied on the cloth while wet. This method of repairing alarms and mystifies the public.

While Captain Jovis and his assistants are busy with the last details, the travellers go to dine in the canteen of the gas-works, according to the established custom.

When we come out again the balloon is swaying, enormous and transparent, a prodigious golden fruit, a fantastic pear which is still ripening, covered by the last rays of the setting sun. Now the basket is attached, the barometers are brought, the siren, which we will blow to our hearts' content, is also brought, also the two trumpets, the eatables, the overcoats and raincoats, all the small articles that can go with the men in that flying basket.

As the wind pushes the balloon against the gasometers, it is necessary to steady it now and then, to avoid an accident at the start.

This has happened too many times to be left to chance.

It is at this point that I see a somewhat sturdy, if not overweight, woman of, perhaps, thirty or so years staring intently at our efforts and, for some reason, my gaze is riveted to her, though further scrutiny is prevented by the thin grey veil hanging from her and makes a more comprehensive investigation of her charms or otherwise, at least of the facial variety, impossible.

My interest, you may be assured - your writer being nothing if not a bachelor of the most ingrained and confirmed intention - having nothing in common with the vulgar and all too prevalent lechery with which I see men of my acquaintance, some of them friends even, ogle a sex that in my experience is both trivial, willful, and supremely indifferent to the discipline of personal responsibility we men take as our rightful burden.

Though I do confess, at certain weak moments of need, to be not impervious to a certain…

Admiration.

The above indifference to the qualities of the female other than those of the purely physical does not, however, prevent me on this occasion from what is a forensic evaluation of the veiled lady and her appeal, or lack of such, and it is only after I have convinced myself that; though she is certainly not a woman of the first ilk, in terms of either form or background if her somewhat sober and inexpensive, if not cheap, costume is a guide; it must be admitted that from the neck down she is certainly in possession of a buxom physicality that certain men could find...

Winning.

A certainty that is confirmed by the less than decorous glances thrown in her direction by the other males in the vicinity whose presence she appears not to notice.

Mostly because I suspect her attention seems to be trained on one man and one man alone – though it is impossible to ascertain who amongst us has the honour as her eyes and their direction are disguised by the veil.

Captain Jovis, though, ignored by this buxom onlooker or not, is now ready and calls all the passengers to board.

It is at this point, my own eyes still affixed for some reason to our observer, that she raises her veil and trains her own gaze upon the object intriguing her interest and, with a start, I realise the identity of the man amongst us exciting the lady's interest.

Yes.

You are ahead of me.

It is, of course, your writer.

Though I am a little surprised to be the cause of her attention, such a scrutiny of me from the fair sex is not unheard of and, with honest observation free of vanity – I am, and have been informed of the fact on many occasions, not unpleasing to the female eye.

The observation having also been made that, were I of a mind mercenary enough, I could land myself something of a catch.

Indeed, and in a purely bestial and self-interested fashion, I have made use of this purely physical appeal to satisfy those sexual longings even I find myself assailed by from time to time. A fall from the high-ground of my manly independence that nature deems necessary from time to infrequent time and, for which reminder of my human frailty, and the less than impregnable fortress of my self-vaunted individuality, I feel depressed and listless for some time afterwards.

This scrutiny by the veiled lady is, however, a scrutiny that, while not devoid of the usual interest in my manly figure and aquiline features, betokens, I sense, more than just a simple female response to a potential beau who has taken her fancy.

More relevantly; shockingly so for some reason; I realise when her veil is peeled back that not only is the woman with the unwavering stare affixed to me familiar, but that she is my new Patronne and the widowed owner of the lodgings in which, from not two days ago, I now reside.

Madame Durand.

A young woman and recent widow a decade or so removed from my own two-score-and-three years.

But what has brought her here?

And why does she stare so intently?

Discomfited by her scrutiny but unwilling to allow her the knowledge of such, I direct a tentative wave in her direction that is, at once, cordial and dismissive. Designed to convey to her that, while I may live in her home and pay for the privilege, she is no more to me than a housekeeper and functional acquaintance. A dismissive, if as said, cordial, gesture on my part delivered as a means of imparting that I have no desire to include her in my social sphere of activity.

If my Patronne and housekeeper is discomfited she shows no sign of such and I worry that somewhere along the line I may be forced to adopt both gestures *and* language more blunt and more rude than is my desire to use.

If her reaction to my cordial dismissal is a guide, however, then I will be forced to be firm with her sooner rather than later as the eyes – eyes I cannot recall having blinked, and somewhat vivid and startling into the bargain I confess - remain upon me and I attempt to sideline a sense of unease on the score by busying myself with the task to hand.

Lieutenant Mallet jumps aboard, climbing first on the aerial net between the basket and the balloon, from which he will watch during the night the movements of Le Horla across the skies, as the officer on watch, standing on starboard, watches the course of a ship.

M. Etierine Beer gets in after him, then comes M. Paul Bessand, then M. Patrice Eyries and I get in last.

But the basket is too heavy for the balloon, considering the long trip to be taken, and M. Eyries finds himself in receipt of the shortest straw and has to get out.

An omission not made without a certain voluble and gesticulatory reluctance on the part of Eyries himself, even if the language of his disappointment remains that of a gentleman and, therefore, will not offend the ears of the curious ladies who are gathered to witness our ascent.

But now, Eyries' omission complete, we are ready and M. Joliet, standing erect on the edge of the basket, begs the ladies, in very gallant terms, to stand aside a little, for he is afraid he might throw sand on their hats in rising.

This they do with the twittering's and mutterings common to their sex before falling into anticipatory silence.

Only then does Joliet command:

"Let it loose."

Then, cutting with one stroke of his knife the ropes that hold the balloon to the ground, our master-of-Ceremonies gives *"Le Horla"* its liberty.

Neither raising my hat in salute of our elevation along with the others in the basket nor deigning the ground from which we rise a look, I am, nonetheless, certain of my concierge's eyes upon me and feel grateful for my removal from a situation I am convinced I will have to address upon returning to my new lodgings.

If not immediately then certainly at some later point.

For now, though, I fly skyward and attempt to enjoy the delights I myself have anticipated with no small relish.

Nothing can be heard as we float, rise, fly and glide.

Our friends shout with glee and applaud, but we hardly hear or see them, such is our excitement.

We are already so far, so high!

What?

Are we really leaving these people down there?

Is it possible?

In seconds, it seems, Paris spreads out beneath us, a dark bluish patch, cut by its streets, from which rise, here and there, domes, towers, steeples, then around it the plain, the country, traversed by long roads, thin and white, amidst green fields of a tender or dark green, and woods almost black.

