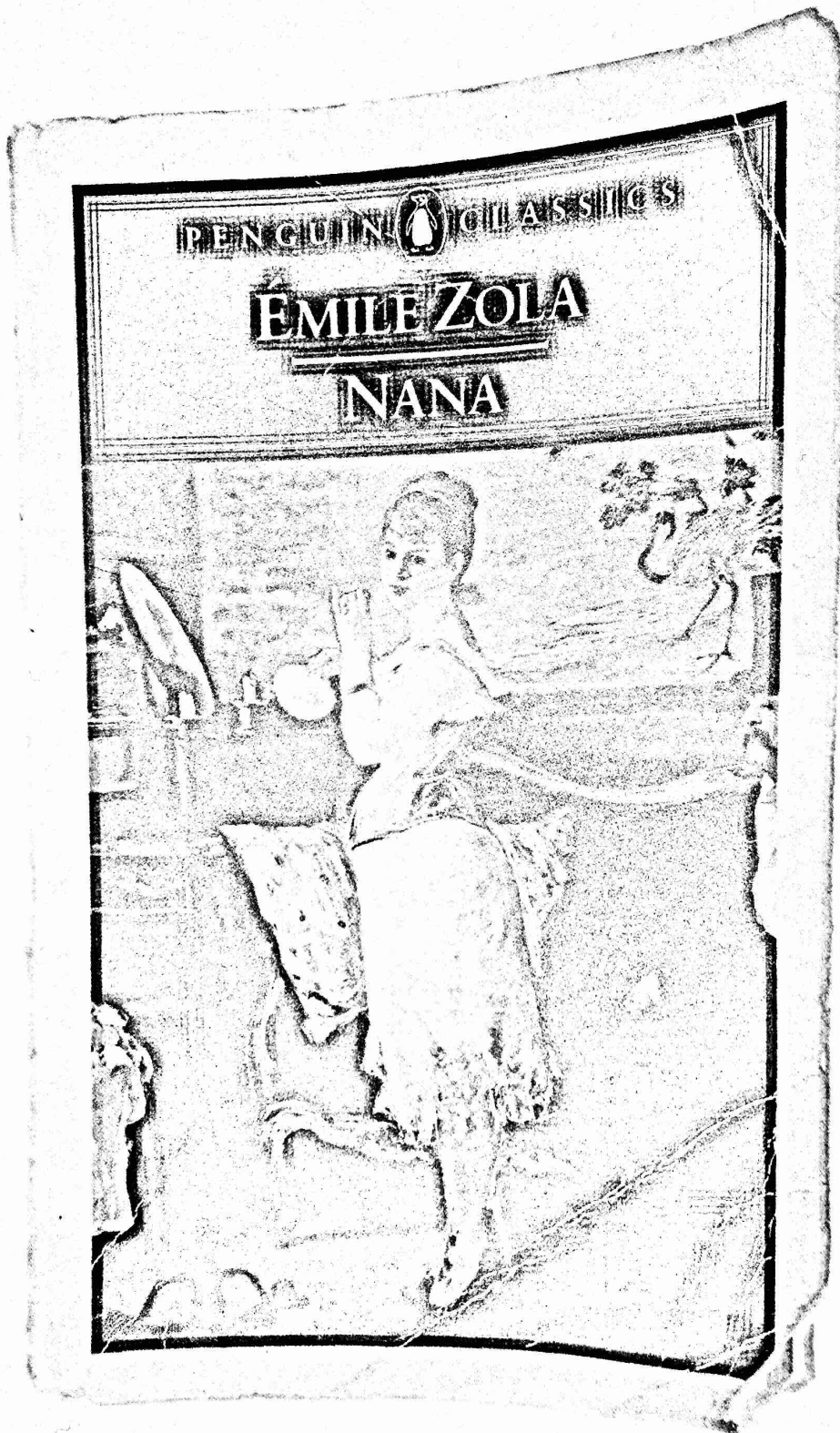
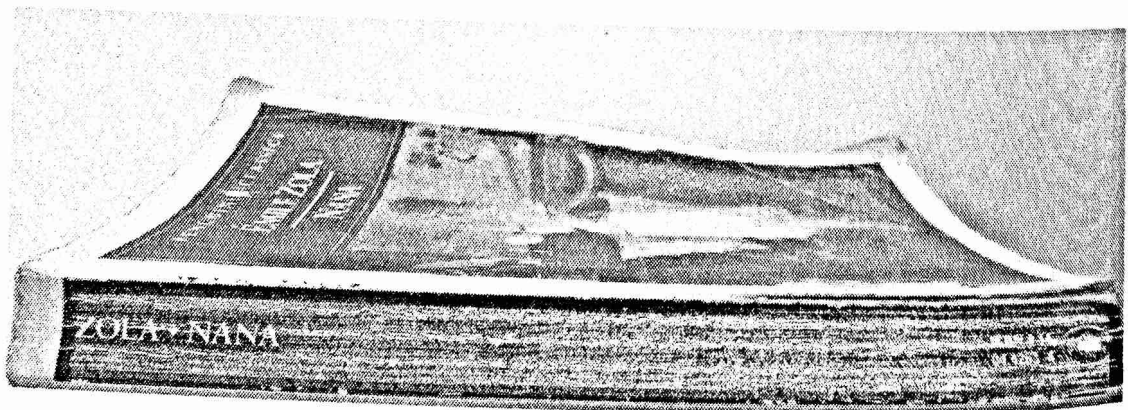


