Title: The Son of Monte-Cristo

Author: Jules Lermina

Release date: August 8, 2008 [eBook #26216]
Most recently updated: January 3, 2021

Language: English

Credits: Produced by Sigal Alon, Hanna Burdon, Fox in the Stars and
the Online Distributed Proofreading Team at
https://www.pgdp.net

Transcriber's Note: Spelling, accents and punctuation have been changed for consistency. Variations in the use of hyphens have been retained as in the original. The unexpected use of Nechar, perhaps instead of Necker, and Ali-Pacha of Jamna, perhaps instead of Ali Pasha of Janina, also have been retained.

THE
SON OF MONTE-CRISTO.

SEQUEL TO

THE WIFE OF MONTE-CRISTO,

AND END OF THE CONTINUATION TO
ALEXANDER DUMAS' CELEBRATED NOVEL OF

"THE COUNT OF MONTE-CRISTO."

"THE SON OF MONTE-CRISTO" stands at the head of all exciting and absorbing novels. It is the sequel to "The Wife of Monte-Cristo," and the end of the continuation of Alexander Dumas' phenomenal romance of "The Count of Monte-Cristo." Like its renowned predecessors, it absolutely swarms with thrilling and dramatic incidents and adventures, everything being fresh, original and delightful. The spell of fascination is cast over the reader in the opening chapter and remains unbroken to the end. It deals chiefly with the astounding career of Esperance, Monte-Cristo's son, whose heroic devotion to Jane Zeld is one of the most touching and romantic love stories ever written. The scenes in Algeria have a wild charm, especially the abduction of Esperance and his struggle with the Sultan on the oasis in the desert. Haydée's experience in the slave mart at Constantinople is particularly stirring and realistic, while the episodes in which the Count of Monte-Cristo figures are exceedingly graphic. The entire novel is powerful and interesting in the extreme. That it will be read by all who have read "The Count of Monte-Cristo" and will delight them is certain.

NEW YORK:

WM. L. ALLISON COMPANY,

PUBLISHERS.

"The Son of Monte-Cristo," the sequel to "The Wife of Monte-Cristo," and end of the continuation of Dumas' masterwork, "The Count of Monte-Cristo," is in all respects a great novel. Romantic in the highest degree, powerful in the widest sense of the term and absorbingly interesting, it is a work absolutely without parallel at the present day. Every chapter has a strong and stirring feature of its own, while all the legions of intensely thrilling incidents are as original and surprising as they are strong. The hero is Esperance, the son of the Count of Monte-Cristo, who is followed from boyhood to the close of his wonderful and unprecedented career. His varied and remarkable adventures form a succession of amazing episodes never equalled in fiction, while his love for the unfortunate Jane Zeld and the strange complications to which it gives rise are depicted in the most fascinating fashion. The Count of Monte-Cristo and Haydée also have thrilling adventures, and Mercédès, Benedetto, Sanselme and Danglars, together with Fanfar, again appear. The hosts of admirers of "The Count of Monte-Cristo" should read "The Son of Monte-Cristo," as well as all who relish a novel of rare merit. They will certainly be delighted with it.

"The Son of Monte-Cristo" stands at the head of all exciting and absorbing novels. It is the sequel to "The Wife of Monte-Cristo," and the end of the continuation of that phenomenal romance, Alexander Dumas' "Count of Monte-Cristo." Like its renowned predecessors, it absolutely swarms with thrilling and dramatic incidents and adventures, everything being fresh, original and delightful. The spell of fascination is cast over the reader in the opening chapter and remains unbroken to the end. It deals chiefly with the astounding career of Esperance, Monte-Cristo's son, whose heroic devotion to Jane Zeld is one of the most touching and romantic love stories ever written. The scenes in Algeria have a wild charm, especially the abduction of Esperance and his struggle with the Sultan on the oasis in the desert. Haydée's experience in the slave mart at Constantinople is particularly stirring and realistic, while the episodes in which the Count of Monte-Cristo figures are exceedingly graphic. The entire novel is powerful and interesting in the extreme. That it will be read by all who have read "The Count of Monte-Cristo" and will delight them is certain.

CONTENTS.

[Pg 11]

[Pg 15]

THE
SON OF MONTE-CRISTO.

SEQUEL TO

THE WIFE OF MONTE-CRISTO.

CHAPTER I.

ESPERANCE, THE SON OF MONTE-CRISTO.

Esperance, the son of Monte-Cristo, lay sleeping in the comfortable bed provided for him in the house of Fanfar, the French colonist, as related at the close of the preceding volume, "The Wife of Monte-Cristo." The prostration and exhaustion brought on by the excitement and fatigue of his terrible adventure with the remorseless Khouans rendered his sleep as leaden as the sleep of death; indeed, had it not been for his heavy respiration, he might have been mistaken for a corpse. But ordinary difficulties were not to conquer the heroic son of Monte-Cristo, who seemed to have inherited all the marvelous power and energy of his noble father, and as he lay there in the hot Algerian night, amid the balmy perfume of the luxuriant tropical flowers, a mysterious [Pg 16] smile hovered about the corners of his sharply cut lips that told unmistakably of a fearless nature and a firm desire to promote the success of the good and the true. Esperance slept, and the lion in him was dormant; it was, however, destined soon to be aroused.

In another room, around the family table, Fanfar and his guests were seated, the Count of Monte-Cristo occupying the place of honor. The colonist, at the urgent solicitation of those with whom he had so strangely been brought in contact, was about to relate the story of his life, when suddenly Monte-Cristo's quick ear caught a sound.

"What was that?" he said in a startled whisper, instantly springing to his feet.

"I heard nothing," said Fanfar.

"It was, perhaps, the cry of some wild beast," suggested Captain Joliette.

Monte-Cristo hastened to his son's apartment, followed by Fanfar, Captain Joliette and Coucon, the Zouave.

The boy was still sleeping soundly, and the apartment was altogether undisturbed.

Monte-Cristo uttered a sigh of relief; he bent over the beautiful child and gently kissed him on the forehead.

The party returned to the adjoining room and resumed their seats. Scarcely had they done so when a dark form, shrouded in a green bournous, appeared stealthily at the open window of Esperance's chamber, and, gazing furtively around, lightly sprang into the room. [Pg 17]

"Dog of a Frenchman!" hissed the intruder in a low tone between his teeth. "When you flung me over the battlements of Ouargla, you fancied you had killed me; but Maldar bears a charmed life and will have a bitter revenge!"

The intruder was indeed Maldar, the Sultan, who by some miracle had escaped Monte-Cristo's vengeance.

As he spoke he shook his fist in the direction of the Count, who was sitting at the table with the rest of Fanfar's guests, though his sombre air and clouded brow told that, while preserving his outward calmness, he yet suspected the presence of a deadly foe.

Maldar had removed his sandals, and his footsteps were noiseless. He went to the bed and stood for an instant gloating over the slumbering boy.

"I failed before, but I shall not fail again. Allah is great! I will strike this giaour of a Frenchman in his tenderest spot—his heart! The son shall pay the father's debt!"

Half-crouching and gathering his green bournous closely about him, he crept cautiously back to the window and made the sign of the crescent in the air. There was a slight flash, a pale phosphorescent glow, and in the midst of it the emblem of Islam appeared for an instant like a semi-circle of fire and then vanished.

Immediately a Khouan showed himself at the window; he leaped into the apartment, followed by three others of his fanatical and pitiless tribe. The new-comers instantly knelt at Maldar's feet [Pg 18] and kissed the hem of his bournous.

"Son of the Prophet," said one of them, "we are here to do your bidding!"

"Rise," said Maldar, "and seize yonder lad, first gagging him with this sacred scarf made from Mohammed's own sainted vestment. Be quick and bear him to the desert!"

The Khouan who had acted as spokesman took the scarf from Maldar's hand and skilfully executed his command. Esperance was in such a deep slumber that he did not make a movement, even when the Arab lifted him from the bed and held him in his arms.

"Away!" cried Maldar in an undertone, adding, as the Khouan sprang from the window and disappeared in the darkness without: "Now, Count of Monte-Cristo, you are once more at my mercy, and this time you will not escape my vengeance!"

He darted through the window, motioning to the remaining Khouans to do likewise. In an instant the room was empty; the Arabs had vanished like a vision of the night.

Ten, fifteen minutes passed, and still not a sound to break the torpor of the Algerian night, save

the hum of conversation around the table of Fanfar, the colonist. Monte-Cristo's sombre air had not passed away. He was a prey to a species of uneasiness he had never experienced before. Fanfar, noticing that the Count was disturbed, that some mysterious influence was working upon him, hesitated to commence his narration. Finally he said to him:

"Count, are you anxious concerning your son? If so, you can dismiss your anxiety. The lad is in [Pg 19] perfect safety beneath my roof; his slumber will refresh him, and he will awake entirely restored. As for the Khouans, they never deign to visit my humble habitation, and they will hardly break their rule to come here now. Still, to satisfy you and put all your apprehensions at rest, I will go and take a look at the lad."

He arose and went to Esperance's room. In an instant he returned. His face had the pallor of wax.

Monte-Cristo leaped nervously to his feet and stood staring at him, his countenance wearing an expression of intense anguish.

"Well?" said he, in an unsteady voice.

Fanfar was breathless with excitement and terror. When he could find words, he said:

"The lad is gone!"

"My God!" cried Monte-Cristo, putting his hand to his forehead and staggering beneath the overwhelming blow, "I felt it! I had a premonition of some impending disaster, I knew not what! Oh! Esperance! Esperance!"

He hurried into the adjoining room and stood beside the empty bed. The moon was now shining in unclouded splendor and the apartment was almost as light as day. The slight covering had been torn from the couch and lay in a heap on the floor. Near it a small object sparkled; the agonized father stooped and picked it up: it was a miniature dagger of oriental workmanship, and upon its jeweled handle was an inscription in the Arabic tongue. Monte-Cristo took the weapon to [Pg 20] the window and the full light of the silvery moonbeams fell upon it. The inscription was from the Koran, and was a maxim adopted by the Khouan tribe. The Count read it and trembled.

"I recognize this weapon," said he; "it is Maldar's. The Sultan is living and has been here! It is to him I owe this terrible misfortune—he has carried away my son!"

Miss Elphys approached the Count and touched his arm.

"We must start in pursuit at once!" said she, with a look of courage and determination.

"We?" cried Madame Caraman, aghast. "You, surely, do not mean again to face the dangers of this barbarous country, to go upon another Quixotic expedition, and drag me with you? Remember you are a woman! Besides, there are plenty of men here for the task!"

Clary glanced at the governess with indignation, but vouchsafed no reply to her selfish speech.

"Mademoiselle," said Captain Joliette, addressing the heroic girl, "your feelings do you honor; but I for one cannot consent for you to imperil your life in a night hunt for the dastardly Khouans, who have certainly made their way to the desert with the abducted lad. Madame Caraman is right; you must not again face the dangers of this barbarous country. Remain here with Madame Irène and Madame Caraman. I will organize and lead the pursuit."

Monte-Cristo, who, in the face of the new dangers that threatened his son, had recovered [Pg 21] somewhat of his accustomed calmness, came to them and said:

"I thank you, Miss Elphys, for your generosity and bravery, but you must take the Captain's advice. Captain Joliette, I fully appreciate your motives in wishing to take command in this pursuit, but, at the same time, I must claim the precedence. Remember I am a father, and have a father's duty to perform. I will lead the pursuit."

Captain Joliette bowed.

"So be it," said he, "it is your right."

Coucon, Fanfar, Gratillet and Iron Jaws eagerly offered their services, and even Bobichel forgot his merry pranks and demanded to accompany the expedition. The Count of Monte-Cristo desired the former clown to remain for the protection of the ladies, but Miss Elphys protested against this.

"Take Bobichel with you," she said. "We can protect ourselves."

Bobichel, overjoyed, ran for the horses, and the little army instantly mounted, riding away toward the desert at the top of their animals' speed, with Monte-Cristo at their head.

Meanwhile Maldar and his Khouan followers were dashing along at a rapid pace on the fleet Arab coursers with which they were provided. One of the party bore Esperance before him on his saddle. The boy had not been aroused from his lethargic sleep by the abduction and subsequent flight. He slept peacefully and profoundly.

The fanatical Arabs maintained unbroken silence, and the sound of their horses' hoofs was [Pg 22] deadened by the sand.

Maldar rode a trifle in advance. Now that the excitement of the abduction had worn off, he was as stoical as the rest, but occasionally, as he thought of his triumph over Monte-Cristo and the vengeance he was about to take upon his hated enemy, for he had decided to put Esperance to a lingering and terrible death and send the lad's gory head to the agonized father, a grim smile stole over his otherwise impassible countenance, and a demoniac gleam shot from his eyes.

But suddenly a faint sound was heard in the far distance. It came from the direction of Fanfar's farm. Maldar listened attentively; then he said to the Khouans, whose quick ears had also detected the sound:

"Ride like the wind, sons of the Prophet! We are pursued! The Count of Monte-Cristo and his unbelieving French hounds are on our track! But if they would overtake us and recover the boy, they must have the cunning of serpents and horses as fleet as the lightning's flash!"

CHAPTER II.

[Pg 23]

HAYDÉE, THE WIFE OF MONTE-CRISTO.

