GUY DE MAUPASSANT

PIERRE AND JEAN

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Содержание

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CHAPTER I

"Tschah!" exclaimed old Roland suddenly, after he had remained motionless for a quarter of an hour, his eyes fixed on the water, while now and again he very slightly lifted his line sunk in the sea.

Mme. Roland, dozing in the stern by the side of Mme. Rosemilly, who had been invited to join the fishing-party, woke up, and turning her head to look at her husband, said:

"Well, well! Gerome."

And the old fellow replied in a fury:

"They do not bite at all. I have taken nothing since noon. Only men should ever go fishing. Women always delay the start till it is too late."

His two sons, Pierre and Jean, who each held a line twisted round his forefinger, one to port and one to starboard, both began to laugh, and Jean remarked:

"You are not very polite to our guest, father."

M. Roland was abashed, and apologized.

"I beg your pardon, Mme. Rosemilly, but that is just like me. I invite ladies because I like to be with them, and then, as soon

as I feel the water beneath me, I think of nothing but the fish."

Mme. Roland was now quite awake, and gazing with a softened look at the wide horizon of cliff and sea.

"You have had good sport, all the same," she murmured.

But her husband shook his head in denial, though at the same time he glanced complacently at the basket where the fish caught by the three men were still breathing spasmodically, with a low rustle of clammy scales and struggling fins, and dull, ineffectual efforts, gasping in the fatal air. Old Roland took the basket between his knees and tilted it up, making the silver heap of creatures slide to the edge that he might see those lying at the bottom, and their death-throes became more convulsive, while the strong smell of their bodies, a wholesome reek of brine, came up from the full depths of the creel. The old fisherman sniffed it eagerly, as we smell at roses, and exclaimed:

"Cristi! But they are fresh enough!" and he went on: "How many did you pull out, doctor?"

His eldest son, Pierre, a man of thirty, with black whiskers trimmed square like a lawyer's, his mustache and beard shaved away, replied:

"Oh, not many; three or four."

The father turned to the younger. "And you, Jean?" said he.

Jean, a tall fellow, much younger than his brother, fair, with a full beard, smiled and murmured:

"Much the same as Pierre – four or five."

Every time they told the same fib, which delighted father

Roland. He had hitched his line round a row-lock, and folding his arms he announced:

"I will never again try to fish after noon. After ten in the morning it is all over. The lazy brutes will not bite; they are taking their siesta in the sun." And he looked round at the sea on all sides, with the satisfied air of a proprietor.

He was a retired jeweller who had been led by an inordinate love of seafaring and fishing to fly from the shop as soon as he had made enough money to live in modest comfort on the interest of his savings. He retired to le Havre, bought a boat, and became an amateur skipper. His two sons, Pierre and Jean, had remained at Paris to continue their studies, and came for the holidays from time to time to share their father's amusements.

On leaving school, Pierre, the elder, five years older than Jean, had felt a vocation to various professions and had tried half a dozen in succession, but, soon disgusted with each in turn, he started afresh with new hopes. Medicine had been his last fancy, and he had set to work with so much ardour that he had just qualified after an unusually short course of study, by a special remission of time from the minister. He was enthusiastic, intelligent, fickle, but obstinate, full of Utopias and philosophical notions.

Jean, who was as fair as his brother was dark, as deliberate as his brother was vehement, as gentle as his brother was unforgiving, had quietly gone through his studies for the law and had just taken his diploma as a licentiate, at the time when Pierre

had taken his in medicine. So they were now having a little rest at home, and both looked forward to settling in Havre if they could find a satisfactory opening.

But a vague jealousy, one of those dormant jealousies which grow up between brothers or sisters and slowly ripen till they burst, on the occasion of a marriage perhaps, or of some good fortune happening to one of them, kept them on the alert in a sort of brotherly and non-aggressive animosity. They were fond of each other, it is true, but they watched each other. Pierre, five years old when Jean was born, had looked with the eyes of a little petted animal at that other little animal which had suddenly come to lie in his father's and mother's arms and to be loved and fondled by them. Jean, from his birth, had always been a pattern of sweetness, gentleness, and good temper, and Pierre had by degrees begun to chafe at ever-lastingly hearing the praises of this great lad, whose sweetness in his eyes was indolence, whose gentleness was stupidity, and whose kindliness was blindness. His parents, whose dream for their sons was some respectable and undistinguished calling, blamed him for so often changing his mind, for his fits of enthusiasm, his abortive beginnings, and all his ineffectual impulses towards generous ideas and the liberal professions.

Since he had grown to manhood they no longer said in so many words: "Look at Jean and follow his example," but every time he heard them say "Jean did this – Jean does that," he understood their meaning and the hint the words conveyed.

Their mother, an orderly person, a thrifty and rather sentimental woman of the middle class, with the soul of a soft-hearted book-keeper, was constantly quenching the little rivalries between her two big sons to which the petty events of their life constantly gave rise. Another little circumstance, too, just now disturbed her peace of mind, and she was in fear of some complications; for in the course of the winter, while her boys were finishing their studies, each in his own line, she had made the acquaintance of a neighbour, Mme. Rosemilly, the widow of a captain of a merchantman who had died at sea two years before. The young widow – quite young, only three-and-twenty – a woman of strong intellect who knew life by instinct as the free animals do, as though she had seen, gone through, understood, and weighted every conceivable contingency, and judged them with a wholesome, strict, and benevolent mind, had fallen into the habit of calling to work or chat for an hour in the evening with these friendly neighbours, who would give her a cup of tea.

Father Roland, always goaded on by his seafaring craze, would question their new friend about the departed captain; and she would talk of him, and his voyages, and his old-world tales, without hesitation, like a resigned and reasonable woman who loves life and respects death.

The two sons on their return, finding the pretty widow quite at home in the house, forthwith began to court her, less from any wish to charm her than from the desire to cut each other out.

Their mother, being practical and prudent, sincerely hoped

that one of them might win the young widow, for she was rich; but then she would have liked that the other should not be grieved.

Mme. Rosemilly was fair, with blue eyes, a mass of light waving hair, fluttering at the least breath of wind, and an alert, daring, pugnacious little way with her, which did not in the least answer to the sober method of her mind.