READING NANA

AN EXPERIMENTAL NOVEL



SHARON KIVLAND



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MA BIBLIOTHÈQUE

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The cover shows the author's Penguin edition of *Nana*

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I have established the plan of Nana, and I am very pleased.

Émile Zola

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ÉBAUCHE

I have been reading *Nana* by Émile Zola for some time now, over a number of years. Zola's novel, his 'true story of the *demi-monde*', was published in instalments, first appearing in October 1879 in *Le Voltaire*. The definitive version in book form was published on 15 February by Charpentier. I read and I re-read the book, in both French and English. I digest the book, condensing it, organising it into themes, appearances; yes, I assimilate it. I read (one might say perform) my assimilations, and I have danced one, according to Jean-Luc Godard's film version, inviting others to join me. Some parts of my reading have been published in instalments. Herein they are assembled, a whole novel that is largely incomplete, as *Nana* or *Nana* slips from the grasp. Her value lies in that she can be exchanged. Her value lies in that another has had her. Her body has useful qualities, and these qualities are also of value. *Nana* or *Nana* is of value because she has been used; her potential for use is realised and finely calibrated. The cleavage between her use and exchange is less clearly demarcated. She eludes possession, no matter how many times she is had, no matter how many times it is read. There is no portrait of her, though Manet paints one which or who is like her. A horse is named for her, described in more detail than she. I take it upon myself to depict her, to speak for her and as her: a woman who is a book, a book that is a woman.

GHOSTWRITER

I have something else. It smells damnably strong in me. I only have to appear and the audience will be hanging out their tongues. A skin. Oh, what a skin I've got. I am an amusing creature, a lovely girl. I sing like a trombone. My laughter makes a delightful dimple appear in my chin. I have a little red mouth and bright blue eyes. The reddish hair on my neck looks like an animal's pelt. I am so plump and white. I am sure of the sovereign power of my flesh. I have round shoulders, amazon breasts, the rosy tips of which stand up as stiff and straight as spears. My broad hips sway voluptuously. My deadly smile of a man-eater. My slightest movements fan the flames of desire. With a twitch of my little finger I can stir men's flesh. My lips are moist, my eyes sparkling. Close to my ear I have a patch of delicate, satiny skin. Champagne makes me tipsy straightaway. No one can teach me anything about lady-like behaviour. I am not a fool. I want people to show me a bit of respect. I have a cool scented hand. I am the devil, with my laughter, my breasts and my crupper, which seems swollen with vice. My dimpled face seems fraught with desire. I have an unnaturally red mouth in an unnaturally white face, and exaggerated eyes, ringed with black and burning fiercely as if ravaged by love. I stand out, white and gigantic. My hair reaches down below my waist. Little golden hairs curl low down between my shoulders. My smile is adorable in its