It was in Monte-Cristo's luxurious mansion in Marseilles, one bright morning in April. Since the Count's departure for Algeria in search of her son, Mercédès, faithful to her oath never to leave Haydée, had taken up her residence there. The two women who had filled such important places in the life of Monte-Cristo were sitting together in the large drawing-room, the windows of which looked out upon the calm blue waters of the Mediterranean. These windows were open and through them floated the delightful perfume of the flowers from the garden beyond, mingled with the saline odors of the sea. It was about ten o'clock and the sun, high in the heavens, inundated the vast apartment with its golden light and filled it with a generous warmth.

Haydée, the wife of Monte-Cristo, reclined upon an oriental rug, her head pillowed in the lap of Mercédès, who sat on a divan elegantly upholstered in the eastern fashion. Mercédès was lightly toying with Haydée's glossy hair that fell like a cloud about her shapely shoulders. Her eyes were beaming with affection, while those of Haydée had in them a dreamy, faraway look.

"Sister," said Mercédès at last, "why are you so sad and silent?" [Pg 24]

"I know not," replied the wife of Monte-Cristo, languidly.

"You are thinking of your husband, the noblest of men, who is even now, perhaps, risking his life in the Algerian desert to save and recover my son."

"You speak truly," returned Haydée with a shudder; "I am thinking of him, and my heart is strangely oppressed."

"Have confidence in Monte-Cristo," said her companion, earnestly. "His lion courage, wonderful mental resources and mysterious power will render him more than a match for the untutored Arabs with whom it is his mission to contend."

"Yes, Mercédès; but my son, my Esperance? He is so young to be exposed to the dangers of the desert!"

"But Monte-Cristo is with him, and the father's love will shield him from all harm."

Haydée made no reply, but continued to gaze dreamily into space. Mercédès, still toying with her hair, strove to rouse her.

"Sister," said she, abruptly, "yesterday you promised to tell me how Monte-Cristo rescued you from the hands of the Turkish slave-dealer, Ali Pasha. Will you not fulfil that promise now?"

Haydée turned her eyes full on her companion's countenance and a look of gratitude passed over her pale visage. She saw that Mercédès wished to draw her mind from the contemplation of her husband's present peril by inducing her to revert to his heroism of the past. [Pg 25]

"I will tell you," said she, "here in this apartment where everything, even to the very air, is vital with souvenirs of my beloved husband." And, without altering her position, Haydée at once commenced the following thrilling narration:

"We were cruising off the coast of Egypt in the Alcyon, when the idea of visiting Constantinople suddenly occurred to Monte-Cristo. He gave his orders without an instant's delay and the yacht was immediately headed for the Sultan's dominions.

"We reached Constantinople in due time, after an exceedingly pleasant voyage, for though it was toward the close of spring the weather was mild and for weeks the sea had been as calm and unruffled as a mirror.

"As we entered the Bosporus, we noticed a strange craft hovering near us. It was a small, rakish-looking vessel bearing the Turkish flag. Monte-Cristo had run up his private ensign on the Alcyon, an ensign that was recognized by all nations and gave the yacht free entrance into every port.

"The strange craft seemed to be following us, but as it made no attempt to approach the yacht, we soon became used to its presence and ceased to give it attention.

"When the Alcyon anchored, a gorgeously decorated caique, manned by a score of stalwart oarsmen, shot from shore and was soon alongside of the yacht. A magnificently-appareled old man with a long, snowy beard, attended by four solemn and stately eunuchs, came on board and [Pg 26] was ceremoniously received by the Count. It was the Grand Vizier, who, having recognized Monte-Cristo's ensign, had hastened to welcome the illustrious hero to Constantinople in the name of his august master, the Sultan.

"Such an honor merited prompt and becoming recognition, and Monte-Cristo was too much of a Frenchman not to return compliment for compliment. Leaving the Alcyon in charge of his first officer, and bidding me a hasty and tender farewell, the Count entered the caique with the Grand Vizier and departed to pay his respects in person to the ruler of the Turkish nation.

"No sooner was the caique lost to sight among the shipping than the strange craft we had previously observed suddenly ran up to the yacht and made fast to her with grappling-irons. Before Monte-Cristo's men could recover from their surprise at this manœuvre they were made prisoners and securely bound by twenty Turkish buccaneers, who had leaped over the bulwarks of the Alcyon, headed by a villainous-looking wretch, furiously brandishing a jeweled yataghan. This was Ali Pasha, the slave-dealer, as I soon learned to my cost.

"When the ruffians boarded the yacht, I had rushed below and hidden myself in Monte-Cristo's cabin, first securing a keen-bladed dagger for my defence.

"I had locked the door, but it was almost instantly burst open and Ali Pasha leaped in, followed by several of his crew.

"Holding my weapon uplifted in my hand, I cried out, in a tone of desperate determination: [Pg 27]

"'The first scoundrel who dares to lay a finger on me shall die like a dog!'

"This speech was greeted with a loud burst of contemptuous laughter, and Ali Pasha himself, springing forward, whirled the dagger from my grasp with his yataghan. This done, he sternly fixed his glance upon me and said:

"'Haydée, wife of Monte-Cristo, Haydée, the Greek slave, you are my captive! Sons of Islam, seize her and conduct her to the slave mart of Stamboul!'

"Three Turks advanced to obey this command. They seized me and in vain did I struggle in their ruffianly grasp. In a moment I was securely bound and gagged. A mantle was thrown over my head. I felt myself thrust into a sack and swooned just as one of the buccaneers was lifting me upon his shoulder.

"When I recovered consciousness, I found myself, with a number of half-clad Georgian and Circassian girls, in the dreaded slave bazaar of Constantinople. Old memories, fraught with terror, rushed upon me. I recalled the time when I was before exposed for sale and Monte-Cristo had bought me. Would he come to my rescue once more? I scarcely dared to hope for such a thing. I pictured to myself the Count's desolation and distress on discovering that I had been stolen from him. But what could he do? How could he find me again? And even should he discover me, how could he snatch me from the grasp of Ali Pasha, whose favor with the Sultan was notorious? Monte-Cristo, with all his prestige, was but one man, and no match for the [Pg 28] mendaciousness, duplicity and power of the entire Turkish court! I was lost, and nothing could save me!

"How shall I describe my feelings when I realized that I was even then, at that very moment, exposed for sale, that from being the free and honored wife of Monte-Cristo I had suddenly become a mere article of human merchandise, valued simply at so many miserable piastres! My fate hung upon a thread. Would I be purchased by some grandee as a new ornament for his harem, or was I destined to fall into the hands of a brutal master, to be used as a household drudge for the execution of bitter and revolting tasks?

"When each new purchaser entered the bazaar I trembled from head to foot, I quivered in every limb. One by one I saw the unfortunate Georgian and Circassian girls inspected and disposed of, until at last I was the only slave unsold in the entire mart. I thought my turn must speedily come, that the next Mussulman who entered would surely buy me, and I had firmly resolved upon suicide at the first opportunity, choosing death rather than slavery.

"Ali Pasha had personally conducted all the visitors about the bazaar, dilating in the extravagant oriental fashion upon the extraordinary merits of the captives he wished to turn into money. Many times he had paused before me where I stood cowering in a corner, volubly expatiating on my value and attractiveness, but hitherto not a single Turk had evinced the slightest inclination to relieve him of me.

"At last two men made their appearance and eagerly glanced around the mart. Both wore turbans [Pg 29] and full Turkish dress. Their faces were shrouded with heavy beards, and there was an indescribable something about them that stamped them as personages of exalted rank.

"They paused a short distance from me, and one of them said, addressing Ali Pasha:

"'What is the name of yonder slave?'

"'Zuleika,' answered the obsequious and unscrupulous slave-dealer.

"'From what country is she and how did you obtain possession of her?' asked the second visitor, who had not yet spoken. His voice was subdued and evidently disguised; nevertheless there was something familiar in its tone that strangely stirred me and filled me with hope.

"Ali Pasha replied to his inquiry with unblushing effrontery:

"'The slave is from Circassia, and was sold to me by her parents.'

"I know not how I obtained the courage to do so, but instantly I cried out:

"'All that vile wretch has said is false! My name is Haydée, and I am the wife of the Count of Monte-Cristo! Ali Pasha forcibly abducted me from my husband's yacht that now lies in the harbor of Constantinople!'

"'Ali Pasha,' said the first speaker, 'this is a grave accusation! It is true that the illustrious Monte-Cristo's yacht now lies in the harbor of Stamboul, and such an abduction as this slave has mentioned did, indeed, take place.' [Pg 30]

"The slave-dealer winced slightly, but, instantly recovering himself, calmly answered:

"'I know nothing of Monte-Cristo, his yacht or his wife. As for this lying slave, I will punish her on the spot!'

"With these words he advanced toward me and lifted his clenched fist to strike. I shrank tremblingly against the wall, but the next instant a blow that would have felled an ox had hurled Ali Pasha to the stone floor of the bazaar. It was delivered by the man whose voice had seemed familiar to me, and, tearing off his beard, my husband, the undaunted Count of Monte-Cristo himself, caught me in his arms and folded me to his breast!

"Ali Pasha had now arisen to his feet. Livid with rage he rushed at Monte-Cristo with a dagger in his hand, swearing by the Prophet that he would have his heart's blood. But the other visitor caught his arm and held him back.

"'Who are you and why do you stand between me and my just revenge?' cried the slave-dealer, furiously.

"The stranger threw open his robe, and on his breast gleamed a diamond-studded crescent.

"'The Grand Vizier!' exclaimed Ali Pasha, prostrating himself before the high official. The latter clapped his hands, whereupon six soldiers marched into the bazaar.

"'Seize that wretch!' he cried, pointing to the slave-dealer, 'and inflict upon him the punishment of the bastinado!' [Pg 31]

"When this order had been executed, the Grand Vizier, placing himself at the head of the soldiers, escorted Monte-Cristo and myself to the harbor and saw us safely on board the royal caique.

"In due time we reached the yacht, where the officers and crew were at their posts as usual.

"After his interview with the Sultan, Monte-Cristo, accompanied by the Grand Vizier, had returned to the Alcyon in the caique. To his astonishment he found his men lying on the deck tightly bound. On releasing them he learned what had happened, and his influence was sufficient to induce the Grand Vizier, who was greatly affected by the Count's despair when he discovered the terrible fate that had befallen me, to risk the Sultan's displeasure by aiding him to recover me from the clutches of Ali Pasha.

"Such," concluded Haydée, "was the manner in which Monte-Cristo rescued me from the hands of the villainous Turkish slave-dealer and a fate worse than death."

"Sister," said Mercédès, "no wonder you love Monte-Cristo so devotedly, for he is one of the noblest and most heroic men upon this earth!"

CHAPTER III. [Pg 32]

THE COUNT OF MONTE-CRISTO.

Maldar and his Khouan followers had reached the desert with their captive. For a long time they heard Monte-Cristo and his men in hot pursuit of them, but the sound, growing fainter and fainter, had finally ceased. The Sultan concluded that the Count had been misled by some fancied indication and had taken a wrong direction. He therefore gave himself no further concern in regard to him. Once in the desert he slackened the pace of his Arab steed and the Khouans imitated his example. The party rode on for several miles when they arrived at a small oasis, covered with tall palm trees, that resembled an island of verdure amid the far-reaching waste of arid sand. There Maldar gave the order to dismount. The Khouans sprang lightly from their weary horses, both men and animals going directly to the wells, where they took long draughts of the cool, refreshing water. The night was now far spent, and as the abductors of Esperance threw

themselves upon the grass surrounding the wells, the first rosy streaks of dawn appeared in the eastern heavens. The horses stood cropping the verdure for a brief period, then they also lay down for rest and recuperation. Soon slumber reigned supreme, for Maldar, fearing neither pursuit nor attack, had not taken the precaution to post sentinels. The scarf had been removed [Pg 33] from Esperance's mouth, and the son of Monte-Cristo, still wrapped in his lethargic sleep, lay on the sod beside Maldar near one of the wells. It was a wild and picturesque group, such a group as would have filled the soul of a painter with delight and inspiration.

As the light increased, but while it was yet vague and uncertain, giving a demoniac and supernatural cast to the group and its tropical surroundings, Esperance suddenly awoke and raised himself upon his elbow. For an instant he gazed around him in bewilderment and terror. Was he dead, and were those swarthy-visaged forms extended motionless on the grass of the oasis the forms of fiends? This thought shot through his mind and augmented his consternation. When he fell asleep he was with his father, with the dauntless Monte-Cristo, and the last faces he had seen were the faces of French people and friends. Now he was in the midst of beings of another race, in the midst of strangers. Strangers? No, for at that moment his eyes rested on Maldar, and he realized that he was again in the clutches of his remorseless foe, and that the men around him belonged to the dreaded Khouan tribe.

He was unbound; nothing restrained his movements and not a single guard was watching over him. His fear vanished with his bewilderment and gave place to heroic resolution. Why should he not escape and make his way back to his beloved father and devoted countrymen? He arose cautiously to his feet, and peered into the distance. His heart throbbed with anguish, for beyond [Pg 34] the narrow confines of the green oasis, as far as his eye could reach, stretched the trackless sands of the arid and inhospitable desert. Flight would be madness, nay, perhaps, death, but would it not also be death to remain? The son of Monte-Cristo, full of his father's unconquerable spirit, determined to take the chances of flight. Doubtless Monte-Cristo and his friends were even now scouring the desert in search of him. If he could mount one of the Khouans' horses and escape from the hands of his fanatical foes, he might meet them.