She already seemed to like Jean best, attracted, no doubt, by an affinity of nature. This preference, however, she betrayed only by an almost imperceptible difference of voice and look and also by occasionally asking his opinion. She seemed to guess that Jean's views would support her own, while those of Pierre must inevitably be different. When she spoke of the doctor's ideas on politics, art, philosophy, or morals, she would sometimes say: "Your crotchets." Then he would look at her with the cold gleam of an accuser drawing up an indictment against women – all women, poor weak things.

Never till his sons came home had M. Roland invited her to join his fishing expeditions, nor had he ever taken his wife; for he liked to put off before daybreak, with his ally, Captain Beausire, a master mariner retired, whom he had first met on the quay at high tides and with whom he had struck up an intimacy, and the old sailor Papagris, known as Jean Bart, in whose charge the boat was left.

But one evening of the week before, Mme. Rosemilly, who had been dining with them, remarked, "It must be great fun to go

out fishing." The jeweller, flattered by her interest and suddenly fired with the wish to share his favourite sport with her, and to make a convert after the manner of priests, exclaimed: "Would you like to come?"

"To be sure I should."

"Next Tuesday?"

"Yes, next Tuesday."

"Are you the woman to be ready to start at five in the morning?"

She exclaimed in horror:

"No, indeed: that is too much."

He was disappointed and chilled, suddenly doubting her true vocation. However, he said:

"At what hour can you be ready?"

"Well – at nine?"

"Not before?"

"No, not before. Even that is very early."

The old fellow hesitated; he certainly would catch nothing, for when the sun has warmed the sea the fish bite no more; but the two brothers had eagerly pressed the scheme, and organized and arranged everything there and then.

So on the following Tuesday the Pearl had dropped anchor under the white rocks of Cape la Heve; they had fished till midday, then they had slept awhile, and then fished again without catching anything; and then it was that father Roland, perceiving, rather late, that all that Mme. Rosemilly really enjoyed and

cared for was the sail on the sea, and seeing that his lines hung motionless, had uttered in a spirit of unreasonable annoyance, that vehement "Tschah!" which applied as much to the pathetic widow as to the creatures he could not catch.

Now he contemplated the spoil – his fish – with the joyful thrill of a miser; seeing as he looked up at the sky that the sun was getting low: "Well, boys," said he, "suppose we turn homeward."

The young men hauled in their lines, coiled them up, cleaned the hooks and stuck them into corks, and sat waiting.

Roland stood up to look out like a captain.

"No wind," said he. "You will have to pull, young 'uns."

And suddenly extending one arm to the northward, he exclaimed:

"Here comes the packet from Southampton."

Away over the level sea, spread out like a blue sheet, vast and sheeny and shot with flame and gold, an inky cloud was visible against the rosy sky in the quarter to which he pointed, and below it they could make out the hull of the steamer, which looked tiny at such a distance. And to southward other wreaths of smoke, numbers of them, could be seen, all converging towards the Havre pier, now scarcely visible as a white streak with the lighthouse, upright, like a horn, at the end of it.

Roland asked: "Is not the Normandie due to-day?" And Jean replied:

"Yes, to-day."

"Give me my glass. I fancy I see her out there."

The father pulled out the copper tube, adjusted it to his eye, sought the speck, and then, delighted to have seen it, exclaimed:

"Yes, yes, there she is. I know her two funnels. Would you like to look, Mme. Rosemilly?"

She took the telescope and directed it towards the Atlantic horizon, without being able, however, to find the vessel, for she could distinguish nothing – nothing but blue, with a coloured halo round it, a circular rainbow – and then all manner of queer things, winking eclipses which made her feel sick.

She said as she returned the glass:

"I never could see with that thing. It used to put my husband in quite a rage; he would stand for hours at the windows watching the ships pass."

Old Roland, much put out, retorted:

"Then it must be some defect in your eye, for my glass is a very good one."

Then he offered it to his wife.

"Would you like to look?"

"No, thank you. I know before hand that I could not see through it."

Mme. Roland, a woman of eight-and-forty but who did not look it, seemed to be enjoying this excursion and this waning day more than any of the party.

Her chestnut hair was only just beginning to show streaks of white. She had a calm, reasonable face, a kind and happy way with her which it was a pleasure to see. Her son Pierre was wont

to say that she knew the value of money, but this did not hinder her from enjoying the delights of dreaming. She was fond of reading, of novels, and poetry, not for their value as works of art, but for the sake of the tender melancholy mood they would induce in her. A line of poetry, often but a poor one, often a bad one, would touch the little chord, as she expressed it, and give her the sense of some mysterious desire almost realized. And she delighted in these faint emotions which brought a little flutter to her soul, otherwise as strictly kept as a ledger.

Since settling at Havre she had become perceptibly stouter, and her figure, which had been very supple and slight, had grown heavier.

This day on the sea had been delightful to her. Her husband, without being brutal, was rough with her, as a man who is the despot of his shop is apt to be rough, without anger or hatred; to such men to give an order is to swear. He controlled himself in the presence of strangers, but in private he let loose and gave himself terrible vent, though he was himself afraid of every one. She, in sheer horror of the turmoil, of scenes, of useless explanations, always gave way and never asked for anything; for a very long time she had not ventured to ask Roland to take her out in the boat. So she had joyfully hailed this opportunity, and was keenly enjoying the rare and new pleasure.

From the moment when they started she surrendered herself completely, body and soul, to the soft, gliding motion over the waves. She was not thinking; her mind was not wandering

through either memories or hopes; it seemed to her as though her heart, like her body, was floating on something soft and liquid and delicious which rocked and lulled it.

When their father gave the word to return, "Come, take your places at the oars!" she smiled to see her sons, her two great boys, take off their jackets and roll up their shirt-sleeves on their bare arms.

Pierre, who was nearest to the two women, took the stroke oar, Jean the other, and they sat waiting till the skipper should say: "Give way!" For he insisted on everything being done according to strict rule.

Simultaneously, as if by a single effort, they dipped the oars, and lying back, pulling with all their might, began a struggle to display their strength. They had come out easily, under sail, but the breeze had died away, and the masculine pride of the two brothers was suddenly aroused by the prospect of measuring their powers. When they went out alone with their father they plied the oars without any steering, for Roland would be busy getting the lines ready, while he kept a lookout in the boat's course, guiding it by a sign or a word: "Easy, Jean, and you, Pierre, put your back into it." Or he would say, "Now, then, number one; come, number two – a little elbow grease." Then the one who had been dreaming pulled harder, the one who had got excited eased down, and the boat's head came round.

