The weight of the name

Bourget Paul
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BY

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THE WEIGHT OF THE NAME

LANDRI

THE automobile turned sharply about the chevet of Saint-François-Xavier. With an instinctive movement, Landri de Claviers-Grandchamp seized the megaphone. He called to the chauffeur to stop before one of the side entrances. The powerful limousine was still in motion when he jumped out upon the sidewalk and disappeared within the church, to reappear a few seconds later, by way of the main portal, on Boulevard des Invalides. With the elegant and self-assured bearing characteristic of Landri, with his charming face, at once soldierly and thoughtful, which a proud, almost haughty mouth, beneath the slightly tawny veil of the mustache, would have made too stern had not the eyes, of a caressing brown, softened its expression, that childlike stratagem could mean but one thing,—the desire to guard from curiosity and comments a clandestine rendezvous.

It was true, but—a circumstance which would have made the officers of the dragoon regiment in which the young count was serving as a lieutenant burst
with laughter—he had this rendezvous with a woman
with whom he was madly in love without having ever
obtained anything from her. What do I say? He had
not even ventured, except on one occasion, to speak
to her of his sentiments.

How many elements in his life had conspired to
make him a fop and blasé: that face and that pro-
ession, his fortune and his name—one of the best
in France, which had lacked nothing but the éclat
of great offices at court! But Landri was born roman-
tic. He was still romantic at twenty-nine. In him,
as in the hearts of all genuinely tender-hearted men,
emotion neutralized vanity.

He had met Madame Olier in 1903. That was the
name of the woman in question, a widow to-day,
then the wife of one of his comrades. It was now 1906,
so that he had loved her for three years. It had never
entered his head that such perseverance in a dumb
and unselfish devotion was a delusion. He thought
so less than ever on this warm and, so to speak, languid
morning of late November, as he went his way, drawn
on, uplifted by a proximate hope.

Although he had reasons for very serious reflection,
the air seemed light to him, his step was buoyant on
the sidewalks of that ancient quarter, of which he
recognized the most trivial features. Behind him the
dome of the Invalides stamped the gold of its cupola
on a pallid, pearl-gray mist. At his right the slender
towers of Saint-François soared aloft in a transparent
vapor. At his left the trees of a large private garden
waved their almost leafless branches over the enclosing
wall, and, as far as one could see, the populous Boule-
vard de Montparnasse stretched away, swarming with tramways and omnibuses, with cabs and drays.

In due time the young man turned into Rue Oudinot, then into Rue Monsieur. There he paused before a porte-cochère, the door of which, although it was ajar, he hesitated for some seconds to open. This door gave access to a courtyard, at whose farther end was hidden one of those dainty, oldish hôtels, pleasing to the eye, albeit out of style, of which that street with its ancien-régime name contained some half-score or more a quarter of a century since. Alas! they are vanishing one by one. As soon as the owner of one of them dies, the crowbars of the demolishers set to work. An aristocratic plaything of stone is razed to the ground. In its place rises one of those vulgar income-producing houses, on whose threshold one finds it difficult to imagine the lingering of such a lover as this. To be sure, it is simply prejudice. In the eyes of a man in love, the profile of his mistress, espied in the cage of an elevator, would bedeck with poesy and fascination the staircase of one of those monstrosities in brick and steel which the Americans brutally call "sky-scrapers." All the same, there is a more intimate, a more penetrating sweetness in a perfect accord between the setting in which a woman lives and the passion that she inspires. This sweetness Landri de Claviers had ecstatically intoxicated himself with in all his visits to that hermitage on Rue Monsieur. Never had he savored it more deeply than at this moment, when he was about to risk a step most important for the future of his love.

He had come to Valentine Olier's house with the
firm determination to bring about a decisive interview between them, and to ask her for her hand. If he had insisted that she should receive him at a most unseasonable hour, he had had for that insistence imperative reasons which excused him beforehand for his indiscretion. His timidity before that day, and the rapid throbbing of his pulse as he finally crossed the courtyard, did not come from an embarrassment of the sort that can be explained. It was the sinking of the heart from excess of emotion, which accompanies overpowerful desire in untried sensibilities. Naturally refined, Landri had not aged himself prematurely by the abuse of precocious experiments. To this young man, who was really entitled to be so called, what awaited him behind the curtains of that ground floor was the happiness or the misery of his whole life. But, we repeat, he hoped.

His eyes feasted themselves, as their custom was, on the lines of that façade, so closely associated with the image of his Valentine. Ah! would she ever be his? A reflection of her person illuminated in his eyes that two-story building, charming in very truth, whose light pilasters, modest decorations, pediment with balustrades, and niches adorned with classic busts, presented a perfect specimen of the architecture of the time of Louis XVI,—a composite style, antique and pastoral, like that extraordinary epoch itself, in which a moribund society played at idyls — awaiting the tragedy — amid Pompeian architecture.

This hôtel had been the "folly" of one of the luxurious farmers-general of that day. To-day the petite maison, divided bourgeois-fashion into small