Esperance stole cautiously toward an Arab courser, but he had not taken a dozen steps when Maldar awoke, leaped to his feet, ran to him and laid an iron hand upon his shoulder.

"So you thought to escape me, did you, son of Monte-Cristo?" said the Sultan, with a mocking laugh and a fiendish light in big eyes. "By the beard of the Prophet, your presumption is unbounded! But you are mine, and no power on earth can save you now!"

The heroic lad gazed full in Maldar's face and, without the quiver of a muscle, answered defiantly:

"Wretch that you are to war on defenceless children, I do not fear you! Harm but a single hair of my head, and Monte-Cristo will grind you into dust!"

Maldar replied with a sneer: "Monte-Cristo, the infidel charlatan, is miles away. With all his boasted power he can do nothing to aid you. I have you now, and you shall die!"

With the quickness of lightning Esperance thrust out his hand, seizing the Sultan's jeweled [Pg 35] yataghan and drawing it from its scabbard. At the same time he raised it above his head and brought it down, aiming it straight at Maldar's heart. The Sultan parried the thrust with his arm, receiving a gaping wound from which the blood gushed in a ruby stream. Smarting with pain and foaming with rage, he threw himself upon the daring boy, tore the yataghan from his grasp, and with its heavy handle struck him a blow on the head that stretched him senseless at his feet.

The noise of the conflict awoke the Khouans, who sprang up and rushed to their chief.

One of them drew a long-bladed knife and was about to stab the prostrate and unconscious boy, but the Sultan restrained him with an impatient gesture.

"Not here," said he. "The sacrifice can only be made in the mosque of the Khouans, thrice dedicated to Mohammed and reserved for the holiest rite of Islam, the rite of vengeance!" Motioning to the Khouan to take the insensible boy from the ground, he added "Now to horse and for the mosque. Bear our captive in your arms."

The Arabs mounted and were soon dashing across the desert, headed by the Sultan, who had hastily stanched the blood flowing from his arm and bound up the wound.

Half an hour later, Monte-Cristo and his men reached the oasis. The Count and Captain Joliette rode to the wells and at once saw where the grass had been beaten down by the Khouans and their horses.

"They have been here and recently, too," said Captain Joliette. [Pg 36]

"Thank God!" said Monte-Cristo, fervently. "We are on their track! But what is that?" he added. "Is it blood?"

Coucon and Fanfar, who had been attentively examining the stain, simultaneously answered:

"It is blood."

"My God!" cried Monte-Cristo, with a convulsive start, "then they have slain my son!"

"Not so, Count," said Captain Joliette. "Had they slain Esperance they would have left his body

here. But see," resumed he, pointing to the spot where Esperance had made the attack on Maldar; "here are evidences of a struggle; they have fought among themselves and one of them has been wounded."

"Heaven grant it may be so!" said Monte-Cristo.

The party started off again, following the track of the Arabs' horses, and after an hour's ride came in sight of a long, low building with a gleaming minaret, standing alone in the midst of the desert.

"The mosque of the Khouans!" cried Captain Joliette, triumphantly. "Maldar and his ruffians are there! Look! Yonder are their horses!"

Monte-Cristo and his men reached the building and leaped to the ground; they left their panting animals in charge of Bobichel, and, drawing their revolvers, made their way into the mosque.

There a sight met their eyes that almost froze the blood in their veins.

Esperance, with his hands tied behind him and stripped to the waist, was kneeling upon a large, flat stone in the centre of the mosque. Over him stood Maldar, his yataghan uplifted to strike. The four Khouans stood at a short distance, chanting what was evidently a death-hymn. [Pg 37]

Instantly Monte-Cristo aimed his weapon at the Sultan and fired. Maldar fell dead beside his intended victim.

The other Arabs leaped through the open windows and, mounting their horses, fled across the desert.

Monte-Cristo caught his son in his arms.

"Esperance, my beloved!" he cried.

"Father!" exclaimed the rescued lad, clasping his arms about Monte-Cristo's neck.

Esperance's garments were quickly restored to him by Fanfar, and when he was clad in them, the party again mounted and started on their return to the colonist's farm.

There is no need to describe the toilsome journey, it was accomplished in due time, and once more Esperance was safe in his father's care.

The ladies gave the heroes of the expedition a most enthusiastic welcome, Miss Elphys shedding tears of joy as Esperance told her how his heroic father had saved him from death at Maldar's hands.

The next evening, when the excitement had somewhat subsided and Monte-Cristo and his men had fully recovered from their fatigue, Fanfar began the story of his life, which will be related in the succeeding chapters.

CHAPTER IV. [Pg 38]

FANFAR'S ADVENTURES—CAIN.

Toward the middle of December, 1813, a man was riding through the Black Forest.

This man seemed to be still in the vigor of youth. He wore a long, brown surtout and leathern gaiters. His hair was worn in a queue, and powdered. Night was coming on, and Pierre Labarre, confidential servant of the Marquis de Fongereues, was somewhat weary and eager to get on.

"Quick!" he said to his horse. "Quick! They are waiting for us, and we are the bearers of good news!"

The animal seemed to understand, and accelerated his pace.

Suddenly Pierre started. He had reached a group of nine trees, one of which had been struck by lightning, making the group a conspicuous one. The rider listened as he pulled up his steed.

"Surely," he said to himself, "I heard the trot of a horse on the other side of the Nine Trees!"

The road widened here and divided. He laid his hand on his breast by an involuntary movement.

"The portfolio is safe, any way! Get on, Margotte." And he lifted his reins.

But, as if this movement were a signal, he heard distinctly a horse coming toward him, this time at a full gallop, and then Pierre saw a shadow pass some thirty yards away. [Pg 39]

He drew out a pistol, and rode with it in his hand until he passed the cross-road, but he saw and heard nothing more. Perhaps he had been mistaken—it was only a messenger traveling the same road as himself. He had entered the path which in a half hour would take him into Fribourg, when suddenly there was a flash and a report. A ball struck Pierre in the breast—he fell forward on the neck of his horse. A man came out of the shadow on the side of the road. This man was

wrapped in a cloak. Just as he laid his hand on the bridle of the horse, Pierre straightened himself in his saddle.

"You are in too great a hurry, bandit!" he shouted, firing his pistol at the assassin at the same moment.

The man uttered a terrible cry, and then, with a superhuman effort, sprang into the wood. Pierre fired again, but this time hit nothing.

"It was a good idea of mine," he said, rubbing his chest, "to use this portfolio as a breastplate. And now, Margotte, carry me to Fribourg without further adventures!"

As Margotte obeyed the spur, her master heard the gallop of another horse dying away in the distance.

"Strange!" he said. "I could not see his face, but it seemed to me that I knew his voice when he cried out!"

CHAPTER V.

[Pg 40]

WHAT PIERRE KNEW.

The Place Notre Dame at Fribourg was crowded with citizens and soldiers. The citizens wore troubled, and talked together in low voices, while the soldiers were noisy and abusive against France.

The colossal spire of the Cathedral threw its shadow over this scene.

Sovereigns and diplomats, ready for an invasion of France, had left Frankfort for Fribourg, there to complete their plans of vengeance and hate.

Blucher, with Sachen and Laugeron, had concentrated their troops between Mayence and Coblentz. The Prince de Schwartzemberg was marching toward Bâle. The Swiss were irritated, believing that their neutrality would be violated.

In the Chamber of Commerce the Emperor Alexander, with Metternich and Lord Castlereagh, were studying maps, eager for the fray and the dismemberment of France. Count Pozzo de Borga was on his way to England.

On the Place de Ministre a tall mansion faces the Cathedral. Steps, with wrought iron railings, lead to the oaken door, well barred with steel. On the second floor, in a large, gloomy room, several persons are assembled. The last rays of the setting sun are coming from the high windows through the heavy panes of glass set in lead. [Pg 41]

Standing near a window is a lady in black, looking out on the Square; her hand caresses a child who clings to her skirts. The two corners of the chimney in which are burning resinous logs of wood are occupied. On one side sits an old man, on the other a lady wrapped in a cloak that covers her entirely.

The Marquis de Fongereues is only sixty, but his white hair, his wrinkles, and the sad senility of his countenance gave him the appearance of an octogenarian. He sits motionless, his hands crossed on his knees. The lady opposite, whose head rests on the high oak back of her chair, is not yet forty. Her face is hard, and her eyes, fixed upon the Marquis, seem eager to read his thoughts. She is Pauline de Maillezais—Marquise de Fongereues—and the lady at the window is Magdalena, Vicomtesse de Talizac. Her husband, Jean de Talizac, is the son of the Marquis de Fongereues. Suddenly the old man said:

"Where is Jean?"

Magdalena started, as if this voice, breaking the silence of the room, had startled her.

"He has been away since morning," she replied, in a voice that she endeavored to render careless.

"Ah!" said the Marquis, relapsing into silence. Presently he inquired what time it was.

"Let me see—I wish to tell him," cried the child, leaving his mother's side and running across the room to a console table, on which stood an elaborate clock.

Frederic, the son of the Vicomte de Talizac, is deformed. One shoulder is higher than the other, and he limps, but he seems alert. [Pg 42]

"It is seven o'clock," he said, in a sharp voice.

The door was thrown open at this moment, and a German officer appeared. Madame Fongereues rose hastily.

"And what is the decision, Monsieur de Karlstein?" she asked.

The officer bowed low to each of the three persons in the room, and then said, quietly:

"To-morrow the allied armies will cross the French frontier."

"At last!" exclaimed Madame de Fongereues, and Madame de Talizac uttered a cry of joy. The Marquis was unmoved.

"The details—give us the details!" said the young Marquise.

"We shall reach France through Switzerland," said the German, "and penetrate the heart of the empire. Lord Castlereagh approves of this plan and the Emperor Alexander gives it favorable consideration."

"And in a month the king will be at the Tuileries!" said Madame de Talizac.

The German did not notice this remark.

"And now, ladies, will you kindly permit me to retire? In two hours I leave with my company."

Madame de Fongereues extended her hand to him.

"Go, sir," she said. "Go aid in this sacred work! Insolent France must learn that the most sacred rights cannot be trodden under foot with impunity. Let the chastisement be as terrible as has been the crime!" [Pg 43]

Monsieur de Karlstein bowed low and went out.

"At last!" repeated the Marquise. "These French have insulted and despised us too long! Twenty-five years of exile! It is twenty-five years since my father the Comte de Maillezais took me in his arms and, pointing toward Paris, said, 'Child! remember that the day will come when these men will kill their king, as they have forced your father to fly for his life.' Monsieur Fongereues, do you hear? Are you not glad to return as master among these men who drove you away, and with you all that there was great and noble in France?"

The old man turned his head.

"God protect France!" he said, solemnly.

A shout of laughter rang through the room. It was the son of Vicomte Jean, who was laughing at his grandfather.

Madame de Talizac shrugged her shoulders impatiently. Madame de Fongereues made her a sign.

"Come," she said, "the Marquis is sinking into his second childhood, and his follies irritate me."

The child took his mother's hand.

"We shall be the masters now, mamma, shall we not?"

The Vicomtesse murmured, as she left the room,

"Why has not Jean come? Can it be that he has not succeeded!"

Hardly had they disappeared than a door, concealed behind a hanging, slowly opened. [Pg 44]

Pierre Labarre appeared and noiselessly approaching his master, knelt at his feet.

"Master," he said, respectfully, "I have returned."

The Marquis started. "You have come!" he exclaimed, then dropping his voice, he added, "Quick! Simon?"

"Hush! not so loud!" said Pierre; then whispering in the old man's ear, "He is living!" he said.

The Marquis half closed his eyes, and his lips moved in prayer, while large tears slowly ran down his withered cheeks.

The Marquis belonged to one of the oldest families of Languedoc. His ancestors had served France faithfully and had held positions of trust near the persons of the kings. The present Marquis had committed a fault not easily forgiven by the *ancien régime*. He had married the daughter of a farmer, when he was twenty, in spite of the threats of his family. This union was of short duration, for his wife died in giving birth to a son. This blow was so sudden that the young man abandoned himself to despair. He shut himself up from the world on an estate he had among the Vosges mountains, and lived only for his child.

The beloved dead, though of peasant blood, had been an extraordinary woman. She, young as she was, had thought much, and felt deeply the sufferings of her class. She pointed out to the Marquis how the people were weighed down by taxes, and how little their hard toil availed them.

"Friend," said Simonne, "thou art wealthy, thou belongest to the privileged class, give and speak. Open thy hand, and raise thy voice!" [Pg 45]

She endeavored to awaken in his heart a noble ambition. He was twenty and he loved. Had she lived, Armand would, undoubtedly, have been one of the greatest actors in the crisis then preparing, but now that she was gone, he forgot the glorious legacy she had bequeathed to him.

He detested the court, however, and determined that his son should grow up far away from its influences. Simon, therefore, passed his childhood among the mountains drinking in the delicious air, and growing as freely as a young tree.

But Armand was weak. His friends and family, who had fallen away from him at the time of his marriage, now sought to bring him back. He resisted for a time, but at last went to Versailles. The king received him proudly and said, "Monsieur de Fongereues, it is not well in you to abandon us thus. The throne needs its faithful supporters."