But to-day they meant to display their biceps. Pierre's arms were hairy, somewhat lean but sinewy; Jean's were round and

white and rosy, and the knot of muscles moved under the skin.

At first Pierre had the advantage. With his teeth set, his brow knit, his legs rigid, his hands clinched on the oar, he made it bend from end to end at every stroke, and the Pearl was veering landward. Father Roland, sitting in the bows, so as to leave the stern seat to the two women, wasted his breath shouting, "Easy, number one; pull harder, number two!" Pierre pulled harder in his frenzy, and "number two" could not keep time with his wild stroke.

At last the skipper cried: "Stop her!" The two oars were lifted simultaneously, and then by his father's orders Jean pulled alone for a few minutes. But from that moment he had it all his own way; he grew eager and warmed to his work, while Pierre, out of breath and exhausted by his first vigorous spurt, was lax and panting. Four times running father Roland made them stop while the elder took breath, so as to get the boat into her right course again. Then the doctor, humiliated and fuming, his forehead dropping with sweat, his cheeks white, stammered out:

"I cannot think what has come over me; I have a stitch in my side. I started very well, but it has pulled me up."

Jean asked: "Shall I pull alone with both oars for a time?"

"No, thanks, it will go off."

And their mother, somewhat vexed, said:

"Why, Pierre, what rhyme or reason is there in getting into such a state. You are not a child."

And he shrugged his shoulders and set to once more.

Mme. Rosemilly pretended not to see, not to understand, not to hear. Her fair head went back with an engaging little jerk every time the boat moved forward, making the fine wayward hairs flutter about her temples.

But father Roland presently called out:

"Look, the Prince Albert is catching us up!"

They all looked round. Long and low in the water, with her two raking funnels and two yellow paddle-boxes like two round cheeks, the Southampton packet came ploughing on at full steam, crowded with passengers under open parasols. Its hurrying, noisy paddle-wheels beating up the water which fell again in foam, gave it an appearance of haste as of a courier pressed for time, and the upright stem cut through the water, throwing up two thin translucent waves which glided off along the hull.

When it had come quite near the Pearl, father Roland lifted his hat, the ladies shook their handkerchiefs, and half a dozen parasols eagerly waved on board the steamboat responded to this salute as she went on her way, leaving behind her a few broad undulations on the still and glassy surface of the sea.

There were other vessels, each with its smoky cap, coming in from every part of the horizon towards the short white jetty, which swallowed them up, one after another, like a mouth. And the fishing barks and lighter craft with broad sails and slender masts, stealing across the sky in tow of inconspicuous tugs, were coming in, faster and slower, towards the devouring ogre, who from time to time seemed to have had a surfeit, and spewed

out to the open sea another fleet of steamers, brigs, schooners, and three-masted vessels with their tangled mass of rigging. The hurrying steamships flew off to the right and left over the smooth bosom of the ocean, while sailing vessels, cast off by the pilot-tugs which had hauled them out, lay motionless, dressing themselves from the main-mast to the fore-tops in canvas, white or brown, and ruddy in the setting sun.

Mme. Roland, with her eyes half-shut, murmured: "Good heavens, how beautiful the sea is!"

And Mme. Rosemilly replied with a long sigh, which, however, had no sadness in it:

"Yes, but it is sometimes very cruel, all the same."

Roland exclaimed:

"Look, there is the Normandie just going in. A big ship, isn't she?"

Then he described the coast opposite, far, far away, on the other side of the mouth of the Seine – that mouth extended over twenty kilometres, said he. He pointed out Villerville, Trouville, Houlgate, Luc, Arromanches, the little river of Caen, and the rocks of Calvados which make the coast unsafe as far as Cherbourg. Then he enlarged on the question of the sand-banks in the Seine, which shift at every tide so that even the pilots of Quilleboeuf are at fault if they do not survey the channel every day. He bid them notice how the town of Havre divided Upper from Lower Normandy. In Lower Normandy the shore sloped down to the sea in pasture-lands, fields, and meadows. The coast

of Upper Normandy, on the contrary, was steep, a high cliff, ravined, cleft and towering, forming an immense white rampart all the way to Dunkirk, while in each hollow a village or a port lay hidden: Etretat, Fecamp, Saint-Valery, Treport, Dieppe, and the rest.

The two women did not listen. Torpid with comfort and impressed by the sight of the ocean covered with vessels rushing to and fro like wild beasts about their den, they sat speechless, somewhat awed by the soothing and gorgeous sunset. Roland alone talked on without end; he was one of those whom nothing can disturb. Women, whose nerves are more sensitive, sometimes feel, without knowing why, that the sound of useless speech is as irritating as an insult.

Pierre and Jean, who had calmed down, were rowing slowly, and the Pearl was making for the harbour, a tiny thing among those huge vessels.

When they came alongside of the quay, Papagris, who was waiting there, gave his hand to the ladies to help them out, and they took the way into the town. A large crowd, the crowd which haunts the pier every day at high tide – was also drifting homeward. Mme. Roland and Mme. Rosemilly led the way, followed by the three men. As they went up the Rue de Paris they stopped now and then in front of a milliner's or a jeweller's shop, to look at a bonnet or an ornament; then after making their comments they went on again. In front of the Place de la Bourse Roland paused, as he did every day, to gaze at the docks full

of vessels – the *Bassin du Commerce*, with other docks beyond, where the huge hulls lay side by side, closely packed in rows, four or five deep. And masts innumerable; along several kilometres of quays the endless masts, with their yards, poles, and rigging, gave this great gap in the heart of the town the look of a dead forest. Above this leafless forest the gulls were wheeling, and watching to pounce, like a falling stone, on any scraps flung overboard; a sailor boy, fixing a pulley to a cross-beam, looked as if he had gone up there bird's-nesting.

"Will you dine with us without any sort of ceremony, just that we may end the day together?" said Mme. Roland to her friend.

"To be sure I will, with pleasure; I accept equally without ceremony. It would be dismal to go home and be alone this evening."

Pierre, who had heard, and who was beginning to be restless under the young woman's indifference, muttered to himself: "Well, the widow is taking root now, it would seem." For some days past he had spoken of her as "the widow." The word, harmless in itself, irritated Jean merely by the tone given to it, which to him seemed spiteful and offensive.

