Section Seventeen

_Husband’s Inheritance_

Only my son was left, since my daughter had died in tragic circumstances three years earlier. My son was away with his regiment when this happened. Since he was a minor, I was made his guardian. I was not aware of the weight of this responsibility, which grew considerably when I found out the extent of the debts that I found in the house. My husband, whose judgment was impaired, had allowed himself to be duped and ruined by his servants. My relative, on the other hand, had always helped herself to whatever she pleased, to the extent that the old man denied himself everything and let himself be robbed without ever knowing it by those whom he trusted.

I wrote of this event to my friends, who lived far from me, notably to the Baron, whose responded courteously. This death affected me more than I had anticipated. The idea of this eternal separation was horrifying and when I told the friends who were with me they scolded me for my unwarranted pain. I told them that I agreed with their reasons, but that the moments following his death had made a vivid impression on me. I grieved for three months, then as my affairs forced me to travel, my sorrow gradually faded away.

As the apartment my relative used was under my husband’s name, I asked for the doors to be officially sealed as soon as he died. When I went there to have my furniture removed, it was unfortunately during a holiday. I found only one judge willing to supervise this formality, and I had to take him.

I had found letters and love notes from this woman in my husband’s documents, which proved that she intended to rob me. She was formally asking him to do her the favor of signing the account that she was sending to him, along with a list of furniture that she was supposed to return to me. She added that since I had no idea of what was actually in the apartment, she would be obligated to give me back only the things listed on the account approved by him.

Everybody had informed me as I arrived in the little town that the seals had been affixed under her supervision. She had set aside my husband’s belongings and claimed that the rest were hers. The orders I had given to sequester everything that was in the house had been ignored.

This town is a sort of small republic unto itself. Recently acquired by France, its inhabitants hate everything which is not born among them. My relative was not a native, but had lived there for quite some time and was deemed worthy enough to be a citizen of the town. I, on the other hand, was not well known. Treated like a stranger, I had to bear all possible injustices from the magistrate. Upon my arrival I went to urge him to help me with my business. I complained about the carelessness with which the seals had been affixed, and showed him the compromising letters of my relative. He agreed that her ill will was obvious, and that I would be allowed to have her apartment searched. This was fair, since she had in her possession my husband’s furniture and belongings and since her apartment was under his name.

The next day I was taking inventory with the officers of justice. I had found a list, actually written and signed by my husband, of everything that was in that house. I demanded the items on the list, but saw that instead of the things I had the right to claim, I was given old rags and broken pieces of furniture. The public attorney, a devilish instrument in the hands of my relative, told me there was nothing more, and swore this on
his profession. I therefore asked the judge for the search which he had promised the day before. He bluntly refused, offering me paltry excuses. I lost my temper, treating him badly, but it brought me nowhere. Afterwards I found out that my relative, with whom he had previously been on bad terms, had called upon him shortly after my visit. She had then shown him many civilities, begging him to defend her interests. He was so flattered by this request that he promised her everything and kept his word. He repeatedly did me wrong. I denounce his injustices and will never stop accusing him. This man was not made for his line of duty.

When I became aware of all the debts and hindrance my husband had left me, I gave up my plan to live in Paris. My affection for my son caused me to remain in my desert of loneliness in order to save money as well as appease the creditors of my husband.