embarrassment and submissiveness. The naked flesh of my lithe arms and white shoulders. I am a Venus with the rouge scarcely washed from my cheeks. I experience sudden fits of blushing, flurries of emotion, which leave me trembling. My desires make me feel ashamed. My heart is full to bursting. My childhood ambitions have been greatly surpassed. I taste the novel sensations experienced by young girls. I am intoxicated by the scent of leaves. I feel like a schoolgirl. I savour delicious novelty and voluptuous terrors. I am subject to the fancies of a sentimental girl. I gaze at the moon for hours. I am afraid of dying. I am utterly silly. My maternal affection is as violent as a fit of madness. I am charmed by my existence. I thoroughly enjoy playing the role of lady of the manor. I am rather thoughtful. I am in a very excited state. I am obstinate. I loathe Paris and am not going back there in a hurry. I have been rather pale and serious. I do not intend to take advice from anybody. I am lost in reverie. I really have not behaved very well. I have certainly changed. I am prey to the inner anguish of trying to come to a decision. I am filled with white-hot fury. I grow resigned. I cannot tear myself away from the shop-windows. I have no idea where the money has gone. I boast of being a model of economy. I tremble with repressed indignation. One of my pleasures is to undress in front of the mirror. A passion for my body, an ecstatic admiration of my satin skin and the supple lines of my figure, keeps me serious, attentive, and absorbed in my love of myself. I am as well made as a plant nurtured on a dung-heap. I have become

a force of nature, a ferment of destruction. I have a little brown mole just above my right hip; it strikes me as both quaint and pretty. I have the torso of a plump Venus. My mane of loosened yellow hair covers my back with the fell of a lioness. I have the solid loins and the firm body of an amazon. The lines of my fair flesh vanish in golden gleams. My rounded contours shine like silk. My body is covered with fine hair, reddish down which turns my skin to velvet. There is something of the beast about my equine crupper and flanks, about the fleshy curves and deep hollows of my body. I am the golden beast. I am stupid, vile, and deceitful. I am good-natured and hate hurting other people. I consider myself to be extremely kind. I look so plump and pink. I am not a spiteful woman. I have a kind heart. I am a superbly full-bodied, fair-skinned girl. I affect a desire for solitude and simplicity. I am as supple as fine linen; my skin grows delicate, all pink and white, so soft and pleasing to the touch that I look more beautiful than ever. I am broadminded. I dream of playing the part of a respectable woman. I smile gaily under the rain of little golden curls, which falls around the blue of my made-up eyes and the red of my painted lips. I have the supple grace of a serpent, the studied yet seemingly involuntary carelessness of dress that is exquisitely elegant, the nervous distinction of a pedigree cat. I have an instinctive feeling for elegance. I have never been able to break myself of the habit of sitting on the floor to take off my stockings. The warm scent of violets is the disturbing perfume peculiar to me. I am

radiant. I no longer think of anything but my beauty, forever inspecting my body. I can strip naked at any moment and in front on anyone without having any cause to blush. Solitude saddens me straightaway. I am miserable when I am alone. I feel a sudden blossoming of my nature. I long for domination and to destroy everything. I feel the power of my sex. I have plump limbs and coarse plebeian laughter. Childish fears and horrible fantasies come to me in waking nightmares. The sight of my breasts, hips, and thighs increases my terror. I tremble at the idea of death. My continual desires burn fiercely. The slightest breath from my lips changes gold into ashes which the wind sweeps away. Nothing remains intact in my hands; everything is broken or dirtied or withered between my little white fingers. I draw back my lips to display my white teeth. I picture myself as a silver statuette symbolising the warm voluptuous delights of darkness. Some days I go mad, smashing everything and wearing myself out in frenzies of love and anger, but looking irresistible all the same. My growing needs sharpen my appetite, and I can clean out a man with one snap of my teeth. I devour everything. I pass by like an invading army. I scorch the earth on which my little foot rests. I am tyrannical in my triumph. The passion for defiling things is in-born in me. My delicate hands leave abominable traces, corrupting with their touch whatever they have broken. I have white skin and a mane of red hair. I stretch out the glory of my naked limbs. I rest my feet on human skulls and am

surrounded by catastrophes. I have finished my labour of ruin and death. My sex rises in a halo of glory and blazes down on my prostrate victims. I am as unconscious of my actions as a splendid animal, ignorant of the havoc I wreak, and as good-natured as ever. I am big and plump, splendidly healthy and splendidly gay. I look as clean and wholesome and brand-new as if I have never been used.