The three men spoke not another word till they reached the threshold of their own house. It was a narrow one, consisting of a ground-floor and two floors above, in the Rue Belle-Normande. The maid, Josephine, a girl of nineteen, a rustic servant-of-all-work at low wages, gifted to excess with the startled animal expression of a peasant, opened the door, went up stairs at her

master's heels to the drawing-room, which was on the first floor, and then said:

"A gentleman called – three times."

Old Roland, who never spoke to her without shouting and swearing, cried out:

"Who do you say called, in the devil's name?"

She never winced at her master's roaring voice, and replied:

"A gentleman from the lawyer's."

"What lawyer?"

"Why, M'sieu 'Canu – who else?"

"And what did this gentleman say?"

"That M'sieu 'Canu will call in himself in the course of the evening."

Maitre Lecanu was M. Roland's lawyer, and in a way his friend, managing his business for him. For him to send word that he would call in the evening, something urgent and important must be in the wind; and the four Rolands looked at each other, disturbed by the announcement as folks of small fortune are wont to be at any intervention of a lawyer, with its suggestions of contracts, inheritance, lawsuits – all sorts of desirable or formidable contingencies. The father, after a few moments of silence, muttered:

"What on earth can it mean?"

Mme. Rosemilly began to laugh.

"Why, a legacy, of course. I am sure of it. I bring good luck."

But they did not expect the death of any one who might leave

them anything.

Mme. Roland, who had a good memory for relationships, began to think over all their connections on her husband's side and on her own, to trace up pedigrees and the ramifications of cousin-ship.

Before even taking off her bonnet she said:

"I say, father" (she called her husband "father" at home, and sometimes "Monsieur Roland" before strangers), "tell me, do you remember who it was that Joseph Lebru married for the second time?"

"Yes – a little girl named Dumenil, a stationer's daughter."

"Had they any children?"

"I should think so! four or five at least."

"Not from that quarter, then."

She was quite eager already in her search; she caught at the hope of some added ease dropping from the sky. But Pierre, who was very fond of his mother, who knew her to be somewhat visionary and feared she might be disappointed, a little grieved, a little saddened if the news were bad instead of good, checked her:

"Do not get excited, mother; there is no rich American uncle. For my part, I should sooner fancy that it is about a marriage for Jean."

Every one was surprised at the suggestion, and Jean was a little ruffled by his brother's having spoken of it before Mme. Rosemilly.

"And why for me rather than for you? The hypothesis is very

disputable. You are the elder; you, therefore, would be the first to be thought of. Besides, I do not wish to marry."

Pierre smiled sneeringly:

"Are you in love, then?"

And the other, much put out, retorted: "Is it necessary that a man should be in love because he does not care to marry yet?"

"Ah, there you are! That 'yet' sets it right; you are waiting."

"Granted that I am waiting, if you will have it so."

But old Roland, who had been listening and cogitating, suddenly hit upon the most probable solution.

"Bless me! what fools we are to be racking our brains. Maitre Lecanu is our very good friend; he knows that Pierre is looking out for a medical partnership and Jean for a lawyer's office, and he has found something to suit one of you."

This was so obvious and likely that every one accepted it.

"Dinner is ready," said the maid. And they all hurried off to their rooms to wash their hands before sitting down to table.

Ten minutes later they were at dinner in the little dining-room on the ground-floor.

At first they were silent; but presently Roland began again in amazement at this lawyer's visit.

"For after all, why did he not write? Why should he have sent his clerk three times? Why is he coming himself?"

Pierre thought it quite natural.

"An immediate decision is required, no doubt; and perhaps there are certain confidential conditions which it does not do to

put into writing."

Still, they were all puzzled, and all four a little annoyed at having invited a stranger, who would be in the way of their discussing and deciding on what should be done.

They had just gone upstairs again when the lawyer was announced. Roland flew to meet him.

"Good-evening, my dear Maitre," said he, giving his visitor the title which in France is the official prefix to the name of every lawyer.

Mme. Rosemilly rose.

"I am going," she said. "I am very tired."

A faint attempt was made to detain her; but she would not consent, and went home without either of the three men offering to escort her, as they always had done.

Mme. Roland did the honours eagerly to their visitor.

"A cup of coffee, monsieur?"

"No, thank you. I have just had dinner."

"A cup of tea, then?"

"Thank you, I will accept one later. First we must attend to business."

The deep silence which succeeded this remark was broken only by the regular ticking of the clock, and below stairs the clatter of saucepans which the girl was cleaning – too stupid even to listen at the door.

The lawyer went on:

"Did you, in Paris, know a certain M. Marechal – Leon

Marechal?"

M. and Mme. Roland both exclaimed at once: "I should think so!"

"He was a friend of yours?"

Roland replied: "Our best friend, monsieur, but a fanatic for Paris; never to be got away from the boulevard. He was a head clerk in the exchequer office. I have never seen him since I left the capital, and latterly we had ceased writing to each other. When people are far apart you know – "

The lawyer gravely put in:

"M. Marechal is deceased."

Both man and wife responded with the little movement of pained surprise, genuine or false, but always ready, with which such news is received.

Maitre Lecanu went on:

"My colleague in Paris has just communicated to me the main item of his will, by which he makes your son Jean – Monsieur Jean Roland – his sole legatee."

They were all too much amazed to utter a single word. Mme. Roland was the first to control her emotion and stammered out:

"Good heavens! Poor Leon – our poor friend! Dear me! Dear me! Dead!"

The tears started to her eyes, a woman's silent tears, drops of grief from her very soul, which trickle down her cheeks and seem so very sad, being so clear. But Roland was thinking less of the loss than of the prospect announced. Still, he dared not at once

inquire into the clauses of the will and the amount of the fortune, so to work round to these interesting facts he asked:

"And what did he die of, poor Marechal?"

Maitre Lecanu did not know in the least.

"All I know is," said he, "that dying without any direct heirs, he has left the whole of his fortune – about twenty thousand francs a year ($3,840) in three per cents – to your second son, whom he has known from his birth up, and judges worthy of the legacy. If M. Jean should refuse the money, it is to go to the foundling hospitals."

Old Roland could not conceal his delight and exclaimed:

"Sacristi! It is the thought of a kind heart. And if I had had no heir I would not have forgotten him; he was a true friend."

The lawyer smiled.

"I was very glad," he said, "to announce the event to you myself. It is always a pleasure to be the bearer of good news."

It had not struck him that this good news was that of the death of a friend, of Roland's best friend; and the old man himself had suddenly forgotten the intimacy he had but just spoken of with so much conviction.