A few days later he was presented to Mademoiselle de Maillezais—her beauty was of that quality that dazzles rather than pleases. She made herself very attractive on this occasion, anxious to take back to the king this nobleman who had so nearly been lost.

In 1779, Armand married this lady. Simon, the peasant's son, was then five years of age. When his father spoke of him to his wife some little time after their marriage, she replied:

"You will, of course, do as you choose, but I should say that any change would be likely to injure his health." [Pg 46]

The Marquis was glad to seize any excuse for keeping Simonne's son away from that society which his mother had so strongly condemned. It was with the feeling, therefore, that he was obeying the wishes of his beloved dead, that he left Simon among the mountains.

It was at this time that the war begun by the enemies of Nechar against his innovations reached its height. The nobles and the clergy, feeling their privileges attacked, organized against the Genoese banker a campaign in which he was to fall. The Maillezais family were Nechar's pitiless adversaries, and in spite of himself the Marquis was carried along with them. His wife had acquired a supremacy over him that daily increased. His weak nature was ever ready to be influenced by others, and his natural enthusiasm originally aroused by Simonne for another cause, was perverted to the profit of the *ancien régime*, and finally he was one of the first to applaud the words of Louis XVI., when he signed his name to an edict which inflicted on the country a new debt of four hundred and twenty million.

"It is *legal* because *I wish it*."

Nevertheless, the Marquis often thought of Simonne when he was alone. He recalled her beautiful, energetic face, her pathetic, eloquent words. Then he longed to see her son, whom his present wife hated. She herself had become a mother; the Vicomte Jean Talizac had been held at the baptismal font by the Queen Marie Antoinette. [Pg 47]

The Marquise determined to oust Simon from his place in his father's heart. She but half succeeded in this, and was too wise to attack the memory of the dead.

The Marquis wrote in secret to his son, and occasionally went to see him among the Vosges, and embraced the lad, who inherited all his mother's intelligence and goodness.

Then the Vicomte returned like a truant schoolboy to Versailles, and the Marquise brought in her boy with an expression that seemed to say, "This is your boy! He is the one in whose veins runs only noble blood!"

In 1787 the Marquis was dangerously ill. His wife was devoted to him, and one day when he was in a critical condition she said, gently:

"Shall I send for the peasant's child?"

He closed his eyes and did not reply. When, after long weeks of illness, he was restored to health, he belonged to the Marquise. He never spoke of his eldest child, and adored Jean.

Then came the emigration. Monsieur de Fongereues, friend of Condé and of Polignac, yielded to his wife's entreaties and joined the Prince de Condé at Worms, where he was making an appeal to foreign powers against France. Although yielding to the wishes of the Marquise, De Fongereues was fully aware that it was a base act to desert his country, and excite against her the hatred of her most violent enemies. Young Simon, the son of the peasant, could not join in this parricidal act, although the Marquis sent Pierre Labarre, who was even then in his service, to his son, then fifteen years of age, to sound his views. If the youth would enter the army of Condé, the Marquis assured him a brilliant future. If he remained in France, however, he could no longer rely on his father, who, however, sent him a large sum of money. The youth refused the money, and replied: [Pg 48]

"Say to my father that I love him, and that if ever he requires a devoted heart and a courageous arm that he may summon me to his side; but now, if I am to choose between poverty in my own country and wealth in a foreign land, I remain here!"

"It was Simonne's soul that spoke through his lips!" murmured the Marquis, when Pierre repeated the message sent by the young man.

The father and son did not meet after 1790. We will now return to Fribourg, to that room where Pierre Labarre had just told the Marquis that Simon was living.

Twenty-five years had elapsed—twenty-five years of anguish and sorrow for the Marquis. He had seen France fighting with heroic energy against all Europe. He had heard the enthusiastic shouts of 1792, and then the dull groans of the people crushed under the heel of the conqueror. And

while his country bled and fought, the Marquis blushed with shame in London, Berlin and Vienna when his French ears heard the maledictions of the conquered.

As soon as his son, the Vicomte Jean, reached the age of twenty, he had become one of the most [Pg 49] active agents of the coalition, and, as if to indicate his hatred of France, married a German.

From that time the Marquis heard nothing but abuse of France, nothing but exultation when her sons fell in Spain or in Russia. The old man's heart was sore within him, but it was then too late for him to make a stand, and he was obliged to live on amid this hatred.

Once only did Jean go to France to lend his aid to Cadondal's conspiracy, but he was obliged to flee precipitately, and with difficulty succeeded in gaining the frontier. On his return he was in a state of sullen rage. Was it despair at his lack of success, or did the Vicomte feel any remorse? His father watched him with troubled eyes and many fears, but did not dare ask a question.

What had become of Simon? The Marquis had read in a newspaper that a Simon Fougère carried the orders of the day at the battle of Hohenlinden. He leaped at once at the truth. Simonne's son was fighting for his country, while his other son, the Vicomte de Talizac, was fighting against it.

Suddenly the Marquis beheld the fall of the Imperial idol. The allied armies were in France. Vengeance was near at hand!

Three times the Marquis sent Pierre to France, but the faithful servant could learn nothing of Simon, but this last time he discovered that Simon was living. Pierre had been in the service of the Marquis for forty years. He had known Simonne, and felt for his master the deepest affection. [Pg 50] He was of the people, and only this affection had induced him to leave France. By degrees he had become the confidant of his master, and read his half-broken heart like an open book, and realized that it was full of regrets, almost of remorse. Then he swore to himself that he would aid the Marquis to repair the injustice done to Simon. It is needless to say that Pierre's honest nature felt no sympathy for the Marquise. She, on the contrary, was the object of his deepest aversion, for he well knew that she had done her best to have him dismissed from the service of the Marquis.

The Vicomte de Talizac, the Vicomtesse, and their son, detested Pierre and watched him closely, with what aim they alone knew.

"I went to the Vosges, master," said Pierre. "I learned that the soldier known by the name of Simon Fougère had gone to Lorraine. I could learn nothing more. I went about everywhere—to Epinal, Nancy, Saint Dié—and I had begun to despair, when one evening I reached the foot of a mountain and saw a little cluster of houses. I asked a peasant who was passing if I could procure accommodations there for the night.

"Of course," he answered. "Go straight ahead and you will come to friend Simon's inn."

The Marquis listened breathlessly. Pierre continued:

"The name was a common one in that part of the country, as I had good reason to know, but this time my heart began to beat. I thanked the peasant and I hurried on. And when I think that a Comte de Fongereues——"

"It was he, then!" cried the Marquis, snatching his servant's hands. "And you saw him? Tell me [Pg 51] everything!"

"He is happy," answered Pierre. "But, master, let me tell my story in my own way, for then I shall forget nothing. I went into a little inn, which was as clean as possible and bore the sign, 'France!' A fire of vine branches was sparkling in the big chimney. A boy of about ten came to meet me. 'My friend,' I said, 'is this the inn of Monsieur Simon?'"

"'Yes, sir,' he replied, looking at me with soft, dark eyes. I felt as if I had seen him before."

"What! do you mean——" cried the Marquis.

"Wait, master, wait. I told him that I wanted supper and a bed. The boy ran toward a little door and called: 'Mamma! Mamma!' A woman appeared in peasant dress, with dark hair and eyes. She carried a little girl on one arm. The mother looked about thirty, and the girl was some six years of age.

"'Take a chair, sir,' said the mistress of the house. 'We will do the best we can for you.' Then she told the boy to take the horse to the stable and call his father. I took my seat by the fire and reflected that Simon would not be likely to know me, if it were he, as he had not seen me for thirty years. You had bidden me take care not to betray myself, but I knew that Time had done his work.

"'The country about here looks very dreary,' I said to Madame Simon. She turned in surprise from her work. She was laying the table for my supper.

"'Ah! you are a stranger here!' she answered with a smile. 'No, it is not dreary; it is much [Pg 52] pleasanter here than in the cities.'

"'But in winter?' I persisted.

"'Oh! the mountains are magnificent then.'

"'Have you been living here long, Madame?'

"'Ten years,' she replied.

"'And these beautiful children are yours?'

"She hesitated a moment, or I thought so, but she said in a moment:

"'Yes, they are mine, and you will see their father presently, the best man in this place!' She brought in a bowl of steaming soup. 'Excuse the simplicity of the service, sir.' The door opened, and, master, if it had been in Africa, or thousands of miles from France, I should have known Simonne's son. He had his great deep eyes, but, master——"

Pierre stopped short.

"Go on; you frighten me!" cried the Marquis.

"Oh! master, Monsieur Simon has lost a leg. I saw it at once, and the tears came to my eyes. He lost it at Elchingen, in 1805—it was shot off by a cannon ball."

The Marquis started.

"And his brother was there, too!" he murmured. "Go on, Pierre."

"I knew him at once, as I was saying. He is tall, he is strong; his hair is turning gray, and he wears a heavy moustache, and was dressed in peasant costume. He came to me, and said in a voice that was so like his mother's: 'You are welcome!' I extended my hand, he did not seem to be astonished, and received it cordially. I went to the table, and while I ate my soup I watched him [Pg 53] closely. He took the little girl up in his arms, and began to talk to her in a low voice, and the child listened intently. I could not hear what was said, but presently the child came running to me.

"'Monsieur,' she cried, 'will you do me a favor?'

"'Certainly,' I replied.

"'Will you drink with papa to the French army?'

"'Most gladly!' I answered, wondering at the same time if Simon took me for a spy. The mere idea made me feel ill, and I wanted to tell him who I was, when he came to the table with a couple of glasses.

"'To the success of our arms shall be our toast, sir!' he said. I answered, as I raised my glass to my lips: 'To France!' His eyes flashed with joy. These words had evidently conquered his distrust.

"'Would it be indiscreet to ask, sir, by what strange chance you are in this wild place?'

"I told him, for I had to lie, that I had lost my way. He looked at me a moment.

"'You come from Germany, do you not?'

"'Are you a sorcerer?' I exclaimed.

"'No—it is plain to see that by the cut and the material of your clothing. But is it true,' he continued rapidly, 'that the allied armies are about to cross the frontier?'

"'Alas! I fear so. But you do not know our last disaster, then?'

"'Fortune has betrayed us, but patience—patience!'

"'Do you think that further resistance is possible?' I asked.

"'I am a soldier of France!' was his proud reply. 'I believe in my banner and my country!' He then [Pg 54] asked me many questions, and finally one that made my heart leap to my throat.

"'Is it true that the French emigrés have accepted positions in these foreign armies?' I protested my ignorance. He passed his hand over his brow, as if to chase away unfortunate doubts, and I changed the conversation.

"'These lovely children are yours?' I asked.

"'Yes—and this is my wife, Françoise Simon, the best of women, who has consoled me in many sorrows, and this is Jacques, my eldest, and you know Francinette. Perhaps you will give me your name now?'

"'One moment—you have not introduced yourself.'

"'I am called Simon,' he answered with a frown.

"'Simon—and nothing else?'

"'Nothing else. If I ever bore another name, I have forgotten it. I fought in 1791. I was wounded and compelled to leave the service.' He spoke with some nervousness.

"'Are your parents living?' I asked. He looked at me intently, and pouring out a glass of wine, he carried it to his lips with a steady hand.

"'I never knew them,' he replied.

"We talked for some time, and he told me that after he recovered from his wound he entered the service of a rich farmer, and soon saved enough to lease a small farm for himself, where he carried on his small business as an inn and kept a school, 'for,' he said, 'I had received a good education, and wished to do something for the children about me.'

"It was midnight before I went to my room, and I arose as soon as I heard a movement below, [Pg 55] but, early as it was, Simon had already gone out. I felt that I must return to you without waiting to see him again. I had formed a plan which I trust you will approve of. I went to the Mayor and obtained a copy of Simon's papers. You know since the new code any one can get such papers, and I said something about a lawsuit."

"And you have these papers?"

"Yes—in a portfolio in my breast."

He touched his breast as he spoke and uttered an exclamation of pain. "I had forgotten," he said, and then told his master of the attack made on him in the Black Forest.

"That is very strange," said the Marquis, thoughtfully.

"At all events, I wounded him," Pierre replied.

At this moment there was a sound just outside the door. The Marquis threw it open quickly, but there was nothing to be seen.

"I was sure I heard—"

"This old, worm-eaten wood makes strange noises when the dampness gets into it," said Pierre.

The Marquis read the papers carefully which Pierre now gave him.

"But there were two children at the time?" he said to Pierre. "Where is the certificate of the birth of Jacques?"

Pierre hesitated. "When Simon and Françoise were married," he answered, reluctantly, "Jacques [Pg 56] was already born."

"And now," said the Marquis, "I must make some change in my will. My poor boy, in these papers, does not give his real name, nor the place of his birth, but we will soon remedy that."

"But why do you talk of your will! You must see your son, master, and then you can make all things right."

"I have grown very old lately, and have little strength left, but I hope to embrace my son Simon before I die; but I am in the hands of God. I wish to incorporate these papers in my will and then there will be no difficulty in proving Simon's relationship."

"But what do you fear?" asked Pierre.

The Marquis looked at him.

"Why this question? You know as well as I."

"Do you think that the Vicomte would have the audacity—"

The Marquis laid his hand on his servant's breast.