The Seine appears like a coiled snake, asleep, of which we see neither head nor tail; it crosses Paris, and the entire field resembles an immense basin of prairies and forests dotted here and there by mountains, hardly visible in the horizon.

…Would that we had continued on our north-westerly route to settle to a new life wherever our balloon set down. Anywhere other than a return to the place from whence we left and the horror awaiting me at the hands of the female monster who had selected me to be…

My apologies.

I move too swiftly.

As demoralised and abject as you can be assured your writer remains, he possesses at least a measure of lingering pride, enough at least to wish his writing to follow a form and structure in which he can find approval whilst retaining your interest in his misbegotten tale.

Allow me to continue…

The sun, which we could no longer see down below, now re-emerges as though it is about to rise again, illuminating our balloon to make it appear like a star to the people who are looking up.

M. Mallet every few seconds throws a cigarette paper into-space and says quietly:

"We are rising, always rising."

Captain Jovis, radiant with joy, rubs his hands together and repeats:

"Eh? this varnish? Isn't it good?"

In fact, we can see whether we are rising or sinking only by throwing a cigarette paper out of the basket now and then. If this paper appears to fall down like a stone, it means that the balloon is rising; if it appears to shoot skyward the balloon is descending.

The two barometers mark about five hundred meters, and we gaze with enthusiastic admiration at the earth we are leaving and to which we are not attached in any way; it looks like a colored map, an immense plan of the country.

All its noises, however, rise to our ears very distinctly, easily recognizable and we hear the sound of the wheels rolling in the streets, the snap of a whip, the cries of drivers, the rolling and whistling of trains and the laughter of small boys running after one another.

A new perspective on the all too familiar.

Every time we pass over a village children's voices are heard above the rest - and with great distinctness. Some men are calling us. Locomotives whistle and we answer with the siren, which emits plaintive, fearfully shrill wails like the voice of a weird being sentenced to wander through the world and attempting to forewarn the unwary of its novel and fearful appearance.

We perceive lights here and there, some isolated fire in the farms, and lines of gas in the towns. We are going toward the northwest, after roaming for some time over the little lake of Enghien. Now we see a river; it is the Oise, and we begin to argue about the exact spot we are passing. Is that town Creil or Pontoise—the one with so many lights?

No.

Not Pontoise.

For if that were the case we could now gaze down upon the junction of the Seine and the Oise.

Then there is the enormous fire to the left.

Isn't it the blast furnaces of Montataire?

So, Pontoise discounted, we must be above Creil.

Creil or Pontoise, the view is superb.

It is dark on the earth, but we are still in the light, and it is now past ten o'clock. Now we begin to hear slight country noises. The double cry of the quail in particular, then the mewing of cats and the barking of dogs.

Surely the dogs have scented the balloon; they have seen it and have given the alarm. We can hear them barking all over the plain and making the identical noise they make when baying at the moon. The cows also seem to wake up in the barns, for we can hear them lowing; all the beasts are scared and moved before the aerial monster that is passing.

My own fears are of a nature even more ludicrous than those of the unfavoured beasts below, given I am a rational and well-educated man of middle-years for whom such fancy should have been put aside long before my studies at L'ecole des Beaux Arts - certainly before the serious turn of my thoughts that prevented any possibility of my becoming a sculptor of any imagination.

At least of a kind worthy of the description *"artist"*.

The delicious odors of the soil rise toward us, the smell of hay, of flowers, of the moist, verdant earth, perfuming the air-a light air, in fact, so light, so sweet, so delightful that I realize I never was so fortunate as to breathe before.

Can I be blamed for not realising this is as close as I am ever likely to come to that elusive and, at best, part achievable chimera called freedom?

Blissful in my soon to be shattered ignorance, a profound sense of well-being, unknown to me heretofore, pervades me, a well-being of body and spirit, composed of supineness and infinite rest, of forgetfulness and indifference to everything as I surrender to this novel sensation of traversing space without any of the sensations that make motion unbearable.

No noise, no shocks and, most comfortingly, without fear.

The figure of Madame Durant that has prevented the exhilaration I might have expected from our original elevation is receding to the back of my mind and, in the way of the Ostrich who believes a head surrounded by sand is an end to his troubles, I allow the sensations of both view and air, as well as the physical absence of that currently giving such puzzling concern, to lead my thoughts into more pleasant and less confrontational avenues.

Even if I sense - *know* - there is something unfathomable and indescribable lurking.

This is the near subliminal backdrop that scratches at my corneas, even as the grandeur of the landscape below soothes and imprints upon cousin retinas.

For though I am not of a fanciful disposition, I sense trouble lies in my path.

Trouble that will *not*, I sense, be faced whilst I travel by balloon.

Though it will, I tell myself, even as I attempt to shrug off my forebodings, be waiting to confront me at some time after my return to terra firma.

And that, as if to underline my misgivings and convey the message that my thoughts were now an open-book, is when it happened.

The voice.

Her voice.

Inside *my* head!

Of course, arrangements having for me to occupy my new rooms having made by and with the agent of my soon to be Patronne, I had, until now, experienced very little in the way of dealings with the woman except a perfunctory few words from the lady herself when I took residence.

Perfunctory words, and a distinctive and stern way of uttering them.

Nothing in their content, just the same, suggested even the hint of a clue as to the interest she would suddenly take in my person as evidenced at the Gas Works from which we had just flown.

The somewhat severe and avian features of Madame Durant, though fixed upon me unflinchingly as she stood upon the threshold of what was now *my* room – a spacious, comfortable and clean room, I confess - giving no indication that she might have… *intentions*… in regard of her older and more socially and intellectually advanced lodger.

The opposite proposition, of which I trust myself sure - and allowing you my reader to take into account a certain unavoidable male reaction - to have made plain by now, not a of a kind ever likely to come about; at least not in any of the ways resembling romantic interaction between the two sexes placed in juxtaposition by the Almighty.

She had certainly not dressed to impress for our first encounter, if such was to be her future intent, though the full and conical breasts beneath her plain and un-colourful dress did appeal to the beast that resides in even my cultivated soul; while the pinched waist and flaring hips leading down to a pair of lace-up boots, pointed toes peeking out from its lower folds, added to the, admittedly, *small* frisson of lust I experienced upon our first encounter.

M. Cloutier, the agent with whom I dealt, had filled me in with what little he knew of my would-be Patronne and concierge and I discovered, amongst the few other salient but sparse scraps of knowledge in his possession, that she was recently widowed.