Only Mme. Roland and her sons still looked mournful. She, indeed, was still shedding a few tears, wiping her eyes with her handkerchief, which she then pressed to her lips to smother her deep sobs.

The doctor murmured:

"He was a good fellow, very affectionate. He often invited us

to dine with him – my brother and me."

Jean, with wide-open, glittering eyes, laid his hand on his handsome fair beard, a familiar gesture with him, and drew his fingers down it to the tip of the last hairs, as if to pull it longer and thinner. Twice his lips parted to utter some decent remark, but after long meditation he could only say this:

"Yes, he was certainly fond of me. He would always embrace me when I went to see him."

But his father's thoughts had set off at a gallop – galloping round this inheritance to come; nay, already in hand; this money lurking behind the door, which would walk in quite soon, to-morrow, at a word of consent.

"And there is no possible difficulty in the way?" he asked. "No lawsuit – no one to dispute it?"

Maitre Lecanu seemed quite easy.

"No; my Paris correspondent states that everything is quite clear. M. Jean has only to sign his acceptance."

"Good. Then – then the fortune is quite clear?"

"Perfectly clear."

"All the necessary formalities have been gone through?"

"All."

Suddenly the old jeweller had an impulse of shame – obscure, instinctive, and fleeting; shame of his eagerness to be informed, and he added:

"You understand that I ask all these questions immediately so as to save my son unpleasant consequences which he might

not foresee. Sometimes there are debts, embarrassing liabilities, what not! And a legatee finds himself in an inextricable thorn-bush. After all, I am not the heir – but I think first of the little 'un."

They were accustomed to speak of Jean among themselves as the "little one," though he was much bigger than Pierre.

Suddenly Mme. Roland seemed to wake from a dream, to recall some remote fact, a thing almost forgotten that she had heard long ago, and of which she was not altogether sure. She inquired doubtingly:

"Were you not saying that our poor friend Marechal had left his fortune to my little Jean?"

"Yes, madame."

And she went on simply:

"I am much pleased to hear it; it proves that he was attached to us."

Roland had risen.

"And would you wish, my dear sir, that my son should at once sign his acceptance?"

"No – no, M. Roland. To-morrow, at my office to-morrow, at two o'clock, if that suits you."

"Yes, to be sure – yes, indeed. I should think so."

Then Mme. Roland, who had also risen and who was smiling after her tears, went up to the lawyer, and laying her hand on the back of his chair while she looked at him with the pathetic eyes of a grateful mother, she said:

"And now for that cup of tea, Monsieur Lecanu?"

"Now I will accept it with pleasure, madame."

The maid, on being summoned, brought in first some dry biscuits in deep tin boxes, those crisp, insipid English cakes which seem to have been made for a parrot's beak, and soldered into metal cases for a voyage round the world. Next she fetched some little gray linen doilies, folded square, those tea-napkins which in thrifty families never get washed. A third time she came in with the sugar-basin and cups; then she departed to heat the water. They sat waiting.

No one could talk; they had too much to think about and nothing to say. Mme. Roland alone attempted a few commonplace remarks. She gave an account of the fishing excursion, and sang the praises of the Pearl and of Mme. Rosemilly.

"Charming, charming!" the lawyer said again and again.

Roland, leaning against the marble mantel-shelf as if it were winter and the fire burning, with his hands in his pockets and his lips puckered for a whistle, could not keep still, tortured by the invincible desire to give vent to his delight. The two brothers, in two arm-chairs that matched, one on each side of the centre-table, stared in front of them, in similar attitudes full of dissimilar expressions.

At last the tea appeared. The lawyer took a cup, sugared it, and drank it, after having crumbled into it a little cake which was too hard to crunch. Then he rose, shook hands, and departed.

"Then it is understood," repeated Roland. "To-morrow, at your place, at two?"

"Quite so. To-morrow, at two."

Jean had not spoken a word.

When their guest had gone, silence fell again till father Roland clapped his two hands on his younger son's shoulders, crying:

"Well, you devilish lucky dog! You don't embrace me!"

Then Jean smiled. He embraced his father, saying:

"It had not struck me as indispensable."

The old man was beside himself with glee. He walked about the room, strummed on the furniture with his clumsy nails, turned about on his heels, and kept saying:

"What luck! What luck! Now, that is really what I call luck!"

Pierre asked:

"Then you used to know this Marechal well?"

And his father replied:

"I believe! Why, he used to spend every evening at our house. Surely you remember he used to fetch you from school on half-holidays, and often took you back again after dinner. Why, the very day when Jean was born it was he who went for the doctor. He had been breakfasting with us when your mother was taken ill. Of course we knew at once what it meant, and he set off post-haste. In his hurry he took my hat instead of his own. I remember that because we had a good laugh over it afterward. It is very likely that he may have thought of that when he was dying, and as he had no heir he may have said to himself: 'I remember helping

to bring that youngster into the world, so I will leave him my savings.'"

Mme. Roland, sunk in a deep chair, seemed lost in reminiscences once more. She murmured, as though she were thinking aloud:

"Ah, he was a good friend, very devoted, very faithful, a rare soul in these days."

Jean got up.

"I shall go out for a little walk," he said.

His father was surprised and tried to keep him; they had much to talk about, plans to be made, decisions to be formed. But the young man insisted, declaring that he had an engagement. Besides, there would be time enough for settling everything before he came into possession of his inheritance. So he went away, for he wished to be alone to reflect. Pierre, on his part, said that he too was going out, and after a few minutes followed his brother.

As soon as he was alone with his wife, father Roland took her in his arms, kissed her a dozen times on each cheek, and, replying to a reproach she had often brought against him, said:

"You see, my dearest, that it would have been no good to stay any longer in Paris and work for the children till I dropped, instead of coming here to recruit my health, since fortune drops on us from the skies."

She was quite serious.

"It drops from the skies on Jean," she said. "But Pierre?"

"Pierre? But he is a doctor; he will make plenty of money; besides, his brother will surely do something for him."

"No, he would not take it. Besides, this legacy is for Jean, only for Jean. Pierre will find himself at a great disadvantage."

The old fellow seemed perplexed: "Well, then, we will leave him rather more in our will."

"No; that again would not be quite just."