WOMEN'S DRESS

Flounced skirts. A light-coloured dress. A soft blue dress with a great sash in the seven colours of the rainbow. Her goddess's white tunic. A dress of faded green silk, and a round hat which had been dented by blows. A veil of gauze. Her nightdress. The dressing-gown. A dark dress of an indecisive colour somewhere between puce and brown. The hat was a fantastic affair, with a deep brim in front, and adorned with a lofty feather. Her black dress. Her voluminous dress of pale blue satin. Her dress, a very simple affair of white foulard, so fine and supple that it clung to her like a long shift. Her tight-fitting blue velvet dress. Black silk trimmed with Chantilly lace. Her white foulard dress, as light and crumpled as a shift. Furs over her shoulders. An old bodice. A faded black dress. A little cambric bodice. Her little cambric bodice. Pale underwear. The little white silk parasol. A chemise, some petticoats and a dressing-gown. A tea-gown. A long night-gown with a lace insertion, a pair of embroidered drawers, and the dressing-gown, which was a long cambric garment trimmed with lace. Her laundress's costume, but with furs over her shoulders. Dazzling blue and pink dresses. Her grey foulard gown, which fitted loosely over her shoulders. Brownish-yellow silk. A nightdress trimmed with lace. Her nightdress all torn and crumpled by a night of love. Her

first silk dress. Her dressing-gown, with tousled hair and down-at-heel shoes. An ordinary dressing-gown. Dirty petticoats. Faded dresses and lamentable hats. The wide sleeves of her dressing-gown. Down-at-heel boots, dirty skirts and a hat which had been ruined by the rain. Her dress of pearl-grey silk, trimmed with Chantilly. A gown of white embroidered satin. Dressed in black silk, with just a gold heart hanging round her neck. A tattered kerchief. A little blue silk bodice and tunic, which fitted closely to her body and bulged out enormously over the small of her back, outlining her thighs in a very bold fashion for this period of ballooning skirts. A white satin dress with white satin sleeves, and a white satin sash worn crossways, the whole decorated with silver point-lace. A blue toque with a white feather. A grey silk gown trimmed with red bows and puffs. A very simple black dress. Dressed all in white satin striped with yellow, and covered with diamonds from waist to hat. A white dress trimmed with marvelous English point-lace. A pink silk dress. Light-coloured gowns. Light tulle and ruffled silks and satins. A mass of lace, bows and bustles. Low-necked dresses. A bodice embroidered with jet beads. Some magnificent lace. A white outspread petticoat. Rings, bracelets, ear-rings, a necklace an inch wide, and a royal diadem surmounted by a central diamond the size of a thumb. Over her tights, nothing but a golden girdle which hardly concealed her behind and in front. The dead woman's diamonds, enormous stones.

THE STREETS OF PARIS

Boulevard Haussmann. Rue de la Goutte-d'Or. Rue Miromesnil. Rue de Penthièvre. Rue de Richelieu. Rue des Martyrs. Rue de l'Arcade. Rue Pasquier. Passage des Panoramas. Faubourg Saint-Antoine. Galerie des Variétés. Galerie Saint-Marc. Galerie Feydeau. Galerie Montmartre. Rue Rossini. Rue de la Grange-Batelière. Rue du Faubourg-Montmartre. Rue de Provence. Rue Taitbout. Rue Saint-Marc. Rue de la Chaussée-d'Antin. Rue Véron. Rue de la Rochefoucauld. Rue Mosnier. Rue des Poissoniers. Rue de Laval. Boulevard Saint Michel. Rue Notre-Dame de Lorette. Rue Le Peletier. Rue Bréda. Rue Fontaine. Rue Rougemont. Rue Bergère. Rue Vivienne. Avenue de Villiers. Rue Cardinet. Rue Polonceau. Place du Carrousel. Rue du Faubourg-Saint-Honoré. Rue Royale.