Her husband – an unhappy man, if Cloutier were to be believed – had flung himself from the bridge at Courbevoie and drowned; the artists normally to be found at their easels on the banks to each side of the edifice unable to reach him before his lungs filled and finally succumbed, as so many others before him, to the waters of the Seine.

Hence Madame Durand's need for a lodger.

Though of no small sexual appeal – if in a very unsophisticated way – the woman's somewhat severe mien made the departure from this mortal coil of the husband something less than a mystery to me.

If her demeanour matched her unforgiving and avian features, I recall telling myself, then the late M. Durand would no doubt have been considering the bridge and the water rushing beneath it with much temptation.

And for a great deal of time.

But then, of what were such things to me anyway?

I had a comfortable room in an affluent area from which the pleasures of the city were easily reached and the money from a legacy left by a doting aunt that was, if not a fortune, enough to allow me to enjoy them.

The avian lady and her personal history were unconnected to my own interests and life was, on the whole, good.

Until now:

"Do not be alarmed."

So immediate and clear is the voice I recognise from our one encounter that my head darts to either side of me in attempts to locate her; amazed that not only could she have entered the basket sight unseen but that I could possibly have missed her presence until now.

I am certain you can divine what must come next.

You are right.

Madame Durand is *nowhere* to be found.

Only my fellow balloonists, lost to admiration of the landscape passing beneath us, are revealed to my search and I give vent to an inward curse of self-castigation for my out-of-character…

What?

Fancifulness!

I laugh to myself.

"No, Paul," comes the voice once again, and this time the sound of it within my skull is more profound and startling, *"you are not being fanciful in the slightest*."

So startling is the voice, in fact, that I give an involuntary start that brings me up hard against my somewhat portly neighbour.

Bessand.

A fellow balloon aficionado, and a magistrate into the bargain, who is not so engrossed by the passing scenery that he forgets to clutch at one of the ropes attaching our basket to the balloon itself and, thus, prevents himself from being tipped overboard headlong.

The look he throws me is a mix of recrimination for my carelessness and understanding for what he takes as my shared high-excitement.

Neither of which looks is of any consequence to me.

I have other more pressing concerns.

"Yes, it is I Paul," the voice confirms when Bessand returns to his airborne perusal.

Then, as if to authenticate her presence in my skull:

"Colette Durand."

A giggle that is neither well-disposed nor girlish accompanies the divulgence of her Christian name, though it could well be taken to be evil.

A suspicion her next words tend to confirm:

"Though 'Paul' is not a name; neither that nor Dussatoir; by which I will address one I intend to go as low as you."

Such words are senseless to me and I am convinced I must suffer from some kind of neurasthenic disorder that has crept upon me stealthily and chosen this opportunity to come to flower.

The effect of altitude?

Perhaps.

Or does the onset of madness manifest itself in just such an early form?

What other explanation can there be for the voice of a relative stranger reverberating against the walls of my skull if not some exotic malady or insanity?

A *relative stranger* I know for certain to be miles distant, yet remains, nonetheless, capable of ensuring her words are heard to me.

And such words:

"No, Paul Dussatoir – for now I shall continue to address you in such a way until we come to a more suitable arrangement – it is not a dysfunction caused by altitude that enables you to hear my words so clearly, even though I remain at La Villette and you are so far distant from me."

I shake my head violently from side to side – at least as violently as I can without drawing attention to myself.

The asylum, after all, and understandably I think you will agree, is not my destination of choice, knowing as I do that many who linger there do so for lesser reasons than the hearing of strange voices in the head.

A voice, in this case, capable of divining my thoughts and being amused by them, if the laughter of this woman some decade or so younger than I is to be believed.

Laughter that resounds so loudly within my head it is almost painful as I become aware that my breathing is becoming short and I can feel the onset of nausea.

Worse, I sense this is but the start of such feelings.

"A simple shaking of the head will not rid yourself of me," laughter turns to words, though a dark and vindictive merriment runs through them. *"It would be as well for you to accept – though I realise it will be impossible for such an intelligent and manly individual as yourself to do so just yet – that, as of this moment, I am with you for as long as I choose and may have access to even your most intimate thoughts – at times of my own choosing."*

With something resembling relief, I realise this is simply my subconscious responding to thoughts triggered by the woman's appearance shortly before our rise; thoughts brought on by some malady of the air to which I and, it seems, I alone am prone.

Yes.

That is the explanation.

What other could there possibly be?

The laughter greeting my thoughts is almost maniacal in pitch.

"Oh, I will have such fun with you," she told me, relish dripping from her tones. *"Sensitive men such as yourself and my poor ninny of a husband are so very rare. But you are neither poor nor a ninny and the responsive nature you fail to acknowledge places you at my disposal and will ensure you remain my servant and sexual plaything for a very long time to come."*

I bite back a response to this imaginary voice and its odious suggestions – that a respectable woman could even speak of such matters to a man is shocking to me - and tell myself it is nothing that will not vanish completely the moment the balloon makes landing and my feet once again feel firm land.

The chuckle that greets my thoughts is nothing if not suggestive of evil in full bloom.

"You may have it your way for now," I hear. *"Soon, however, and when I am ready to take possession of my new creature, I will take pains to have you acknowledge your new master."*

"Master?" I mutter to myself, winning myself a quizzical glance from Jovis who has leaned across me to view something or other below.

A weak smile assures him all is well and he takes his look and resumes his previous position.

"You may enjoy the rest of your trip," the voice goes on, as if such enjoyment would be impossible without this permission, *"but be assured, at a time of my choosing your new existence will begin."*

I wait, sensing the voice is not finished, and find myself correct.

"Until then," it continues, *"remember the words: 'La Horla'."*

Even as I worry at her continued presence in my thoughts I ask myself what possible reason she can have for taking the name of our balloon and feminising the article preceding it.

My thoughts receive a swift response:

"They will serve as a reminder to you that this conversation truly did take place," she tells me.

Then, with yet another maleficent laugh:

"Au revoir."

JUNE 8TH

What a lovely day!

The neurasthenic disorder I now have no doubt was precipitated by my balloon trip, the same disorder preventing full enjoyment of the much anticipated trip itself, is no more than a memory and I have spent all the morning lying on the grass at the front of my new lodgings and can be reached through some glass doors leading down from my rooms. I lie in complete comfort under the enormous plantain tree which covers and shades and shelters the whole of the garden and realise this is a house and a location I could come to enjoy very much.

Though it is not visible from the spot I reside upon, from the windows of my room I can see the Seine. The same Seine which flows alongside the Rue D'Augustin containing the Durand house and the same Seine at Courbevoie to which M. Durand entrusted his body. The great and wide Seine, which goes to Rouen and Havre, and which is covered with boats passing to and fro and provides your writer with much pleasure during long walks along its banks and his contemplation of his life and that of life in general.