"Drat it all!" he exclaimed. "What do you want me to do in the matter? You always hit on a whole heap of disagreeable ideas. You must spoil all my pleasures. Well, I am going to bed. Good-night. All the same, I call it good luck, jolly good luck!"

And he went off, delighted in spite of everything, and without a word of regret for the friend so generous in his death.

Mme. Roland sat thinking again in front of the lamp which was burning out.

CHAPTER II

As soon as he got out, Pierre made his way to the Rue de Paris, the high-street of Havre, brightly lighted up, lively and noisy. The rather sharp air of the seacoast kissed his face, and he walked slowly, his stick under his arm and his hands behind his back. He was ill at ease, oppressed, out of heart, as one is after hearing unpleasant tidings. He was not distressed by any definite thought, and he would have been puzzled to account, on the spur of the moment, for this dejection of spirit and heaviness of limb. He was hurt somewhere, without knowing where; somewhere within him there was a pin-point of pain – one of those almost imperceptible wounds which we cannot lay a finger on, but which incommode us, tire us, depress us, irritate us – a slight and occult pang, as it were a small seed of distress.

When he reached the square in front of the theatre, he was attracted by the lights in the Cafe Tortoni, and slowly bent his steps to the dazzling facade; but just as he was going in he reflected that he would meet friends there and acquaintances – people he would be obliged to talk to; and fierce repugnance surged up in him for this commonplace good-fellowship over coffee cups and liqueur glasses. So, retracing his steps, he went back to the high-street leading to the harbour.

"Where shall I go?" he asked himself, trying to think of a spot he liked which would agree with his frame of mind. He could

not think of one, for being alone made him feel fractious, yet he could not bear to meet any one. As he came out on the Grand Quay he hesitated once more; then he turned towards the pier; he had chosen solitude.

Going close by a bench on the breakwater he sat down, tired already of walking and out of humour with his stroll before he had taken it.

He said to himself: "What is the matter with me this evening?" And he began to search in his memory for what vexation had crossed him, as we question a sick man to discover the cause of his fever.

His mind was at once irritable and sober; he got excited, then he reasoned, approving or blaming his impulses; but in time primitive nature at last proved the stronger; the sensitive man always had the upper hand over the intellectual man. So he tried to discover what had induced this irascible mood, this craving to be moving without wanting anything, this desire to meet some one for the sake of differing from him, and at the same time this aversion for the people he might see and the things they might say to him.

And then he put the question to himself, "Can it be Jean's inheritance?"

Yes, it was certainly possible. When the lawyer had announced the news he had felt his heart beat a little faster. For, indeed, one is not always master of one's self; there are sudden and pertinacious emotions against which a man struggles in vain.

He fell into meditation on the physiological problem of the impression produced on the instinctive element in man, and giving rise to a current of painful or pleasurable sensations diametrically opposed to those which the thinking man desires, aims at, and regards as right and wholesome, when he has risen superior to himself by the cultivation of his intellect. He tried to picture to himself the frame of mind of a son who had inherited a vast fortune, and who, thanks to that wealth, may now know many long-wished-for delights, which the avarice of his father had prohibited – a father, nevertheless, beloved and regretted.

He got up and walked on to the end of the pier. He felt better, and glad to have understood, to have detected himself, to have unmasked *the other* which lurks in us.

"Then I was jealous of Jean," thought he. "That is really vilely mean. And I am sure of it now, for the first idea which came into my head was that he would marry Mme. Rosemilly. And yet I am not in love myself with that priggish little goose, who is just the woman to disgust a man with good sense and good conduct. So it is the most gratuitous jealousy, the very essence of jealousy, which is merely because it is! I must keep an eye on that!"

By this time he was in front of the flag-staff, whence the depth of water in the harbour is signalled, and he struck a match to read the list of vessels signalled in the roadstead and coming in with the next high tide. Ships were due from Brazil, from La Plata, from Chili and Japan, two Danish brigs, a Norwegian schooner, and a Turkish steamship – which startled Pierre as much as if it

had read a Swiss steamship; and in a whimsical vision he pictured a great vessel crowded with men in turbans climbing the shrouds in loose trousers.

"How absurd!" thought he. "But the Turks are a maritime people, too."

A few steps further on he stopped again, looking out at the roads. On the right, above Sainte-Adresse, the two electric lights of Cape la Heve, like monstrous twin Cyclops, shot their long and powerful beams across the sea. Starting from two neighbouring centres, the two parallel shafts of light, like the colossal tails of two comets, fell in a straight and endless slope from the top of the cliff to the uttermost horizon. Then, on the two piers, two more lights, the children of these giants, marked the entrance to the harbour; and far away on the other side of the Seine others were in sight, many others, steady or winking, flashing or revolving, opening and shutting like eyes – the eyes of the ports – yellow, red, and green, watching the night-wrapped sea covered with ships; the living eyes of the hospitable shore saying, merely by the mechanical and regular movement of their eye-lids: "I am here. I am Trouville; I am Honfleur; I am the Andemer River." And high above all the rest, so high that from this distance it might be taken for a planet, the airy lighthouse of Etouville showed the way to Rouen across the sand banks at the mouth of the great river.

Out on the deep water, the limitless water, darker than the sky, stars seemed to have fallen here and there. They twinkled

in the night haze, small, close to shore or far away – white, red, and green, too. Most of them were motionless; some, however, seemed to be scudding onward. These were the lights of the ships at anchor or moving about in search of moorings.

Just at this moment the moon rose behind the town; and it, too, looked like some huge, divine pharos lighted up in the heavens to guide the countless fleet of stars in the sky. Pierre murmured, almost speaking aloud: "Look at that! And we let our bile rise for twopence!"

On a sudden, close to him, in the wide, dark ditch between the two piers, a shadow stole up, a large shadow of fantastic shape. Leaning over the granite parapet, he saw that a fishing-boat had glided in, without the sound of a voice or the splash of a ripple, or the plunge of an oar, softly borne in by its broad, tawny sail spread to the breeze from the open sea.

He thought to himself: "If one could but live on board that boat, what peace it would be – perhaps!"

And then again a few steps beyond, he saw a man sitting at the very end of the breakwater.

A dreamer, a lover, a sage – a happy or a desperate man? Who was it? He went forward, curious to see the face of this lonely individual, and he recognised his brother.

"What, is it you, Jean?"

"Pierre! You! What has brought you here?"

"I came out to get some fresh air. And you?"

Jean began to laugh.