FURNITURE & SOFT FURNISHINGS

The velvet rail. Long-fringed pelmets. The scarlet velvet of the seats. Heavy crimson drapery. The velvet balustrade. Benches covered with red velvet. The velvet-covered ledge. The marble-topped tables. Benches covered with imitation leather. The vulgar luxury of consoles and gilded chairs formed a sharp contrast with junkshop furniture such as mahogany tables. The rosewood bedstead, and the hangings and seats of figured damask with a pattern on blue flowers on a grey ground. A blind of embroidered *tulle*. A large marble-topped dressing-table, a cheval-glass framed in inlaid wood, a *chaise longue*, and some armchairs upholstered in blue satin. Massive mahogany Empire furniture, and its hangings and chair coverings of yellow velvet stamped with bold designs. A square armchair with a stiff frame and inhospitable upholstery. A deep easy-chair, whose red silk padding was as soft as eiderdown. The big chair with the redsilk upholstery. A pile of side-tables, sofas and armchairs with their legs in the air. The console-table, surmounted by a looking-glass. A huge wing-chair whose velvet had been so worn it looked yellow in places. Four straw-bottomed chairs. A tin-topped table. A curtain of light brown material. A large cheval-glass stood opposite a white marble dressing table. A small dressing-table blackened by the grease from brushes and combs. A hideous red suite of furniture. A bedroom hung

with Louis Seize cretonne in a delicate shade of pink by an Orléans upholsterer. Rosewood furniture and its hangings of figured damask with big blue flowers on a grey ground. A tiger-skin rug for the hearth. A rosewood wardrobe with a mirror on the door and a bed hung with blue rep. The mirror-fronted wardrobe. Velvet-covered ledges. Some rustic chairs. Red velvet seats. The blood-red straw of her chair. The greasy dressing-table. Beautiful eastern hangings, old sideboards and big Louis XIII chairs. Divans covered with old Persian rugs, and armchairs upholstered in old tapestry. Thick hangings deadened every sound. A monumental sideboard, adorned with old porcelain and marvellous pieces of ancient plate. The bedroom in mauve satin. The bedroom in blue silk under lace. On the lavishly upholstered bed, which was as low as a sofa, there were twenty thousand francs worth of Venetian point lace. The furniture was lacquered blue and white with silver filigree patterns. So many white bearskins. Pink silk hangings—a faded Turkish pink, embroidered with golden thread. Italian cabinets, Spanish coffer, a Japanese screen of delicate workmanship. Embroidered silks and needlepoint hangings. Armchairs as wide as beds, and sofas as deep as alcoves. A white bath and crystal and ivory appointments. Gobelin tapestries. A Venetian mirror hanging above an Italian chest. Pink hangings. The armchairs as wide as beds, the sofas as deep as alcoves. The antique furniture, the golden silk hangings. The soft carpets and seats. The great bed with Venetian point hangings. White lacquer furniture

inlaid with silver
furniture. Sabine
in red silk. Gen
hangings, the de
in tea-rose velv
and fringes. The
silver, like a gre
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silks and vel
with a bold t
carpet adorn
a red velvet

inlaid with silver. Hung with Genoa velvet. Precious furniture. Sabine's *chaise longue*, that solitary seat covered in red silk. Genoa velvet hangings, the gilding. The red hangings, the deep divans, the lacquered furniture. Hung in tea-rose velvet, with little silver buttons and gold tassels and fringes. The bed—a dazzling marvel, chased gold and silver, like a great jewel, with golden roses scattered over a trellis-work of silver. White roses in the carpet. Silver buttons like white stars on the tea-rose velvet of the hangings, the pink flesh-tint. Golden cords hanging from the corners and gold lace-work framing the panels, like delicate flames or flowing locks of red hair. The gold and silver bed, shining in all the fresh splendour of its chasing. The oppressive luxury, the gilded furniture, the silks and velvets. Hung with Louis XIII cretonne printed with a bold floral pattern, the mahogany furniture, a red carpet adorned with black foliage. The solitary armchair, a red velvet Voltaire.