A church is nearby and the air is full of bells which sound through the blue air on this fine morning, sending their sweet and distant iron clang to me, their metallic sounds, now stronger and now weaker, according as the wind is strong or light.

What a delicious morning it has been! About eleven o'clock, I took a stroll along the riverbank in time to witness a long line of boats drawn by a steam-tug, as big a fly, scarcely puffing as it passed. After two English schooners, whose red flags fluttered toward the sky, there came a magnificent Brazilian three-master; it was perfectly white and wonderfully clean and shining. I saluted it, I hardly know why, except that the sight of the vessel gave me great pleasure.

Though not so great a pleasure as that provided by the absence of my Patronne and the fact that, when she did eventually return to the house from wherever her business had taken her to find me sunning myself, her response was a simple and not at all sinister inclination of the head as if nothing of note had occurred between us.

A response, I tell myself, that confirms all my suspicions in regard of my temporary loss of reason.

As I mentioned earlier you may recall: an *'Ostrich'*.

JUNE 12TH

I have had a slight feverish attack for the last few days, and I feel ill, or rather I feel low-spirited.

Whence come those mysterious influences which change our happiness into discouragement, and our self-confidence into diffidence?

One might almost say that the air, the invisible air, is full of unknowable Forces, whose mysterious presence we have to endure.

I wake up in the best of spirits, with an inclination to sing in my heart.

Why?

Then again, why question the onset of those moods pleasing to us?

In this instance, a mood that does not endure for too long.

I go down by the side of the water, and suddenly, after walking a short distance, I return home wretched, as if some misfortune were awaiting me there.

Again:

Why?

The imagined incident with Madame Durand whilst soaring towards the heaven in our balloon is little more than a memory I have chuckled over to myself on more than a few occasions since its passing.

So what else could explain the cold shiver passing over my skin? What else other than a return of the malady that raised my imagination to such ludicrous heights of fancy in the first instance?

What has upset my nerves and given me a fit of low spirits? If not a malady then is it the form of the clouds, or the tints of the sky, or the colors of the surrounding objects which are so changeable?

Could such everyday and natural phenomena have troubled my thoughts as they passed before my eyes?

Who can tell?

Everything that surrounds us, everything that we see without looking at it, everything that we touch without knowing it, everything that we handle without feeling it, everything that we meet without clearly distinguishing it, has a rapid, surprising, and inexplicable effect upon us and upon our organs, and through them on our ideas and on our being itself.

How profound that mystery of the *Invisible* is!

We cannot fathom it with our miserable senses:

Our eyes are unable to perceive what is either too small or too great, too near to or too far from us.

We can see neither the inhabitants of a star nor of a drop of water.

Our ears deceive us, for they transmit to us the vibrations of the air in sonorous notes and our senses are fairies who work the miracle of changing that movement into noise, and by that metamorphosis give birth to music.

All of which makes the mute agitation of nature a harmony.

So is it also with our sense of smell, which is weaker than that of a dog, and so with our sense of taste, which can scarcely distinguish the age of a wine!

Oh! If we only had other organs which could work other miracles in our favor, what a number of fresh things we might discover around us!

The dejected walk back to my new lodgings takes an eternity – or seems to – and my lethargy is so great I truly find it an effort to place one foot before the other.

Should this continue I really must consult a physician.

JUNE 16TH

I am ill, decidedly!

Not only am I feverish, and horribly so, but a condition of debilitating enervation accompanies the clammy condition of my skin and makes my mind suffer as much as my body.

I have, without ceasing, the horrible sensation of some danger threatening me.

The apprehension of some coming misfortune or of approaching death.

A presentiment which is no doubt, an attack of some illness still unnamed, which germinates in the flesh and in the blood.

For a reason I cannot guess at, a question pops into my head:

"Is it possible to die while, to all intents and purposes, remaining alive?"

My answer to this mysterious question, and made instantly, a resounding:

"Yes!"

Sometime after midday, my Patronne, and the idee fixe of my fevered imagination, serves me soup but generally leaves me to my own devices.

There is a marked absence of any curiosity, and certainly compassion, for my weakened condition in those severe features already remarked upon and, other than serving and then removing the chicken broth which has been my only repast since falling ill, she neither enquires after my well-being nor graces me with a look.

Which, incredibly, is *not* the case in regard of me to her.

To my horror, and with a lewd inner satisfaction I can only put down to the enervation and boredom of my situation, I find my eyes drawn to her chest and the full conical breasts residing below the fabric of her simple black dress.

She is not I realise, with a thrill of recognition as out of character to me as the less than gentlemanly interest I am taking in her *"feeders"* – so does Jovis refer to them when in his cups and his ex-navy tongue is loosened – wearing either bodice or corset.

Not if the freedom of movement she displays and the rippling of flesh beneath her clothing is to be believed.

Despite my debilitated condition, my manhood reacts shamefully to my observations and I pray my Patronne of the avian visage has not noticed.

All was well, however, and when the lady herself returned to collect the empty bowl there was nothing in either her expression or her manner to suggest she suspected my shameful and out-of-character lapse.

At least I can console myself that the voice in my head – *her* voice – remains absent and could only have been brought on by unusual circumstances.

The absence, I assure myself for some reason, can only be a sign that my mysterious malady will soon pass.

JUNE 18TH

I have just come from consulting my medical man.

Repose is proving impossible and I can no longer get any sleep.

Our appointment was not satisfactory.

"And what appears to be the problem, my good fellow?"

I dislike such familiarity upon first acquaintance and draw the conclusion that the man is as pompous and self-regarding as I find so many of his profession.

I also suspect, though he comes recommended by Jovis, that Dr. Fouchet is something of a quack.

He does, at least, possess nous enough to find that my pulse is high.

He also finds that my eyes are dilated and my nerves highly strung.

As Jovis had intimated in regard of the man's *'expertise'*, as he described it with a total absence of irony, he was not inexpensive and I had, not unreasonably, been expecting a diagnosis in respect of my current ailment of a more enlightened kind.

"Do you exercise?" he asked in a patronising manner that instantly raised my hackles given our respective physical conditions.

The doctor:

Not yet out of his mid-thirties and running to corpulence.

The patient:

Into his mid-forties with a physical shape unlikely to offend a man half his age.

Hackles aside I had, nonetheless, to confess that, physical condition aside, I was the one seeking treatment for an illness and not him.

It halted the progress of my contempt not a whit.

According to this genius, and despite my protestations, there are no alarming symptoms and I have nothing that cannot be cured by a course of shower baths and of bromide of potassium.