"I too came out for fresh air." And Pierre sat down by his brother's side.

"Lovely – isn't it?"

"Oh, yes, lovely."

He understood from the tone of voice that Jean had not looked at anything. He went on:

"For my part, whenever I come here I am seized with a wild desire to be off with all those boats, to the north or the south. Only to think that all those little sparks out there have just come from the uttermost ends of the earth, from the lands of great flowers and beautiful olive or copper coloured girls, the lands of humming-birds, of elephants, of roaming lions, of negro kings, from all the lands which are like fairy-tales to us who no longer believe in the White Cat or the Sleeping Beauty. It would be awfully jolly to be able to treat one's self to an excursion out there; but, then, it would cost a great deal of money, no end – "

He broke off abruptly, remembering that his brother had that money now; and released from care, released from labouring for his daily bread, free, unfettered, happy, and light-hearted, he might go whither he listed, to find the fair-haired Swedes or the brown damsels of Havana. And then one of those involuntary flashes which were common with him, so sudden and swift that he could neither anticipate them, nor stop them, nor qualify them, communicated, as it seemed to him, from some second, independent, and violent soul, shot through his brain.

"Bah! He is too great a simpleton; he will marry that little

Rosemilly." He was standing up now. "I will leave you to dream of the future. I want to be moving." He grasped his brother's hand and added in a heavy tone:

"Well, my dear old boy, you are a rich man. I am very glad to have come upon you this evening to tell you how pleased I am about it, how truly I congratulate you, and how much I care for you."

Jean, tender and soft-hearted, was deeply touched.

"Thank you, my good brother – thank you!" he stammered.

And Pierre turned away with his slow step, his stick under his arm, and his hands behind his back.

Back in the town again, he once more wondered what he should do, being disappointed of his walk and deprived of the company of the sea by his brother's presence. He had an inspiration. "I will go and take a glass of liqueur with old Marowsko," and he went off towards the quarter of the town known as Ingouville.

He had known old Marowsko-*le pere Marowsko*, he called him – in the hospitals in Paris. He was a Pole, an old refugee, it was said, who had gone through terrible things out there, and who had come to ply his calling as a chemist and druggist in France after passing a fresh examination. Nothing was known of his early life, and all sorts of legends had been current among the indoor and outdoor patients and afterward among his neighbours. This reputation as a terrible conspirator, a nihilist, a regicide, a patriot ready for anything and everything, who had escaped

death by a miracle, had bewitched Pierre Roland's lively and bold imagination; he had made friends with the old Pole, without, however, having ever extracted from him any revelation as to his former career. It was owing to the young doctor that this worthy had come to settle at Havre, counting on the large custom which the rising practitioner would secure him. Meanwhile he lived very poorly in his little shop, selling medicines to the small tradesmen and workmen in his part of the town.

Pierre often went to see him and chat with him for an hour after dinner, for he liked Marowsko's calm look and rare speech, and attributed great depth to his long spells of silence.

A simple gas-burner was alight over the counter crowded with phials. Those in the window were not lighted, from motives of economy. Behind the counter, sitting on a chair with his legs stretched out and crossed, an old man, quite bald, with a large beak of a nose which, as a prolongation of his hairless forehead, gave him a melancholy likeness to a parrot, was sleeping soundly, his chin resting on his breast. He woke at the sound of the shop-bell, and recognising the doctor, came forward to meet him, holding out both hands.

His black frock-coat, streaked with stains of acids and sirups, was much too wide for his lean little person, and looked like a shabby old cassock; and the man spoke with a strong Polish accent which gave the childlike character to his thin voice, the lisping note and intonations of a young thing learning to speak.

Pierre sat down, and Marowsko asked him: "What news, dear

doctor?"

"None. Everything as usual, everywhere."

"You do not look very gay this evening."

"I am not often gay."

"Come, come, you must shake that off. Will you try a glass of liqueur?"

"Yes, I do not mind."

"Then I will give you something new to try. For these two months I have been trying to extract something from currants, of which only a sirup has been made hitherto – well, and I have done it. I have invented a very good liqueur – very good indeed; very good."

And quite delighted, he went to a cupboard, opened it, and picked out a bottle which he brought forth. He moved and did everything in jerky gestures, always incomplete; he never quite stretched out his arm, nor quite put out his legs; nor made any broad and definite movements. His ideas seemed to be like his actions; he suggested them, promised them, sketched them, hinted at them, but never fully uttered them.

And, indeed, his great end in life seemed to be the concoction of sirups and liqueurs. "A good sirup or a good liqueur is enough to make a fortune," he would often say.

He had compounded hundreds of these sweet mixtures without ever succeeding in floating one of them. Pierre declared that Marowsko always reminded him of Marat.

Two little glasses were fetched out of the back shop and placed

on the mixing-board. Then the two men scrutinized the colour of the fluid by holding it up to the gas.

"A fine ruby," Pierre declared.

"Isn't it?" Marowsko's old parrot-face beamed with satisfaction.

The doctor tasted, smacked his lips, meditated, tasted again, meditated again, and spoke:

"Very good – capital; and quite new in flavour. It is a find, my dear fellow."

"Ah, really? Well, I am very glad."

Then Marowsko took counsel as to baptizing the new liqueur. He wanted to call it "Extract of currants," or else "*Fine Groseille*" or "*Groselia*," or again "*Groseline*." Pierre did not approve of either of these names.

Then the old man had an idea:

"What you said just now would be very good, very good: 'Fine Ruby.'" But the doctor disputed the merit of this name, though it had originated with him. He recommended simply "Groseillette," which Marowsko thought admirable.

Then they were silent, and sat for some minutes without a word under the solitary gas-lamp. At last Pierre began, almost in spite of himself:

"A queer thing has happened at home this evening. A friend of my father's, who is lately dead, has left his fortune to my brother."

The druggist did not at first seem to understand, but after thinking it over he hoped that the doctor had half the inheritance.

When the matter was clearly explained to him he appeared surprised and vexed; and to express his dissatisfaction at finding that his young friend had been sacrificed, he said several times over:

"It will not look well."

Pierre, who was relapsing into nervous irritation, wanted to know what Marowsko meant by this phrase.

Why would it not look well? What was there to look badly in the fact that his brother had come into the money of a friend of the family?

But the cautious old man would not explain further.

"In such a case the money is left equally to the two brothers, and I tell you, it will not look well."