"There is no peasant," he said, slowly and emphatically, "no peasant in these parts who is capable of such a crime."

Pierre bowed his head; he understood.

"And this is not all," continued his master, "a will may be lost, may be stolen. I wish to provide for everything, and wish that Simon and his children shall be rich."

The Marquis went on speaking in so low a voice that no one but the servant could possibly hear.

CHAPTER VI. [Pg 57]

FRATERNAL THOUGHTS.

When the Marquise, her daughter-in-law, and grandson left the salon, a servant attached especially to the service of the Vicomte approached.

"Madame la Vicomtesse," said Cyprien, "my master wishes to see you; he is in his chamber."

"Go, my child," interposed the Marquise, "but leave the boy with me, for I hate to be alone in these rooms which are drearier than a cloister."

The Vicomtesse de Talizac was of Austrian origin, and concealed under an air of languid indifference the most boundless ambition. Her large eyes were light and generally without

expression, but on occasion they grew dark and flashed fire.

She had married the Vicomte de Talizac with the idea that she would thus obtain a high position at the French Court, knowing well moreover that the immense fortune of the Fongereueses would ensure her princely luxury. The Vicomtesse was both proud and avaricious, and her nature rebelled at the smallest check to her secret aspirations. Her only son came into the world hopelessly deformed, but his mother adored him to whom Nature had given neither physical nor moral beauty. She labored to make him as selfish and indifferent as herself. She determined that [Pg 58] as he grew to man's estate, he should be feared rather than pitied, and to do this it was necessary that he should be immensely rich. He was taught from his cradle to hate France. When his mother saw that the hour of triumph for the emigrés, the traitors, was near at hand, she was filled with bitter joy.

None of these people realized the work that had been going on for twenty years, and had little idea of the changes that had taken place. They ignored them all, and were only anxious to restore everything to the old condition.

The Vicomte de Talizac and his wife were especially eager for these results. There was but one shadow on their brilliant future. The fortune of the Vicomte had nearly gone—the fortune of the Fongereues family remained, but the Vicomte was well aware that his father had contracted an early marriage, and that of this union a son was born, with whom, to be sure, the old Marquis seemed to have broken entirely, but of late de Talizac began to realize that the father's love had outlived this separation; and, moreover, indulged in no possible delusion in regard to himself; he did not love his father, and knew that his father did not love him. Madame de Fongereues was also well aware of the tender reverence in which Simonne was held by the Marquis, and was convinced that the peasant's son was not forgotten.

Where was Simon? Were he to appear it would be ruin for the Vicomte. When Magdalena fully realized this, she snatched her son in her arms, and said to his father: [Pg 59]

"If you are not weak and childish, this Simon will never despoil our son!"

De Talizac understood her.

We resume our recital at the moment when the Vicomtesse entered her husband's room, where he was lying on the couch. He signed to her to close the door. The Marquis was the living image of his mother, except that her beautiful regular features became in his face bony and repulsive.

"Well?" said the Vicomtesse, going up to the couch.

"I am wounded," he answered. "The man escaped me."

His wife frowned.

"Really!" she said, "one might think that the Vicomte de Talizac was strong enough to conquer a lacquey!"

"Hush!" cried the Vicomte, his eyes flashing fire, "do you think that I require you to remind me of the shame of my defeat? I have been for days, as you well know, on the track of the hound. I hid by the wayside to-night, like a murderer, and I saw him press his hand to his breast as if to assure himself of the safety of some package which undoubtedly contained the secret so necessary to the safety of our future. By what miracle the fellow escaped, I can't divine. I saw him fall forward, but he suddenly fired at me—but I did at all events as I promised you to do—"

"I can only say that our son is ruined!"

"No, not yet; listen to me. Pierre is with my father at this moment; hasten and listen to the [Pg 60] conversation."

"But he is locked in his room!"

"I know that, Magdalena. Raise that curtain; you will find a door which opens on a staircase in the wall; go down twenty steps, then stop, pass your hand over the wall until you feel a spring; press it, and it will open. You will find a small window concealed within the room by the carving, and you can hear every word that is spoken—"

"Very good; but your wound—"

"Is not of much consequence; but hasten, for your son's sake."

The Vicomtesse disappeared.

This explains the noise that had attracted the attention of the Marquis.

An hour later Magdalena returned to her husband. "I know enough," she said. "Your brother Simon is married—he has two sons, and lives in the village of Leigoutte."

A cruel smile wandered over the lips of the Vicomte.

"Ah! the invasion will then take that direction!"

CHAPTER VII. [Pg 61]

THE VILLAGE.

On the 1st of January, 1814, it was known that foreign forces had invaded France. It was a terrible surprise when fugitives passed through the villages crying, "Save yourselves, while there is yet time!"

Mothers wept for their sons, wives for their husbands, sisters for their brothers!

The winter was a severe one. The Vosges mountains and the villages in the valleys were alike wrapped in snow.

The inn which our readers already know at Leigoutte, presented a most picturesque appearance. The snow had been so heavy for several days that the woodcutters had not been up the mountains to bring down the wood, but this morning they had determined to make an attempt, and had gathered before the inn with their long light sledges on their shoulders. They seemed to be waiting for some one. "Can Simon be sick?" asked one of these men, finally.

"Not he!" answered another. "He is at the school-room with the children, and he never knows when to leave them."

"Oh! that is very well," grumbled a third, "but I think we had better go in and get a glass of wine, than wait here all this time." [Pg 62]

"Have a little patience, friend; if Simon teaches our children, it is that they may be better off than their fathers, and not like them be compelled to die with cold and fatigue some day among the mountains!"

"Well said, friend, well said!" called out a full rich voice.

Every one turned. The door of the school-room was open, and he who had spoken was standing with arms outspread to prevent the children from rushing out too hastily on the slippery ice.

"Not so quick, children," he cried. "You can't fly over the snow like lapwings."

A boy of about ten repeated these words to the smaller children.

"That is right, Jacques," said Simon, "begin early, for you may have this school some day yourself!"

"Good morning, Master Simon," said one of the woodcutters, taking off his hat, "we were just saying that we should like something warm before we started."

"And you are right. I beg your pardon for keeping you waiting. I was just telling the children about a battle of the Republic at Valmy."

"Take my arm, sir," cried one of the woodcutters. "That wooden leg of yours is not very safe on the ice."

"Am I not here?" asked Jacques, in a vexed voice, "can I not look out for my father?"

Simon laughed.

"But why," he asked, "have you not asked for wine at the inn?" [Pg 63]

"Because we heard that the little girl was ill, sir—"

"Oh! it is nothing of any consequence—there she is, as rosy and smiling as ever."

When Simon's voice was heard, the inn awoke from its silence. A woman appeared on the threshold holding in her arms a pretty little creature about six years old.

The mother was a simple peasant woman, wearing a peasant's dress. She began to fill glasses for these woodcutters, who addressed her with a cordial good morning.

At this moment the door was hastily opened, and a man appeared on the threshold. The woodcutters uttered a cry of surprise. The man was a soldier, who leaned against the wall and did not speak.

Simon hurried forward. "You are welcome, comrade," he exclaimed.

The man turned pale, and but for Simon's support, he would have fallen on the floor.

"Françoise, a chair!" cried the innkeeper.

The soldier had his head wrapped in a blue handkerchief, and drops of blood were upon his cheek. His uniform was in rags, and a linen bandage was wrapped around one leg.

The men looked on with terrified respect while Simon tried to make him drink a glass of wine, and signed to Jacques to take off the soldier's shoes, now covered with snow.

The soldier uttered a deep sigh of relief. He was a peasant of about forty, although his moustache was gray. His features bore the traces of suffering and privations. [Pg 64]

"Some brandy!" he gasped.

Little Francinette carried the glass to him. He drank it, looking the while at the child with admiration and sad envy. Then taking her on his knee, he looked around him at the honest faces, and said:

"My name is Michel—Michel Charmoze. There are thirty of us down on the road, all wounded, in a big wagon. The horses have fallen, one is dead, and we have come for help."

The woodcutters looked from one to the other in amazement.

"What!" cried the soldier, "do you know nothing in this land of snow? I have been fighting three months on the Rhine. The Emperor has deserted us. All is over!"

The peasants listened in a stupefied sort of way. Only the vaguest rumors had as yet reached the peasants that Napoleon's star had begun to pale. Simon knew it, but he had held his peace.

"Where are the wounded?" he asked, quietly.

"A quarter of a league down the road."

"My friends," said Simon, "we have no horses, but your arms are strong. You must save these Frenchmen!"

"We are ready!" shouted twenty voices.

"Father, may I go, too?" asked Jacques, eagerly.

"Yes," said Simon, kindly. "You may go, and take some brandy with you."

The woodcutters took also shovels, sticks and ropes. [Pg 65]

"When they come back," said Simon to his wife, "you must have a good meal ready. Carry straw into the school-room, tear up your old sheets into bandages, and send to Wisembach for the doctor."

"But the child—what am I to do with her?" asked Françoise, timidly.

"Oh! I will look out for her," cried the soldier. "I had a little girl of my own, but since I have been away, both mother and child have died!"

Simon and Michel were alone for a few moments. The little girl still sat on the soldier's knee, gravely enlarging one of the holes in his uniform with her busy little fingers.

"Then the invaders are in France?" said Simon.

"They are, indeed, but they won't stay long—be sure of that!"

"What army is it that is advancing in this direction?" asked Simon.

"Schwartzemberg's, with Russians, Prussians and Austrians."

"How far off are they?"

"Not more than ten leagues. We were nearly overtaken by them. They would not have got thus far had we not been betrayed by everybody. Those dogs of Royalists have felt no shame to be seen with these enemies of France!"

Simon started.

"Do you mean," he asked sternly, "that the emigrés have dared——"

"Yes, they have dared to do just that!" and Michel swore a frightful oath. "I believe that there are Frenchmen who would lead these savages on, to roast and kill their own mothers!" [Pg 66]

Simon had become deadly pale.

"Yes," continued the soldier. "Let me tell you about this wound." And he tore off the handkerchief around his head. His eyes at that moment fell on Simon's wooden leg, which he had not before seen. "Ah! you are one of us, then?" exclaimed Michel.

Simon nodded. "Go on with your story, my friend," he said.

"Well, we had just crossed the Rhine, and were getting on famously when we saw the detachment that had attacked us. I knew by their caps that they were Russians. We sheltered ourselves behind a wall, and then we let fly. I tell you, that was a fight! In front of me was a tall fellow who fought like the very devil. I pricked him with a bayonet, and he opened his arms wide and yelled —good Lord! I hear that yell now—'I am killed! Here! help for Talizac!' He shot at me the same moment. Now, friend, was not that a French name? But what is the matter with you?"

Simon had dropped into a chair. He was as white as a sheet, and his eyes were fixed on vacancy.

The soldier looked at him for a moment. "Come!" he said, "give me another glass, and we will drink to our country!"

At this moment Françoise came in hurriedly.

"Simon!" she cried, "the peasants are coming here from every direction. They say that the foreigners are coming this way, and they bid us fly!"

Simon went to the door. Françoise had spoken the truth. On all the roads and on all the mountain paths crowds were seen of men, women and children. [Pg 67]

If the rout of an army is terrible, that of a people is infinitely more so. This flight from home and fireside is sad beyond expression. These peasants were running, carrying on their shoulders all that they held most precious. Their houses had been searched, for these peasants had served in the rising of '92, and they probably had arms. An old man was shot for concealing a pistol. At another place brutes had insulted the women, and burned the cottages deserted by the fugitives. This was the day that Napoleon Bonaparte had replied to the *corps legislatif*, who supplicated him to return to the people their lost liberty: "France is a man!—I am that man—with my will, my fame, and my power!"

The woodcutters now returned, dragging the huge wagon they had dug out of the snow-drifts. Simon rapidly explained to several peasants the preparations he had made, and under his instructions they hastened to remove the wounded from the wagon. It was a terrible sight—eleven out of the twenty-eight were dead. But in fifteen minutes the living were lying on the fresh straw spread in the school-room, and Simon and his wife were going from one to another of these poor sufferers, alleviating their sufferings as far as possible. Suddenly a great noise was heard without, followed by the most profound silence. Simon started.

"What was that!" he asked, quickly.

The door opened, and Michel appeared. [Pg 68]

"The Cossacks!" he cried. "Come, Master Simon, come!"

Simon obeyed, signing to his wife to take his place. He went outside, and beheld some twenty men mounted on thin but vigorous-looking horses. The men were of medium height, bearded like goats and ugly as monkeys. They wore loose robes fastened into the waists with red scarfs. On their heads were high cylindrical caps. Some wore over their shoulders cloaks of bear skins. Their high saddles formed boxes in which they could pack away their booty. They looked down on the crowd with small, twinkling eyes set far in under bushy brows and low foreheads. At their head was an officer in the Austrian uniform.

The crowd fled to the further end of the open space, and the women clasped their crying children to their breasts. Simon walked directly toward the officer.

"Who are you, and what do you want?" he asked, politely but firmly.

The officer did not seem to hear him—he was looking intently at the inn. Simon repeated his question, this time in German. The Austrian then concluded to look at him.

"Is this village Leigoutte?" he asked. "And is that your inn?" And the soldier pointed to the inn.

"What business is that of yours?" asked Simon, who by this time had become excessively angry.