My contempt and suspicions of quackery in regard of the man – despite the enthusiasm of Jovis for his medical accomplishments – grows further and I leave his surgery in even less of a positive frame of mind than the one in my possession upon entering.

Bromide of potassium, indeed!

JUNE 25TH

No change!

My visit to the doctor, the very same quack Jovis assured me was a miracle worker, has turned out to be a waste of both time and a sizable chunk of my aunt's legacy and left me in a still more deplorable state of mind.

My state is really very peculiar and becoming more so by the day.

As the evening comes on, an incomprehensible feeling of disquietude seizes me, just as if night concealed some terrible menace toward me. I dine quickly, and then try to read, but I do not understand the words, and can scarcely distinguish the letters; so great is this nameless terror.

Then I walk up and down my drawing-room, oppressed by a feeling of confused and irresistible fear.

A fear of sleep and a fear of my own bed.

And yet consciousness is scarcely more appealing and while awake I am plagued by a constant suspicion that my life is no longer in my own hands and that even my movements are pre-ordained in some mysterious way that proscribes any of the free-will we each of us take for granted.

About ten o'clock, nonetheless, tired and exhausted, both mentally and physically, sleep comes to seem preferable to wakefulness and I force myself to go through and stretch myself out upon the mattress.

The moment head touches pillow I am frightened.

But of what?

The door and windows to my rooms are locked and bolted and I am secure.

Yet still my body shakes and foreboding fills me, taking me back to the days of childhood when the sinister shapes of night, which were no more than figments of my youthful and fearful imagination, would send my head beneath the covers in imitation of the aforementioned Ostrich, that whatever menace the darkness contained might not recognise my presence and I would be preserved until morning.

It is as I am considering just such a ludicrous act that the voice returns and I am jolted upwards at the waist:

"La Horla."

The words impact upon me in the way I imagine the pointing finger and the death-cap of jurisprudence impact upon the innocent man found guilty of a crime he did not commit and sentenced to the scaffold.

I am not frightened.

What I feel is pure terror.

Her voice is crystal clear in my head and the feminised use of the name we had assigned our balloon sets my body to shaking as I recall the words I had imagined whilst floating high above the earth:

"They will serve as a reminder to you that this conversation truly did take place."

I tell myself that the dread I feel at hearing the voice is a consequence of my malady and nothing more.

And yet…

More and more, I begin to see the voice itself as the malady and my subsequent ill-health its consequence.

What is happening to me?

Up till the present time I have been frightened of nothing.

And now?

I open my cupboards, and look under my bed.

I listen.

For what?

The answer is not long in coming.

"Tomorrow, your new existence begins," the dread voice of Madame Durand intones, as clear as if she were standing next to me.

To my utter astonishment, full of foreboding and terror as I am, my thoughts go to the breasts I had seen heaving beneath her dress as she served me soup and I attempt to picture them free of restraint and naked to my eye.

A mocking laugh tells me the private thoughts I would not air for even a second to the world are known to her.

"You will soon find out," she assures me. *"Though it is quite possible you may not find it the pleasing experience pictured by your imagination."*

Everything about my situation was impossible. There was no way of reconciling myself to it. Not, that is, without conceding the unthinkable.

I *was* insane.

The tone with which she answered my unspoken thoughts was reassuring and intimidating at one and the same time:

"No, my chattel…"

"Chattel?" I asked myself with some outrage, this despite my agitation.

"…You are not insane. You require no more than a sound night's sleep to again think clearly and I am inclined to let you have it."

I shook my head in uncomprehending silence, unable to reconcile myself to either the events that were unfolding or the strange and debasing words with which she accompanied them.

"Now that is a look more in keeping with what I intend you to be in relation to me," I heard. *"A dumb and obedient animal who lives solely to satisfy the needs of his master."*

My jaw fell open, just like the dumb animal the unwanted voice described, and gained yet more laughter.

"But enough for tonight. You will be no use to me exhausted and, besides, it will be all the more believable to you when you have been refreshed by a sound sleep and be unable to justify your fear and obedience as a result of your enfeeblement."

The voice became soothing in a way I had not suspected it could and, wonder of wonders, I felt myself relaxing.

"That is right. Listen to your master and lay back on your mattress to rest. Sleep, Paul Dussatoir…"

Amazingly, my eyes grew heavy.

"Sleep…"

I did.

JUNE 26TH

I slept.

A long time.

Then a dream lays…

No!

A *nightmare* lays hold on me.

I feel that I am in bed and asleep - I feel it and I know it - and I feel also that somebody is coming close to me, is looking at me, touching me, is getting on to my bed, is kneeling on my chest, is taking my neck between less than loving hands and squeezing it.

Squeezing it with enough force to strangle me should such pressure be allowed to continue.

I struggle, bound by that terrible powerlessness which paralyzes us in our dreams; I try to cry out - but I cannot; I want to move - I cannot; I try, with the most violent efforts and out of breath, to turn over and throw off this being which is crushing and suffocating me.

I cannot!

And then suddenly I wake up, shaken and bathed in perspiration. The morning light enters through the open door that leads to my living-room and I find that I am alone.

Unable to return to my slumbers, I at least find myself as refreshed as the voice of my metaphysical tormentress insisted I would. But, in all other ways, my state has grown worse.

What is the matter with me?

The bromide I reluctantly acceded to use at the insistence of Jovis and his quack does me no good, and the shower-baths have no effect whatever; even walks in my much loved forest of Roumare fail to affect a change in either demeanour or outlook and the soft air, impregnated with the odor of herbs and leaves, fails dismally to lift my spirits. Worse than this failure was the feeling that though alone, I was not alone and sudden shivers would run through me as if I were being followed and somebody was walking at my heels.

Following very closely.

Close enough, it felt, to actually touch me.

It is the feeling I have now as the door to my rooms – the same door I am convinced I locked before retiring, leaving the key in the door that entry might not be effected by a person with another key – and *she* walked in.

There was no knock and no greeting upon entry, as if she were telling me that I lived in her kingdom and she went where she pleased within it.

Does a King ask permission of his valet de chamber to go hunting, after all?

She was dressed head-to-foot in black and looked all the more imposing for it, avian features seeming even more severe and intimidating than usual – even though I tried to keep up my end:

“Do you not think it courteous – not to mention, decorous - to knock before you enter a man’s rooms?” I asked, my own attempt at the intimidatory having nowhere near the same effect as her seemingly effortless and natural variety.