And the doctor, out of all patience, went away, returned to his father's house, and went to bed. For some time afterward he heard Jean moving softly about the adjoining room, and then, after drinking two glasses of water, he fell asleep.

CHAPTER III

The doctor awoke next morning firmly resolved to make his fortune. Several times already he had come to the same determination without following up the reality. At the outset of all his trials of some new career the hopes of rapidly acquired riches kept up his efforts and confidence, till the first obstacle, the first check, threw him into a fresh path. Snug in bed between the warm sheets, he lay meditating. How many medical men had become wealthy in quite a short time! All that was needed was a little knowledge of the world; for in the course of his studies he had learned to estimate the most famous physicians, and he judged them all to be asses. He was certainly as good as they, if not better. If by any means he could secure a practice among the wealth and fashion of Havre, he could easily make a hundred thousand francs a year. And he calculated with great exactitude what his certain profits must be. He would go out in the morning to visit his patients; at the very moderate average of ten a day, at twenty francs each, that would mount up to seventy-two thousand francs a year at least, or even seventy-five thousand; for ten patients was certainly below the mark. In the afternoon he would be at home to, say, another ten patients, at ten francs each – thirty-six thousand francs. Here, then, in round numbers was an income of twenty thousand francs. Old patients, or friends whom he would charge only ten francs for a visit, or see at home for

five, would perhaps make a slight reduction on this sum total, but consultations with other physicians and various incidental fees would make up for that.

Nothing could be easier than to achieve this by skilful advertising remarks in the Figaro to the effect that the scientific faculty of Paris had their eye on him, and were interested in the cures effected by the modest young practitioner of Havre! And he would be richer than his brother, richer and more famous; and satisfied with himself, for he would owe his fortune solely to his own exertions; and liberal to his old parents, who would be justly proud of his fame. He would not marry, would not burden his life with a wife who would be in his way, but he would choose his mistress from the most beautiful of his patients. He felt so sure of success that he sprang out of bed as though to grasp it on the spot, and he dressed to go and search through the town for rooms to suit him.

Then, as he wandered about the streets, he reflected how slight are the causes which determine our actions. Any time these three weeks he might and ought to have come to this decision, which, beyond a doubt, the news of his brother's inheritance had abruptly given rise to.

He stopped before every door where a placard proclaimed that "fine apartments" or "handsome rooms" were to be let; announcements without an adjective he turned from with scorn. Then he inspected them with a lofty air, measuring the height of the rooms, sketching the plan in his note-book, with the passages,

the arrangement of the exits, explaining that he was a medical man and had many visitors. He must have a broad and well-kept stair-case; nor could he be any higher up than the first floor.

After having written down seven or eight addresses and scribbled two hundred notes, he got home to breakfast a quarter of an hour too late.

In the hall he heard the clatter of plates. Then they had begun without him! Why? They were never wont to be so punctual. He was nettled and put out, for he was somewhat thin-skinned. As he went in Roland said to him:

"Come, Pierre, make haste, devil take you! You know we have to be at the lawyer's at two o'clock. This is not the day to be dawdling."

Pierre sat down without replying, after kissing his mother and shaking hands with his father and brother; and he helped himself from the deep dish in the middle of the table to the cutlet which had been kept for him. It was cold and dry, probably the least tempting of them all. He thought that they might have left it on the hot plate till he came in, and not lose their heads so completely as to have forgotten their other son, their eldest.

The conversation, which his entrance had interrupted, was taken up again at the point where it had ceased.

"In your place," Mme. Roland was saying to Jean, "I will tell you what I should do at once. I should settle in handsome rooms so as to attract attention; I should ride on horseback and select one or two interesting cases to defend and make a mark in court.

I would be a sort of amateur lawyer, and very select. Thank God you are out of all danger of want, and if you pursue a profession, it is, after all, only that you may not lose the benefit of your studies, and because a man ought never to sit idle."

Old Roland, who was peeling a pear, exclaimed:

"Christi! In your place I should buy a nice yacht, a cutter on the build of our pilot-boats. I would sail as far as Senegal in such a boat as that."

Pierre, in his turn, spoke his views. After all, said he, it was not his wealth which made the moral worth, the intellectual worth of a man. To a man of inferior mind it was only a means of degradation, while in the hands of a strong man it was a powerful lever. They, to be sure, were rare. If Jean were a really superior man, now that he could never want he might prove it. But then he must work a hundred times harder than he would have done in other circumstances. His business now must be not to argue for or against the widow and the orphan, and pocket his fees for every case he gained, but to become a really eminent legal authority, a luminary of the law. And he added in conclusion:

"If I were rich wouldn't I dissect no end of bodies!"

Father Roland shrugged his shoulders.

"That is all very fine," he said. "But the wisest way of life is to take it easy. We are not beasts of burden, but men. If you are born poor you must work; well, so much the worse; and you do work. But where you have dividends! You must be a flat if you grind yourself to death."

Pierre replied haughtily:

"Our notions differ. For my part, I respect nothing on earth but learning and intellect; everything else is beneath contempt."

Mme. Roland always tried to deaden the constant shocks between father and son; she turned the conversation, and began talking of a murder committed the week before at Bolbec Nointot. Their minds were immediately full of the circumstances under which the crime had been committed, and absorbed by the interesting horror, the attractive mystery of crime, which, however commonplace, shameful, and disgusting, exercises a strange and universal fascination over the curiosity of mankind. Now and again, however, old Roland looked at his watch. "Come," said he, "it is time to be going."

Pierre sneered.

"It is not yet one o'clock," he said. "It really was hardly worth while to condemn me to eat a cold cutlet."

"Are you coming to the lawyer's?" his mother asked.

"I? No. What for?" he replied dryly. "My presence is quite unnecessary."

Jean sat silent, as though he had no concern in the matter. When they were discussing the murder at Bolbec he, as a legal authority, had put forward some opinions and uttered some reflections on crime and criminals. Now he spoke no more; but the sparkle in his eye, the bright colour in his cheeks, the very gloss of his beard seemed to proclaim his happiness.

When the family had gone, Pierre, alone once more, resumed

his investigations in the apartments to let. After two or three hours spent in going up and down stairs, he at last found, in the Boulevard Francois, a pretty set of rooms; a spacious entresol with two doors on two different streets, two drawing-rooms, a glass corridor, where his patients while they waited, might walk among flowers, and a delightful dining-room with a bow-window looking out over the sea.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.