"Give my men something to drink."

Simon clenched his hands as he replied:

"I never give anything to the enemies of my country!" [Pg 69]

The Cossacks understood him and uttered a groan.

"We shall take it by force, then!" said the officer, spurring his horse toward Simon, but the latter pulled out a pistol and pointed it at the Austrian.

"One step further!" he shouted, "and I will blow out your brains!"

The Austrian pulled up his steed, and saying a few words to his men, they turned their horses and departed.

"We shall see you again!" shouted the Austrian, over his shoulder.

The peasants uttered a shout of joy, but Simon was very thoughtful.

"Why," said he, to himself, "should there be a reconnoissance expressly for this village?"

The men now crowded around Simon.

"You frightened them well!" they said. "How ugly they are!" They laughed, and seemed to think all danger was past.

Simon and Michel exchanged a look, then the former raised his hand to command silence.

"My friends," he said, "they will return, and bring many more with them. Those among you who are not afraid to fight, may remain with me. But we must see at once about a place of safety for the women and children. It will be easy for twenty or thirty of us to keep these invaders from coming to this point again, for we know each mountain path. We have arms, for I long since concealed one hundred guns in my house, and these mountains—the ramparts of France, shall [Pg 70] become inaccessible citadels. The enemy will approach in a compact column; we must send out

scouts who will keep us informed. It is too late to-day for the attack to take place. Two of you will go to the neighboring villages and give the alarm. We will meet to-morrow at the Iron Cross. And remember, children, that in '92, as to-day, the invaders threatened France, and your fathers drove them out. May the children of those men be worthy of them!"

"But about the women and children?" asked Michel.

"They must be hidden in the farm-houses up the mountains. The wounded are protected by the code of war. Courage, then, and shout with me Vive la France!"

These words aroused immense enthusiasm for a few minutes.

Simon felt a hand on his; it was Françoise, with her little girl in her arms, and Jacques at her side.

"We shall not leave you, Simon," said his wife. "But I wish to speak to you a moment."

Simon looked at her in surprise. Then turning to Michel, "You will complete the arrangements. Jacques will show you where the arms are stored."

"Rely on us, Simon!" shouted the peasants. "We will do our duty!"

CHAPTER VIII.

[Pg 71]

THE PAST OF FRANÇOISE.

Simon followed his wife into the house. She closed the door behind her. Simon was struck by the strange expression in her face. Was it anxiety for him that had clouded that placid brow?

"Friend," said Françoise, "you must know all. I saw that Austrian officer from the window, and recognized him—"

"Recognized him!"

"Yes, for the man who dishonored my sister that fatal night of the 16th of May, 1804, at Sachemont, was not alone. He was accompanied by the Count of Karlstein, the man whom you have just seen. I cannot dwell upon the terrors of that night. I escaped—but my poor sister! Nor did I ever speak of that man to you. I felt that Talizac was enough for us to hate."

"Yes, dear, I see; and I, too, have something to tell, for, when after long months in the hospital at Dresden, I was permitted to leave it, I wandered, I know not where; but I reached a hut—it was in February, 1805—I saw a light and knocked. There was no answer, and I opened the door and went in. To my horror, I beheld a woman dead, and heard an infant screaming its heart out."

"Poor little Jacques!" said Françoise, weeping.

[Pg 72]

"I saw a cup of milk on the table; I gave some to the infant. Presently you came in, and did not seem astonished to find the child in my arms. The physician you had gone to seek looked at the poor woman, said she was dead, and that he could do nothing. We were left alone together. It seemed as if you trusted me at once. Your hands trembled, and it was I who closed the eyes of the dead. The next day we followed the poor girl to the grave, and when one of the rough peasants who bore the bier on which she lay, asked you who I was, you answered simply, 'A friend!'

"After we returned to the hut, I asked you who the dead girl was, and then you pronounced the name of Talizac, and heard that a gentleman of France had conducted himself like a base coward —"

"But an honorable man said to me, 'Shall we repair the crime of another? Shall we not give this little one a home and a family?' I became your wife, your happy, honored companion, and poor Jacques will never know that he owes his life to a base profligate."

Simon laid his hand on his wife's head.

"Do you know why Simon Fougère wished to make reparation for the crime of the Vicomte de Talizac?"

"Because Simon Fougère had a loyal and generous heart!"

"Because," said Simon, in solemn tones, "because the Vicomte de Talizac is my brother!"

"Your brother! But who, then, are you?"

"The son of the Marquis de Fongereues," and in a few words Simon explained to his wife the situation already known to our readers.

[Pg 73]

"I reproach myself," concluded Simon, "for having so long concealed my name from you. I have not seen my father since I was a boy. I am indebted to him for a few years of happiness, but he was under the influence of others who awakened in him the pride of race. He has forgotten the

Republican soldier, and has never cared to know whether I lived or died, since the day that he offered me a princely fortune, rank and title, to fight against France. But to return to this man, you are sure he is the friend and accomplice of Talizac?"

"I am sure."

"I have never seen my brother, but I know him to be one of the bitterest enemies France has. He has fought against us, and I have heard that he is nearly ruined. Painful as such suspicions are, I am tempted to believe that the appearance of this Karlstein in this out of the way place, is due to the fact that this renegade brother of mine has hunted me up, knowing that at my father's death I can claim my inheritance. I feel as if we were the cause of this attack on Leigoutte, which is really directed on the heir of the Fongereueses."

"Horrible!" murmured Françoise.

"Yes, this officer asked me if this inn belonged to me. Dear wife, it is now doubly our duty to take every measure for the protection of these people. You must take the children away. I must remain with these peasants. I wish you to go to the farm of old Father Lasvène—"

"Yes, I know, a league away, in the Outremont gorge." [Pg 74]

"I will take you there. Lasvène is a man of sense, and will not be guilty of any imprudence."

Suddenly Francinette, who was looking out of a window, uttered a shrill cry, and ran to her mother.

"What is it?" exclaimed Simon, rushing to the window, which he threw open, but could see nothing.

Françoise soothed the little girl and questioned her.

The child, still wild with fear, pointed to the window. "A man! a bad man!"

The father lifted her in his arms.

"No, no," he said, "little Francinette was dreaming. There was no one there!"

"Yes, I saw him; he climbed over the wall!"

Simon took his gun and went out. Presently he returned, and with a look towards his wife that contradicted his words, he said, "No, it is nothing."

At the same time he wrote a few words on a bit of paper, and laid it on the table near his wife. This is what she read:

"The child is right; there are footprints on the wall—a spy undoubtedly." He said aloud: "And now, wife, make haste; there is no time to lose. Francinette, go to the other window and see if your brother is anywhere about. And Françoise," Simon continued rapidly, "I do not think that our separation will last long, yet it is well to be prepared for everything. All my secret and family papers are in this portfolio. Take every care of it. And now, kiss me—let no one see you weep!"

Michel and Jacques now entered. [Pg 75]

"Well, Michel, what think you of our recruits?" asked Simon, cheerfully.

"Oh, they are born soldiers, and your boy Jacques is as bright as a button!"

Simon drew his child toward him.

"My boy, I meant to take your mother and sister to some place of safety, but I am needed here. You must go in my stead."

"Am I not to remain with you, father?" asked the boy, greatly disappointed.

"No—you are to take care of all that is most precious to me in the world. God bless you all!"

CHAPTER IX. [Pg 76]

WHERE THE INVASION PASSES.

Never was there solitude more complete and more magnificent than at five o'clock that January morning among the Vosges mountains. The snow was piled up, softening the rugged outlines of the mountain peaks and through the pale darkness dim shadows were silently moving. These shadows are the brave mountaineers, who have come to defend France at the summons of Simon, who, in spite of his wooden leg, displayed immense activity. Among these there were no youths. The conscription had long since swallowed them up. They were elderly men and boys. Two of them were but fourteen, but they were vigorous and determined.

"We have arrived in time," said Simon, "but you are sure that there is no other road by which they can reach the village?"

"Only the one by which the wagon came with the wounded, but that, too, is well guarded."

"Yes," answered Simon, "a few brave fellows could keep an army back there, and you know we are continually receiving reinforcements. As soon as they understand that the gorge is impracticable, they will give up the point, and we shall feel that we have rendered effectual aid to France."

In the souls of these patriots there was a singular instinct of discipline. They listened in silence to Simon's words, and obeyed him whom they had taken for their leader without question or argument. [Pg 77]

Simon called two men and bade them climb the high rocks on one side of the gorge. From thence they could look down the whole valley. The mists of the night had slowly drifted away, and the wind had died out. A gleam of sunshine, as pale as moonlight, rested on the mountain top.

The mountaineers waited long on the rocks, whither they had been sent, but returned to say that there was not a sound nor a movement.

"Let us go on," said Simon.

The gorge now became so narrow that only three men could move abreast. On each side rose high walls.

"Now, then," said Simon, "hide here. Keep your eyes open, and waste no ammunition. And you others will pass through that cleft which commands the lower road. Conceal yourselves well, and as soon as a Cossack appears, fire. Hans!"

A peasant ran at the sound of his name.

"If you hear firing from either of these posts, you are to advance at once with twenty men. Select them now, so that there will be no confusion."

Michel listened to these orders in silence.

"Well, comrade," said Simon, "what do you think of my arrangements?"

"They are excellent, and you ought to be a general."

"I could serve only the Republic," answered Simon, "I resigned in 1804."

Michel looked at him as if he did not more than half understand, then he muttered, reluctantly: [Pg 78]

"Well, every man is entitled to his opinions."

"Now that our arrangements are made, we two will go on," said Simon.

They walked for some five minutes and reached the entrance of the gorge. There the road suddenly widened, and gently descended to the valley. On the left there was an enormous rock forty feet high. It was shaped like a pyramid standing on its apex. Simon went round it, feeling with his hands, tearing off bits of moss from time to time.

"Ah! we have it. Here, Michel, dig out this place with your bayonet!"

Michel obeyed, though without the smallest idea of what was to be done, and soon a hole of about a square foot was discovered.

"Now," said Simon, triumphantly, "I defy the Cossacks to pass this point!"

He laid on the ground a box that he had been carrying over his shoulder with great care.

"I have ten pounds of powder here!"

He proceeded to place this box in the hole, which it entirely filled. Then he produced a long wick, one end of which he inserted in the box. Then he nearly closed the box, leaving it only sufficiently open for the wick to burn easily.

"If our guns fail us," said Simon, grimly, "this will soon settle the matter!"

At this moment, from out of the woods on the side of the road sprang a man, shouting:

"Save me! Save me!" [Pg 79]

Simon saw that the fellow was a gipsy, and that he had been wounded.

"Save me!" repeated the gipsy, "they will kill me!"

"Zounds! fellow," cried Michel, "who are you afraid of? I believe you are a spy!"

Simon motioned to Michel to be silent, and questioned the man who proceeded to say that he and his companions had been seized to act as guides through the forest.

"We refused," he said, "because you French had always been good to us. Then the soldiers killed one after the other of us as fast as we refused, and I ran away. They fired at me, and wounded me in the head. Oh! save me!"

Neither Simon nor Michel noticed the almost theatrical exaggeration of this fellow's gestures.

"The Cossacks are near?" asked Simon. "How many?"

"About five hundred."

"On this road?"

"Yes. Hark!"

The three men listened, and distinctly heard the smothered footfall of horses in the snow.

"They are coming!" said Simon.

The Bohemian crouched against the rock, and hiding his face, shivered with fear.

Simon entered the gorge, and carrying his fingers to his lips made a noise that sounded like the hoarse caw of a crow. Other signals answered this, showing that all were ready.

Simon stood listening. The sounds came nearer and nearer, and, presently, some fifty yards away, appeared the Cossacks. They came slowly, uneasy at the profound silence. Simon aimed at the leader, fired and the Cossack fell. Frightful yells filled the air, but they continued to advance. [Pg 80]

Then from every rock and tree came a rain of balls, the echoes from the granite walls making the invaders suppose that the opposing force was a hundred times what it really was.

The Cossacks were ready enough to return the fire, but they saw no enemy; not a human being. Still they moved on, closing up their ranks, and their horses trampling on the dead bodies of their comrades. They reached the gorge. The peasants, sure of their prey, now forgot all prudence, and showed themselves. The Cossacks, with cries of rage, answered their fusillade. The scene was an absolute butchery.

Suddenly, a man in the uniform of the Helmans waved his sword, and the Cossacks pulled up their horses and turned them with inconceivable dexterity. This movement showed the length of their column. The gipsy was right, there were hundreds.

Simon, at this moment, uttered the exclamation:

"Back with you!" he cried. "To your places among the rocks!"

The mountaineers had seen the Cossacks fall, and all the old hatred that had sent their fathers to the Rhine in '92, again sprang to life in their veins. They rushed from out their shelter, regardless of danger. They heard Simon's voice, but did not understand his order, their rage deafened them. [Pg 81] They had hitherto been amenable to discipline, but they were intoxicated by victory. It seemed to them that they could crush the invasion then and there. In vain did Simon shout "Halt!" They went on, and reached the rock.

"I don't like this," said Simon. "This retreat of the Cossacks looks like a ruse. Our men must go no further."

