

The little one arose in his arms and started to sob for "Dada." That was as much as possible do or say. Some people figured she may have wandered there willingly, for she was of the meandering age. The overarching conviction was that she must have been intentionally left by a gathering of Texans, whose canvas-secured cart, late in the day, had crossed the ship that Cotton Maïs kept, just beneath the manor. In time Madame Valmondé relinquished each theory yet the one that Désirée had been shipped off her by a gainful Providence to be the offspring of her warmth, seeing that she was without offspring of the substance. For the young lady became to be lovely and delicate, affectionate and earnest,— the icon of Valmondé. It was no big surprise, when she stood one day against the stone column in whose shadow she had lain sleeping, eighteen years prior, that Armand Aubigny riding by and seeing her there, had begun to look all starry eyed at her. That was the way all the Aubignys began to look all starry eyed at, as though struck by a gun fired. The marvel was that he had not adored her previously; for he had known her since his dad brought him home from Paris, a kid of eight, after his mom kicked the bucket there. The energy that arose in him that day, when he saw her at the door, cleared along like a torrential slide, or like a grassland fire, or like whatever drives head-first over all impediments.