Her presence as she stared back at me without answering triggered, for some reason, a discussion with a monk I had enjoyed whilst visiting Mont St Michel some months back on the subject of reality and the spiritual and my incredulity for that which he took for granted:

"Do we see the hundred-thousandth part of what exists?” he asked. “Look here; there is the wind, which is the strongest force in nature. It knocks down men, and blows down buildings, uproots trees, raises the sea into mountains of water, destroys cliffs and casts great ships on to the breakers; it kills, it whistles, it sighs, it roars. But have you ever seen it, and can you see it? Yet it exists for all that."

He had continued as I gave his words thought:

“You are quite willing to believe in the existence of phenomena you can feel but not see and are yet unwilling to extend your credulity to the possibility of phenomena of a holy nature so far advanced it is capable of creating these effects that exist side-by-side with your own life.”

His manner was friendly and even avuncular, and yet there was something dismissive in the way he described what he saw as my *‘narrowness’*.

His next observation underlining his contempt for my lack of faith:

“Is that not a little… *blinkered?*”

At the time, I was silent before the simple reasoning behind his chiding of me, taking him for either a philosopher or a fool – or perhaps even a philosophic fool – but his words came back to me with a rush and reminded me of the voice I could hear in my thoughts even as its owner remained unseen.

“I am hurt,” she told me, the unforgiving visage fixed upon me revealing no sign of any such discomfort and giving your author the impression it would take a close range pistol shot or a downward slash from a malicious sabre to come close to doing so. It being only as she continued that the import of her words slowly sank in.

“Have you forgotten so swiftly our conversation of last night?”

“Our conversation of last ni…?”

“You mean…?”

Her expression was one of pure triumph for the look of surprise upon my face as incredulity was slowly transplanted by a response of the more credulous kind.

“You would wish for my… *influence…* over you to be the result of your, self-diagnosed, malaise or an over active imagination,” she began, moving further into the room with complete confidence I would not, could not, do anything to prevent her progress.

A confidence that was *not* misplaced.

Despite the fact I was a man in full possession of the strength and vibrancy defining the description – even if I was a little debilitated – and she was no more than a woman, some ten years and more inferior to me in age, intelligence, experience and physical strength, I felt the hairs on my neck crackle as if some invisible force had decided to crisp them with the heat derived of a taper.

The look on that predatory face as it moved closer to me at its own unhurried leisure was that of the vulture swooping down for the carrion it had just spied and marked out for its next repast.

A clumsy and nonsensical metaphor. She was neither swooping and neither was I dead – that desire would only come later. A more apt description of our respective positions in relation to each other would have been rabbit and viper.

I believe you will assign these roles quite easily without any assistance from me.

When she was close enough for the breasts I had already conceded to be magnificent to be before my transfixed eyes, close enough, in fact, for her surprisingly sweet breath to carry to my nostrils as the rest of my body remained rigid and powerless to move, as if I truly were a vegetarian of the field and she a reptile, she spoke two simple words:

“La Horla.”

JULY 10TH

Have I lost my reason?

What has happened to me?

How do I allow myself to be treated so?

And by such a vile creature bereft of any human quality, let alone those of the purely female kind.

Protective and a nurturer this particular example of the sex certainly was not.

The whole day, it seems, and for days before that, I have allowed myself to be used by this… *creature…* as if I truly were the chattel she insists me to be. While she lounges indolently about the house or takes off to the market or for a stroll along the banks of the Seine and the glades of the forest of Roumare, both of which I had once loved to stroll myself and was now forbidden, I toil as if I were no more than common skivvy in her employ.

All domestic chores fall to me, including the scrubbing of floors, the maintenance and laundry of her clothing and the polishing of her boots and shoes.

In fact, we must forget the description *"skivvy"* as it comes nowhere close to describing the full extent of servitude.

For all the world, I may as well be an indentured servant of the kind the Northern States of Mr Lincoln freed from the toils of its southern neighbour.

Yes.

A slave.

I am no more – though this monster with a female shell is, I realise, all too capable of making me a sight less.

Worse than this, and even as I hate her and would cheerfully take her by the throat and wring the life from it, she has somehow made me… made me…

It is almost impossible to write, even for the stranger who will eventually be reading this and to whom I am a complete stranger, but write it I must.

She has made me…

Desire her.

There, I have said it and cannot take it back.

This female fiend has not only forced me to the vilest acts - acts not seen since the most licentious days of Caligula and his debauched Roman court - but she has made me *want* to experience them.

I, Paul Dussatoir, a man for whom the placing of a respectful kiss upon the back of a lady's hand was an act of great forwardness and took much time and planning before being embarked upon, forced to spend a large part of his days upon his knees with his lips and tongue pressed against…

No. I cannot write of such humiliation.

But then I must.

How else will succeeding generations ever learn of the demons in female form that live only to prey upon them? How else can they be made aware of the imperfections of certain male wills that make them fodder for such women. To take steps not to put their frailties in the path of those who would take advantage for their own perfidious gain?

With a heart heavy with shame for the weakness that has allowed her to use me in such a way I must describe to you how the vile Madame Durand has taught me to worship her private womanly parts with the same tongue I was always at pains to have speak the most respectful and courteous language to the weaker sex.

I speak of those parts located at both the front *and* the back.

My despair is boundless.

For those of you reading this at a remove of a few generations from these 1870's, it may just be that morality has deteriorated to a point where relations of such a kind are unremarkable and make you wonder at the levels of discomfiture and ignominy under which I labour with such difficulty.

Somehow I doubt it but, anyway, can only write to you through the lens of my own period and the mores and expectations of acceptable behaviour – both public and private – that hold sway.

And for good reasons my own forced descent into the bestial underline.

To this day, some weeks after labouring under her yoke and countless and futile attempts to shed it, I still have not the vaguest of ideas in relation to how she exerts her control over me and over her husband before me. The late M. Durand I now know, after she informed with, of all things, much pride, having tried to take his life many times and failed. The unfortunate wretch only succeeding after she had given him…

It will be as hard for you to believe as I found it hard at first, hampered, as you are, with no first-hand knowledge in regard of the female demon of whom I speak.

M. Durand found it possible to end an existence he had come to view as intolerable *only* after *she* had given *him* permission to travel to Courbevoie and end it.

A "permission", she has assured her new flunkey, that will *never* be extended to me.

How she keeps me in a state of continual obedience – even as I detest her with every fibre of heart and soul – is a mystery I am singularly incapable of divining. What I do know is that she has somehow contrived to make me desire her above and beyond my fervent wish to despatch her to the next world and its molten embrace.

Even as she orders me to my knees and raises her skirts, that I may pleasure both front and back passages and the bile in my throat rises at the odor assailing my nostrils and the taste that coats my tongue and seems constantly present afterwards, something else rises along with it.