Then took place a horrible thing. The peasants were trying to crowd through the narrow passage by the rock. They were in such haste that they formed a struggling mass. Then from the dark corner rose the gipsy with the Judas face, and glided to the corner where hung the torch arranged by Simon. Presently, there was a little flash of light, and the gipsy threw himself far down the slope, just as a fearful explosion was heard. The rock split and fell upon the peasants. Of these valiant patriots only five remained—seven with Michel and Simon. They all stood nailed to the ground with horror.

And back came the Cossacks at full gallop. The rock had cut off all retreat. These seven men were between the barred-up gorge and the Cossacks.

Michel was the first to fall pierced by a lance. Simon realized that these men will reach his home, his wife and children, before he was nailed to the trunk of an oak by a Cossack's sword, and now Simon is dead!

Over this body of this hero, rolls the horrible flood that is to engulf France.

Talizac, Simon's brother, had said that the invasion should take this direction!

CHAPTER X. [Pg 82]

THE HUT AT OUTREMONT.

How did the Cossacks ever discover that poor little hut sheltered among the rocks?

Simon's wife and children reached this place, and said to old Lasvène:

"Simon is fighting for France. Will you give us shelter?"

Lasvène took them in with a simple "yes." They were all very weary. Jacques had done all in his power to protect his little sister, who was not in the least frightened, only curious.

The old man shook out some fresh straw, gave them each a great bowl of smoking soup, and said:

"Everything here is yours, eat and sleep."

And when all was quiet the old man brought out two guns, which he had kept in spite of Napoleon's edict. He sat down by the fire, and began to clean them.

Suddenly, he felt a hand—a small one—laid on his arm, and a voice said,

"What are you doing with your guns? Do you think there is any danger here?"

The old man hesitated for a reply, and the boy said,

"Show me how to manage them, it may be useful."

Lasvène hesitated a moment, but finally decided to teach little Jacques how to fire these long guns. The boy quickly grasped the movement. When he bit his first cartridge he made a wry face. When one is inexperienced the powder gets between the teeth. [Pg 83]

"Once more," he said, "I am not quite sure yet."

When the clock struck three, Jacques could load the gun like any old grenadier, but he had not been permitted to fire it.

"Your mother is asleep and little sister too," the old man said.

Jacques did not persist.

"Now lie down, my boy, and get a little sleep."

At six o'clock in the morning—it was at that hour that Simon died—a pistol shot scattered the straw on the roof of the hut.

Lasvène rushed to the door and half opening it, cried:

"The Cossacks!"

He knew them well, for he had been in the campaign of 1805.

Jacques started to his feet, and Françoise, pale as death, clutched her little girl to her breast.

"They are only going by," said Lasvène. "They know there is nothing to pillage here."

Lasvène believed himself and his guests under his roof to be safe. He, therefore, threw open the door wide.

He saw about fifty Cossacks.

"I am not making any defence," he said, "what do you want?"

The old soldier said this reluctantly, for the blood leaped hot in his veins, but he had a woman and two children there. [Pg 84]

The Cossacks sat still on their horses, and seemed to be waiting. For what were they waiting?

Suddenly and most incomprehensibly, from behind old Lasvène came two shots. Two Cossacks fell. Who had fired? He ran back into the hut. Jacques stood near the chimney, looking at the guns which he had not fired. Who had?

These shots were answered by a furious clamor. A volley was fired into the cottage. Lasvène ran to the other side of the hut, and saw two men running away. It was these men who fired. Both were dressed like gipsies, but one was Cyprien, the lacquey of Monsieur de Talizac.

"We are lost!" thought Lasvène.

Instantly he pulled across the door his old oaken chest, and piled chairs and tables upon it, the bed, everything that was movable in the hut. Then, snatching one gun, he said:

"We must fight. Take the other!"

The Cossacks were amazed, but they fired through the window.

"Now!" cried Lasvène, and an officer fell. Jacques handed him the other gun, and loaded the first.

Again a Cossack fell.

Françoise rushed to the old man's side.

"Save the children!" she cried.

"At the peril of your life?" he asked.

"Yes," was the reply of the devoted mother.

"Then take the other gun!" [Pg 85]

Françoise obeyed.

"Come!" said the old man to Jacques.

"No," answered the boy, "they will kill mamma!"

"For Simon's sake!" cried Françoise.

Then Lasvène stooped to the ground, and with the aid of an iron ring lifted a trap door.

"Down with you!" said the old man. "It is a subterranean passage, and leads to the Fongereues estate. You have a league to go. God guard you!"

Another deafening discharge of musketry. The mother sank on her knees.

"Save Francinette!" she moaned.

"They have killed my mother!" sobbed the boy.

"Go!" cried Lasvène, "they are coming in!"

He seized the little girl and put her in her brother's arms, and thrusting a pistol into the hands of the little fellow, he pushed him toward the trap door.

"Mother! Mother!" cried the boy.

There was no time to lose. Lasvène lifted him by the collar and dropped him into the dark hole, and closed the cover. Françoise extended her arms to the old man. "Thanks!" she said.

"We are caught like rats in a hole!" he growled.

The Cossacks began to tear down the walls.

"Can you walk?" said the old soldier to Françoise.

"No!"

"Then you must die!"

"Will the children be saved?"

"Yes."

"Then do what you will!"

Lasvène snatched a burning log from the fire and threw it into the middle of a pile of brushwood. [Pg 86]

"Fan it!" he whispered hoarsely.

And Françoise dragged herself forward and fanned the flames with her dying breath.

"Brave woman!" cried Lasvène. "And now, welcome death! Vive la France!"

He poured his flask of powder on the floor. There was a terrible explosion.

Françoise and old Lasvène have done their duty ere they died. The walls of the hut fall, and hide the trap door.

CHAPTER XI. [Pg 87]

CHILDREN IN DARKNESS.

The trap door closed on the two children, leaving them in total darkness. Lasvène had not thought of that.

The boy hesitated. His mother had bidden him save Francinette—here was safety, even if there were also darkness. He kissed his little sister tenderly.

"Can you walk, dear?" he said.

"No—I am afraid!"

Jacques remembered that he was ten, and that Francinette, who was only six, had a right to be afraid.

"Afraid!" he repeated, "what is there to fear? I am not afraid!"

He was not speaking the truth, but he had a vague idea that it was not wrong to tell a falsehood on this occasion. He placed Francinette on the ground, and she clung to his legs. He passed his hand over the wall, and they slowly crept on. The ground was slippery and the air foul. Suddenly Jacques tripped and fell. The little girl began to cry. Her brother had lost his hold on the wall, and when he gathered himself up, he missed the touch of those little hands.

"Cinette! Cinette!" he cried.

She replied with sobs, and he suddenly realized that these sobs were becoming fainter and fainter. Where was she? [Pg 88]

"Cinette! stand still."

The voice replied:

"Jacques! Oh! mamma! I want mamma!"

It was plain that the child was lost, and that several paths ran from the point where he stood. He called to his sister again—no reply. He began to run, and came up against the wall. He started again, then stopped. He saw a red light at the end of a long gallery. This light came from the funeral pyre of Françoise and the old man.

The boy smiled—he fancied that aid was coming. He called: "Mamma! Mamma!" Suddenly his hurrying feet encountered an obstacle, and he fell from a height. His head struck a rock, and he felt the blood stream over his face. Then he fainted.

How long he lay there he never knew. After a while he struggled to his feet, and then hurried on, always away from the red light, not toward it. Suddenly he felt the air strike his face, and he saw the sunshine. The subterranean passage ended. He emerged upon a plain. An old château stood on the brow of a hill opposite.

"If I go there," he said to himself, "I can find people who will look for Francinette with me."

He tried to run; his foot slipped. He looked down and beheld a pool of blood. A dead body lay near, and then another, and another—death and slaughter everywhere!

These were French soldiers who had been surprised and shot. Three guns were fastened together, holding a pot over a fire not yet entirely gone out. [Pg 89]

Jacques was now wild with terror; he wished he were back in the darkness of the subterranean passage, but still he struggled on for his little sister's sake. Suddenly he started. Around the neck of a soldier he saw a cord to which hung a bugle. Jacques made his way to the body. He extended his arm, then pulled it back, but impelled by the hope of safety, he at last succeeded in reaching the bugle without touching the body, but he could not take it away because of the cord. Then Jacques closed his eyes, and supporting himself on one hand, he placed his lips to the mouth of the bugle. His face was very near that of the dead soldier. He remembered the lessons he had received from Simon.

"Tarara! Tarara!"

The sound came rich and full, but the exertion had been too great.

Jacques fainted, and his pale face lay on the stiff, outstretched arm of the dead soldier.

CHAPTER XII. [Pg 90]

THE RISING SUN.

That morning the worthy Schwann, whose ancestors had kept the inn known as the Rising Sun for one hundred and fifty years, said that in all his experience he had never been so busy. Three travelers, three guests in February! It was most amazing. And the worthy innkeeper knew that this was not all. Six more strangers might arrive at any moment; but when he was asked who these strangers were, he winked mysteriously, but looked highly pleased. At the hour when this chapter opens, Master Schwann had just witnessed a veritable slaughter in his poultry yard; pots and saucepans were smoking on the fire, and vigorous preparations were made in the kitchen.

The door was suddenly thrown open, and loud laughter made the windows rattle. The innkeeper started, but before he could speak, he was lifted off his feet by the long arms of a vigorous looking young man, with a most enormous mouth. His costume was something wonderful; a startling combination of colors; a red coat, a yellow vest trimmed with huge black buttons, green breeches and long black hose.

"Iron Jaws!" cried the innkeeper, struggling in the grasp of the Colossus.

"Yes, my best beloved cousin, Iron Jaws it is; let me give you a good shake of the hand." [Pg 91]

"Not too hard!" said Schwann, plaintively.

"You are not glad to see your old friend, then?"

"Not so; but you are so strong that you hurt people without knowing it. But where are all the rest of you?"

"Oh! they are coming on. I did not want to hurry Brelion and Bechette."

"What! Have you those two animals yet?"

"To be sure. Why not? They don't look their age."

"And your wife?"

Gudel, or Iron Jaws, as he was called, hesitated a moment.

"Things are going smoothly there, I hope," said the innkeeper, with a wink.

"Well! We will talk of something else, if you please!"

"Oh! women, women! you have much to answer for!" sighed the innkeeper.

"I was happy enough with my first wife, though, and Caillette is her very image."

"She must be a big girl, now, it is five years since I saw her."

"And she is nearly sixteen. An angel without wings!"

"How does she get on with your wife?"

"Oh! Roulante can't endure her!"

Schwann shook his head.

"Ah! my lad, you made a great mistake. I felt it when you told me that you were about to marry the giantess. She had something about her eyes I didn't like. She doesn't ill-treat Caillette, I hope?" [Pg 92]

"Not if I know it!" answered Gudel, clenching his enormous fist. "Just let her lay a finger on the girl, that is all!"

"You need not get so excited. And now about Bobichel—how is he?"

"Just the same as ever, honest and stupid."

"And Robeccal?"

"I mean to get rid of him for reasons of my own."

"And the little boy?"

Gudel shouted with laughter.

"The little boy! Just wait until you see him. He is six feet, and a treasure. I am strong, but Fanfar is different from me. He has wrists and ankles like a woman, with the hands of a Duchess, but his back and shoulders are iron and his fingers steel. He is, moreover, as good and gentle as possible."

"You love him as much as ever, I see."

The excellent Gudel opened his mouth to speak, when with loud fife and horn, the wagon that held all his worldly possessions rattled up to the door.

We will call the vehicle a chariot, as it is more complimentary than the title of wagon. Four huge wheels held the body of this vehicle, from which rose posts striped like barbers' poles, decorated with parti-colored curtains.

Underneath the chariot hung all sorts of queer looking things—kegs of wine, rope, ladders, baskets, and hoops with torn covers of rose colored tissue paper.

Bobichel must be mentioned first, as he stands on one of the shafts and blows a long horn. The clown is dressed all in yellow with a gray hat. His legs looked like matches in their striped hose. His head was small and pointed, his nose very long and very sharp. [Pg 93]

Behind Bobichel sits Caillette, Gudel's daughter, a pretty, dainty creature with light hair. She turned with a merry laugh to say something to a third person, who lay on a pile of bundles of all shapes and sizes, and smiled back upon the young girl. Still further back was a huge mass which might be supposed to be a woman, from the tawny locks that floated over the shoulders, and if out of curiosity one examined more closely, a large face with pendant cheeks was discovered, a retreating forehead, a pair of small, half closed eyes. A double, or rather a triple chin, rested on an enormous bosom, which seemed to have torn half the buttons from a much spotted cloth waist. This charming being was known as La Roulante, in which sobriquet was lost her real name of Charlotte Magnan. She was also the lawful wife of Gudel.

And finally, to complete this hurried description, we must mention a person who followed the chariot on foot. He was short, slender and bow legged, very pale, and had light eyes without lashes. His scanty hair, as white as an albino's, escaped from a vizorless hat. His costume was much like his appearance; a well worn velvet coat, much too short in the sleeves, and long fingered hands, with one peculiarity, that the thumbs were as long as the fore fingers.

"Ah! you have come, children, have you?" cried Gudel. "And I am thankful, for hunger gnaws my vitals." [Pg 94]

"And mine, too," Bobichel replied, throwing a somersault as he spoke; which he ended with a sudden leap on the shoulders of the good Schwann, who stood the shock with wonderful philosophy.