SILK, SATIN, & SKIN

A skin. Oh, what a skin she's got. Faded green silk. On the nape of many a neck the down stirred. Blue satin. Her skin was still damp. The young woman's skin, a warm supple skin. Red silk padding as soft as eiderdown. Pale blue satin. A silky gleam. A patch of delicate, satiny skin. The parchment skin. White skin. Brownish-yellow silk. The light-coloured silks of the milliners. All in red satin. White satin with pink bows. Her satin skin. The satin texture of the skin. The rounded contours shone like silk in the candle-light. Fine hair, reddish down, turned her skin into velvet. She put out her lips and pressed a lingering kiss on the skin near her armpit. Her skin turned to gold by the light of the big fire. That superbly full-bodied, fair-skinned girl. Her first silk dress. Her skin grew delicate, all pink and white, so soft to the touch and pleasing to the eye. He looked at her skin without being tempted to take advantage of the situation. A fresh bruise on her white skin. Blue silk under lace. Pink silk. Pearl-grey silk. White embroidered satin. Black silk. The golden silk. White satin. Red silk. Pink silk. Rumpled silks and satins. Chandeliers gleaming on the white skin. Her white skin. The silks and velvets. That rosy skin.

ODOUR

I scented it out, and it smells damnably strong in her. The other girl gave off an odour of life, a potent female charm. A musty, dusty smell began to rise into the air. The smell of the meal and the smoke from the cigarettes filled the room. Their perfume was strong and penetrating, while through the humid air, full of the exhalations of the washstand, came occasional whiffs of a more pungent aroma, the scent of a few grains of dry patchouli ground to powder at the bottom of a bowl. An intoxicating scent was rising from the patchouli in the bowl. A scent of flowers and female flesh choked him. A strong whiff of alcohol came out, which mingled with the smell of stale cooking in the lodge and the penetrating scent of the bouquets on the table. An overpowering smell, a smell peculiar to the wings of a theatre, and combining the different scents of gas, of the glue used to make the scenery, of dirty nooks and crannies, and of the chorus-girls' grubby underwear. The atmosphere was still more suffocating, full of the acrid scents of toilet-waters, the perfumes of soaps, and the stench of human breath. A variety of feminine smells, the musky scent of paint and powder mingling with the pungent odour of women's hair. The influence of this female scent. When tuberose rot, they give off a human smell. The strong scent of the essences, mingling with the sharp intoxicating fumes of the champagne. That powerful

perfume which he found so sweet. That odour of women was wafted down. The musky scent of powders and the acrid perfume of toilet vinegars made his head swim the more. The musky odour that wafted through the swing-doors smelt stronger than ever. Breathing in all the animal essence of woman. Nana sniffed the air like a puppy, breathing in the scent of the leaves. Intoxicated by the scent of the leaves. He recognised their different smells, the strong scent of Russian leather, the perfume of vanilla rising from a chocolate-dealer's basement, the savour of musk blown through the open doors of the perfumers. A vague smell of cooking hung about the folds of the hangings. Those hours whose memory lingered like a subtle perfume. The dripping city exhaled an insipid odour suggestive of a dirty bed. The close and now chilled smells which the women left behind them every night. There was such an unpleasant smell of lavender water gone sour. An atmosphere pungent with stale perfumes. It smelt far too strongly of stale lavender water, not to speak of less mentionable things. An unbearable smell of old iron, rags, and damp cardboard. A smell of violets. A warm scent of violets, that disturbing perfume peculiar to Nana which filled the whole house from the attic to the courtyard. Washing and scenting herself all over. In the midst of her scent of violets. The air in the room was so warm and scented. The flowers, refreshed by the rain, had taken on a showy brilliance, and she smelt one ecstatically. The room was slumbering in the warm, damp odour of love. Its all-

pervading scent of ether. A penetrating perfume rose from the light *tulles* and the rumpled silks and satins. Nana, penetrating and corrupting this society with the ferment of her scent as it hung in the warm air. The odours the others had left behind them, the body smells of fair-haired men and dark, and cigar smoke whose pungency choked him. He felt his flesh being steeped in perfume. Under the bed, a dish of carbolic acid gave off an insipid smell. The corpse was beginning to poison the atmosphere of the room. A shovelful of putrid flesh