Something powerful enough to overpower my feelings of intense distaste and keep me to business.

Her business.

Of all the indignities under which I labour – including having had to wait in respectful silence as she informed the visiting Jovis that I was no longer a paying lodger but a paid manservant; reducing my status and making me a social leper with one mendacious stroke – it is this *unwilling* need I have to be in contact with the womanly flesh she so adores to have me worship in as slavish and abject a fashion as possible that disturbs me most.

Neither my own self-disgust nor the look of utter contempt upon the face of Jovis as she described my fall from grace and new position as her lackey while I listened in mortified and obedient silence sickens me as much as this need for her person she has instilled in my unwilling soul.

Even the toes of her well-formed feet, after I have removed her boots and bathed them with fresh rose-water, act upon me as an aphrodisiac and she has but to cross one leg over the other to bring me to heel on the floor below her and take them into my mouth.

Has ever a self-respecting man been taken lower?

She has taken to having me accompany to the market lately, in the sober servant's livery of her own choosing she insists I wear. I am obliged to walk three or four paces behind her and be ready to carry her purchases in a basket the carrying of which makes me look ridiculous. It is a market I have used myself when free-will was my province and the vendors and shoppers there are familiar with me, so it is hardly surprising that they direct odd looks in the direction of my reddened cheeks as I attend the woman they believe employs me as a manservant while, in actuality, using me as a slave.

My life is one of constant and abject misery and I know for certain I will *never* adjust to being used in such a fashion.

Yet I sense far worse is to come.

JULY 16TH

A man has been murdered not two streets from where I reside in such misery.

Misery that has been increased a thousandfold.

I have been informed this morning by Madame Durand that this man died by *my* hand.

When I tell her – for she allows me the freedom of speech when it suits her purpose; and enjoys punishing me afterwards if the outrage she allows to go unfettered abuses her to freely – that had I killed a man I would surely be aware of such a fact she stares at me intently for a few moments and I feel my thoughts darkening.

The scene replacing them is of a kind to make the gibbering oblivion of insanity a welcome freedom.

Picture to yourself a sleeping man who is being murdered, who wakes up with a knife in his chest, a gurgling in his throat, is covered with blood, can no longer breathe, is going to die and does not understand anything at all about it as his killer stands above with a pillow, ready to make good on his work by depriving his victim of the few breaths remaining to him.

It is a scene disturbing enough in itself but made infinitely worse for your author by the fact the man he can see smothering the dying man is no other than himself.

When the scene ends and I return to the present, she is smiling at me.

Why?

In her hands is held the evidence of my crime.

The handkerchief I must have used to wipe my hands after the deed and the hunting-knife gifted to me by Jovis as a birthday gift before my fall into servitude at her hands began.

There you have it.

Not only am I the slave of a woman but I have become a murderer for her.

Oh! Who will understand my horrible agony? Who will understand the emotion of a man sound in mind, wide-awake, full of sense, who looks on in horror, powerless to prevent an act of abomination he himself has already committed?

An act committed, I must inform you, after your writer experienced a triumph.

Albeit a relatively tiny one.

A triumph at the expense of the woman enslaving him.

It had happened only yesterday. I was on my knees at her feet where I could be found most mornings, assisting her with her toilette at the start of each day in the role of body-servant she so loved forcing me to adopt. It was as finished smoothing a stocking onto one of the shapely legs now affecting me so powerfully and balled up its sister to place upon the other leg that it happened.

“Respect your owner’s naked foot before you place the stocking upon it,” she ordered, never seeming to tire in the exercise of control over me. “Kiss my toes then slide your worthless tongue between them to prove no task, no matter how lowly, is beyond your willingness if I tell you I wish it performed.”

It was not the first time she had commanded me to perform such an odious chore and I knew by now the futility of rebellion; attempts to resist what she wanted of me, or even the appearance of reticence on my part, would lead to humiliations of far greater magnitude.

And yet, as my lips brushed the toes of her foot and I prepared to slide my tongue between them, a sense of rage greater than any I had yet to know found me leaping to my own feet and gazing down at her with such fury even she quailed.

“You are a living and breathing residue of a demon’s effluent and I should like to snuff out your existence the way I would snuff out…”

I had not finished with my outburst when, through my rage, I noticed her eyes flutter closed and her head sag as if all energy had been sucked from her.

More encouragingly, for the first time since my nightmare had begun, I felt myself in full receipt of my manly powers.

It was wonderful!

And made me precipitous.

“There!” I cried. “Your power over me is at an end. No longer will I…”

The words died on my lips as her head rose again and her eyes fluttered open to bore into my own.

The self-volition I had felt once more vanished in an instant and I realised with dread I was once more in her toils.

Her expression as she overmastered me gave evidence of malice of which I would not have believed a hum visage capable of expressing.

And her next words assured me she would not be contenting herself with an expression alone.

“You are in need of a lesson.”

I quailed before her in the way of a cur awaiting retribution from the master it had just disobeyed.

“A most severe lesson,” she finished

JULY 17TH

I am convinced that my only possible means of escape is actual madness. The razor with which I attempted to open my veins, this last night, after being made aware of the fact I had taken the life of another, proving ineffectual in the face of her command that I may do nothing to injure either myself or her. That my taking of another human life was forced upon me by an odious and entirely evil female will infinitely more powerful than my own does not console me at all.

So deep has been my fall that I actually view with fondness the days preceding it when I could believe myself to be the simple plaything of my enervated imagination.

But no, whatever the means by which she has achieved it - hypnotic suggestion, for example – I am now her creature and factotum and exist only to serve her simple need to exercise power over the will of an unwilling other.

She has told me as much and assures me that, now, now she has proved beyond doubt the power she wields over me and the heinous crimes she can force me to commit, I will become even more doglike in my obedience to her – though I will, and I have her blessing in this, be free to continue hating her for taking my former existence from me as I continue to serve.

To emphasise the message of canine devotion she intends I extend to her unworthy person, she came to the tiny room she has assigned me at the top of the house and where she insists I remain when not required.

It has happened before but I will never grow used to removing my clothes before a woman who is fully clothed and, moreover, a woman who has just commanded me to do so.

My discomfort, you may be assured, preventing the shedding of my servant's costume not a whit.

Totally naked, cheeks burning with shame, I stand before my female owner and she-devil and wait for her to divulge what she expects of me next as her appreciative eyes take in the body she insists I keep to the shape that first attracted her to it.

It is a wait made with no great eagerness.

A finger points to a spot at her feet and, knowing refusal is futile, I do not hesitate to kneel before her.

With a small chuckle of satisfaction for the position I occupy and the effortless way in which she can force me to occupy it, she takes the hemline of her dress in her hands and raises it to reveal a pair of black lace-up boots with a spike-heel – boots I am familiar with, only having just finished polishing them that same morning.

As the breath catches in my throat and the reluctant arousal she has instilled in me for her form surfaces, she slides the dress further upwards to bring her strong and shapely, stocking-clad, calf-muscles into play.

Blood rushes down from the higher altitudes, much in the way of our descending balloon after the lowering of the gas making it rise - though without the subsequent… *puissance* – and arrows the evidence of my unnatural desire towards her.

On my knees as she gazes down upon me, all the joys of unholy ownership playing about her severe and unforgiving face, I await her evil pleasure with a dread of the humiliation in store.

For it *will* be humiliating.

When it comes to men and the place they occupy in her sordid and distasteful life, Madame Colette Durand knows no other way.

Sure enough, her gift for the finding of ways to take my spirit and male pride lower than I previously believed possible from the already subterranean levels to which she had reduced them is about to be utilized once more.

The dress is raised above her hips to reveal her powerful thighs, half-covered by the stockings and suspenders that contrast so shockingly with the alabaster white skin leading up to her… *exposed*… womanhood.

Conditioned as I am, and oblivious to any coming degradation, I actually salivate.

Knowing without looking that the eyes hungry for my humiliation are upon me, I can do no more than fixate upon the cultivated strip of foliage standing between full exposure and ongoing anticipation.

The sight is removed from me as she turns to the side and presents me with a column of stockinged leg.

The order that leaves her lips exceeds the fear I anticipated.

“You may kneel up and hump my leg like the dog I intend you to become.”

As the shock of her command sends my stunned jaw chestwards I realise, at one and the same time, that it is not the only shock with which I am to be provided.

If the nature of what she expects me to do appals that much then why does my manhood not only remain engorged but demand to make contact with her leg, and in the way she demands, with such urgency?

With the self-respect left to me that is at least enough to enable me to beg – though I know it will be useless – I raise pleading eyes to her own.

The look that bares down upon me is full of the confidence and joy borne of the exertion of the control for which she has told me she lives and the domination of her won will over that of another.

The command that reverberates inside my head is no less powerful for being unspoken and I know I must soon obey or else face consequences worse than those I have suffered up to now – though it does occur to my conflicted senses that murder is surely about as bad as it can get.

Perhaps.

Rising up upon my haunches, I place my hands around my hips and press myself against the stockings that cover her right calf.

The sensations of humiliation and excitement afflicting me remain the same, but now I am necessarily forced to choose which is stronger.

The destruction of my manly pride brought about by allowing this woman to treat me as if were of no more worth than a stray she had found upon the street?

Or the sensation provided by the rise and fall of my manhood against her leg?

The almost maniacal way in which I continue to hump as instructed provides its own answer.

AUGUST 30TH

People are like a flock of sheep, now steadily patient, now in ferocious revolt. Say to it: "Amuse yourself," and it amuses itself. Say to it: "Go and fight with your neighbour," and it goes and fights. Say to it: "Vote for the Emperor," and it votes for the Emperor; then say to it: "Vote for the Republic," and it votes for the Republic.

I, Paul Dussatoir, having previously considered myself above such mentality of the herd variety, find myself left with no other course but to consider my earlier view of my own capacities ill-founded.

How else could I have been brought to such a pass by this she-fiend of the most advanced and debauched decadence were it not for the fact I have been an animal of the field awaiting only the collar of a master as I grazed at my uncomprehending leisure?

And yet those who direct we sheep are stupid, too; for instead of obeying men they obey principles. A course which can only be foolish, ineffective, and false. Principles affect people and those who place their lives at the service of a doctrine remain, nonetheless, people too and are equally as moved; be it in a way that is healthy and productive or ways less so.

None of the above you have read from my pen, you understand, having any bearing on the woman who holds my life in her hand and, from time to time, sees fit to squeeze.

For Colette Durand, and the others I am sure there exist who must be like her, the simple existence of her passions and the unholy means supplied her by which to gratify them is reason enough to go on doing so; no matter the misery of those whose lives, pride and independence must needs be satisfied that she may go on doing so.

I, the aforesaid, Paul Dussatoir being only the latest of the victims responsive to their infernal talents.

We are, some of us, so weak, so powerless, so ignorant, so small - we who live on this particle of mud which revolves in liquid air – and I divine that the reign of man is over.

She is among us!

She whom disquieted priests exorcised, whom sorcerers evoked on dark nights, without seeing her appear.

She to whom the imaginations of the transient masters of the world lent all the monstrous or graceful forms of gnomes, spirits, genii, fairies, and familiar spirits, this after the coarse conceptions of primitive fear, men more enlightened gave him a truer form. Mesmer divined her and ten years ago physicians accurately discovered the nature of her hypnotic power.

Even before *She* exercised it herself.

They played with that weapon of their new Mistress.

The sway of a mysterious will over a human soul it was strong enough to enslave.

They called it mesmerism, hypnotism and suggestion and I picture them now as they diverted themselves like rash children with the perfecting of this rash and unholy power!

Woe to us!

Woe to man!

She has come, the… the…

What does she call herself?

"La Horla!"

Yes!

It is apt.

As the Le Horla the balloon, devised and sent aloft by us men, rises only to fall, *La Horla* rises of her own volition to reign over those responsive few fated to become her subjects.

Woe to me!

For I am the latest of those *'subjects'* and only the release of death my female master has assured me will only come to pass when nature itself is ready to take its due receipt can free me of the bondage I labour under for *her* edification.

The vulture has eaten the pigeon, the wolf has eaten the lamb; the lion has devoured the sharp-horned buffalo and man has killed the lion with an arrow, with a spear and with gunpowder - but *La Horla* will make of man what man has made of the horse and of the ox.

Her chattel and her slave.

And by the mere power of her will.

I hear the voice of my master in the tinkling of a bell - the same bell she now uses to underline the position I occupy in her regard and whenever I am required in her presence – and I scurry to do her bidding.

I know now that she will *never* tire of my unceasing humiliation at her hands and have confessed to myself weeks prior to this current date that there will be no cessation in the imagination she applies to keeping my subjugation to her fresh and novel.

What awaits me when I reach her will only ensure the small essence of man that remains to me becomes smaller still, but scurry to her I do; beaten, abject, and with only one aim.

To serve and please that I may escape the wrath I have seen once too often and have no desire to experience another time.

Once again:

Woe to us!

THE END