But at the third shout he decided to go outside. When the giantess saw him, she called out, angrily:

"Are you coming to help me?"

Gudel looked on with concentrated rage, and as Robeccal went toward the chariot, he said to him:

"Not another step!"

"Indeed! And who will prevent me?"

Gudel's eyes flashed.

"Scoundrel!" he muttered under his breath.

"Well! are you coming?" called La Roulante. "Give him a push and come on!"

These words encouraged the fellow, but as he moved toward the chariot Iron Jaws struck him a tremendous blow in the chest. Robeccal pulled out a knife and leaped on Gudel, but was caught by Fanfar and tossed in the air as if he had been a ball. The fellow landed nearly at the side of the giantess, who tumbled herself off the chariot and rushed upon Fanfar. Schwann appeared at the door at this moment.

"Dinner is ready, good people," he said, soothingly.

Robeccal said a few words in a whisper to the giantess, who shrugged her huge shoulders and made at once to the dining-room. Gudel held out his arms to his daughter.

"Jump, child!" he said. [Pg 95]

And the girl obeyed. The father kissed her tenderly, for the two loved each other very much.

"Do you mean to stay there forever, Fanfar?" was Gudel's next remark.

Fanfar was the person to whom Caillette had addressed her smiles. With a laugh he swung himself down, and hung by his wrists a moment.

"Good boy!" said Gudel. "You mean to keep yourself in practice, I see."

Robeccal, with his hands in his pockets, lounged into the kitchen, and stood watching the preparations for dinner. La Roulante sat as motionless as the Sphynx in the Desert. Gudel said to her, respectfully:

"Are you coming?"

The woman turned her eyes slowly upon him, and then, with a sniff of disdain, called for Robeccal, who heard the stentorian shout, but did not care to be disturbed in his contemplation of the spit on which the fowls were roasting.

CHAPTER XIII. [Pg 96]

MISCHIEF.

While these people were repairing the fatigues of their journey, a door opened very softly at the end of the room. But Schwann heard it. This door had access to the stairs which led to the upper floor. He instantly hastened toward the person, who stood half concealed.

This man was about forty, small, and wearing a brown cloth coat, braided and trimmed with Astrachan. His vest was blue, as was a neckerchief. He wore straps and spurs—a costume, in fact, in the last mode of 1825—and yet, no human being looked less like a dandy. His feet were huge, his hands ugly and bony. His face expressed timidity and hypocrisy. He took off his hat as Schwann approached. The stranger's eyes were half closed, as if the light from the long windows pained them—in reality, he was examining each face at the table.

"You want breakfast, sir, I presume?" asked the innkeeper.

"Yes," said the other, "yes, yes," but he did not seem to have understood the question, although he took a seat at one of the tables.

"Give me some brandy!" he said. "I am expecting some one, and when he comes you will serve our breakfast up-stairs." [Pg 97]

"Very good, sir!" And Schwann walked away. "He is the intendant of some great lord, I fancy," he said to himself.

Again the door opened, and two more customers appeared. One looked like a horse jockey, the other, though in citizen's dress, was without doubt an old soldier. His heavy gray moustache imparted a certain harshness to his expression, though his eyes were frank and honest.

"Where shall I serve your breakfast, gentlemen?" asked the innkeeper.

There was a little hesitation. The last arrivals noticed the man in the brown braided coat, and did not seem to like his appearance. It was plain that some mysterious tie existed among these

travelers, however, for Iron Jaws, hearing the voices of the new-comers, looked up and exchanged a rapid glance with them.

"We will eat there," said one of the two men, pointing to a table at some distance from the man in brown, who smiled slightly as he saw the gesture. He himself had been in the meantime supplied with a decanter of brandy, and now took some newspapers from his pocket, one of which he began to read, holding it in such a way that he was concealed from the observation of every one in the room.

When Schwann brought in a delicious-looking omelette, the horse jockey said, in a loud voice:

"Is Rémisemont far from here?"

"Rémisemont! Ah! gentlemen, it is plain that you do not belong in these parts. It is not more than two leagues away." [Pg 98]

"Then we can easily get there this afternoon?"

Schwann saw that he had made a blunder, and endeavored to retrieve it.

"We had better call it three leagues, and the road is a bad one, and you have to ford the river. There has been a great deal of rain, and two men were drowned there last year; and, by the way, they looked much like you."

"Many thanks!" And the old soldier laughed.

"They didn't know the road, you see——"

"But you can furnish us with a guide?"

"Yes, but not to-day."

"And why not?"

"Because I am alone in the house."

The mountebanks had by this time finished their meal. Gudel came toward the two men.

"If these gentlemen desire it," he said, politely, "I will take them on early to-morrow morning in my wagon."

"That is an excellent idea!" cried the innkeeper. "With Iron Jaws there is no danger."

The strange costume worn by Gudel, and the equally strange name by which Schwann called him, did not seem to amaze the two strangers. They consulted each other with a look, and then courteously accepted the offer.

"I give a little representation here to-night," Gudel continued, "and start at an early hour for Rémisemont." [Pg 99]

Nothing could have been more natural than this scene, nor that Gudel should have accepted the brandy and water offered him, and it would have been a very distrustful nature that would have suspected any secret understanding between Gudel and the two men with whom he was now drinking. Nevertheless, the man behind the newspaper, who had not lost a word of this dialogue, smiled until he showed every tooth in his head.

The giantess and Robeccal left the room together. After a few words together, Robeccal returned, and asked Gudel if he wanted him again, and when his employer said no, that he was at liberty, he once more left the room. The man behind the newspaper did the same, and the two met in the passage.

"One word, if you please," said the man in the brown coat. "Answer me frankly, and you shall have twenty francs. Who is Iron Jaws?"

"A mountebank."

"He has another name?"

"Yes—Gudel."

"Do you know the two men with whom he is talking?"

"No."

"You hate him?"

"What is that to you?"

"A good deal, and to you, too, if you wish him any harm. You are a member of his troupe?"

"Not for long, you had better believe!"

"Long enough to earn a few louis?" [Pg 100]

"What do you want done?"

"I will tell you. If you hate this Gudel I will give you an opportunity to pay off your score, and I

will pay you at the same time."

"That is nonsense!"

"All right. I am in no hurry. I can wait an hour or two."

The man took a louis from his pocket and dropped it on the ground. Robeccal put his foot upon it. During this brief colloquy the two men had not looked at each other. The stranger lounged away, indifferent to all appearance, and Robeccal picked up the gold and disappeared in a different direction.

Meanwhile, Gudel was talking in a low voice to his apparently new acquaintances. Schwann had returned to his saucepans.

"Well?" said the soldier, leaning over his glass as if to smell the wine.

"All goes well," answered Gudel. "The grain was well sown—the harvest waits."

"We will talk elsewhere. Did you notice that fellow who sat reading over there in the corner?"

"Yes—a bad face. A lacquey, I think."

"A lacquey or a spy. Look out for him! Now, when and where can I see you quietly?"

"To-night, after the representation, in my room or yours."

"In yours, then. We will wait until the house is quiet. Leave your door open. And now, be careful that no one suspects our presence here!"

"What! not even Fanfar? You need not distrust him. He is good, brave, and devoted to you." [Pg 101]

"We will talk of that later on." In a louder voice he said: "Then, comrade, we will accept your offer, and go with you to Rémisemont to-morrow."

Gudel nodded, then called Fanfar.

"To work, my lad," he cried. "We must stir up these excellent people in this village. Schwann, where is my permit from the mayor?"

Schwann hurried in wiping his hands, and from under a pile of plates he drew out a paper.

"Fanfar, sign it for me, your hand is better than mine, for the truth is I never learned to write. And now this is done, we must go forth and warn the people of the great pleasure in store for them."

CHAPTER XIV. [Pg 102]

TWO PLACES, S. V. P.

In five minutes all the population of Saint Amé was on the Square, for in these Lorraine villages amusements are rare. They were watching the erection of an enormous shed covered with canvas and strange pictures. An enormous handbill with letters that could be read a hundred feet off, bore most astonishing inscriptions. At the top was Iron Jaws, who held enormous weights with his teeth. The Giantess, who ate raw pigeons, or any other fowl that was most convenient. The wonderful Almanzor (that was Robeccal,) a descendant of the Moors of Spain, crushed glass with his teeth and swallowed swords. Then there was Caillette, the rope-dancer, who charmed the world with her voice, as well as with her aerial lightness. And lastly, in letters of the same length as those which Gudel used for himself, came Fanfar's name.

"FANFAR! FANFAR! FANFAR!

"STRENGTH, SKILL, DEXTERITY.

"He knows everything. He can do everything!"

And finally, there was a representation of a human pyramid, at the top of which was Caillette, all smiles, and a flower in her hand.

The good peasants were naturally delighted with all this. [Pg 103]

Iron Jaws, with his hands in his pockets, was marching up and down, giving his orders like a general at the head of an army. Suddenly he called,

"Bobichel!"

Between two pictures, one of which was a lion devouring a crocodile, appeared the clown's head, grinning from ear to ear. He was so utterly grotesque that the crowd shrieked with laughter.

Bobichel's name did not appear on the handbill. It had been omitted to leave more room for that of his friend Fanfar, and Gudel had called him to introduce him, so to speak, to the crowd.

Fanfar and Caillette were alone. He was trying the ropes of the trapeze, while she was giving some finishing touches to the interior decoration. Suddenly, she stopped and looked up at Fanfar, who was swinging from a wooden bar. An artist would have been struck with the beauty of his figure.

Caillette watched him breathlessly as he went through his exercises, and as he dropped at last on the floor, so lightly that his feet scarcely left their imprint, she threw both arms around his neck.

"How bad you are!" she cried, "you frighten me half out of my wits."

"Frighten you, child! Are you not yet accustomed to my exercises, little sister?"

Caillette colored, and half turned away.

"Why do you call me little sister?" she said.

Fanfar dropped her hands, which he had taken from his neck. A cloud passed swiftly over his brow. [Pg 104]

"Because we have been brought up together," he answered, slowly. "You were not more than six years old when your father took me into his service. But does it vex you for me to call you sister?"

"No, it does not vex me, but I would rather you did not."

Fanfar understood her, and was disturbed. He had long since seen in the girl a growing passion for himself. Her innocence and purity were exquisite, but at the same time she loved Fanfar. He did not love her. He would have given his life for her, but he did not wish to spend it with her, and at the thought of Caillette as his wife he drew back. He now disengaged himself gently from her clinging arms.

"To work!" he said, "it is growing late."

Caillette took up her needle, as the door opened to admit Gudel. He was not alone, two ladies of aristocratic bearing were with him.

"But, my dear Irène, this is a strange caprice," said the elder of the two. "What will the Countess say?"

"My dear Madame Ursula, it would oblige me if you would cease your moans, that is, unless you should prefer to return to the château alone!"

The dear Madame Ursula was a tall, thin woman, wearing blue glasses. She was evidently a companion or governess.

Irène, in her riding-habit, looked about twenty. Her hair was jet black, and curled over a marble white brow. Her hat, Louis XIII. in shape, with curling plumes, gave a haughty expression to her dainty features. She looked as if she might have stepped from out the frame of one of the pictures of Velasquez. Her beauty was striking. Fanfar grasped it, Caillette studied it. [Pg 105]

"Pray tell me," said the young lady to Gudel, "if you have no seats where I can avoid contact with the crowd? I am ready to pay any sum you ask."

"Oh! we have but one price, ten sous."

The governess uttered a small gasp, and the young girl shrugged her shoulders impatiently.

She drew out a handful of gold pieces from her bag.

"Take these," she said, "and do the best you can for me."

Gudel was puzzled and troubled.

"Fanfar!" he called, "have you time to construct a sort of private box for these ladies?"

Fanfar advanced, and when Caillette saw the admiring gaze he riveted on the stranger, she clenched her little hands.

"I don't think I quite understand," he said.

Irène replied:

"It is a very simple matter. I desire to be present at your exhibition, and I do not care to mingle with the vulgar herd."

Fanfar listened to these words very coldly, and then said:

"What you ask is impossible."

"I don't know about that," interposed Gudel, quickly. "I think a private box could be quickly made with a few boards—"

"Only I refuse to make it," said Fanfar. [Pg 106]

"You refuse?"

Irène started. Caillette smiled and blushed.

"And may I know why?" asked the stranger, with a disdainful smile. "Why does——" She hesitated for the name. Fanfar supplied it. "Why does Monsieur Fanfar refuse to gain a few louis for his master?"

"Not his master," said Gudel, hastily.

"Let me speak," interrupted Fanfar. "I will explain to the lady. Our public are bourgeois and common folk who support us, and bring us success. Their hands are large, but they applaud well. They are good people, and I do not wish to humiliate them. To do what you ask would wound them deeply."

Irène listened, with a frown.

Gudel retreated to the background where he indulged in a silent laugh.

Fanfar waited, calmly.

"This is a lesson you read me?" she said, at last.

"No, Mademoiselle, it is only advice. Make yourself beloved by these peasants. I have much to do, and pray that you will excuse me."

He bowed, and was about to retire.

"Monsieur Fanfar," said Irène, "you are right, and I thank you."

Then, turning to Gudel, she asked him with bewitching grace to retain two seats for her.

"Certainly, and the best. Will we not, Fanfar?"

The young man met Irène's eyes, and started.

"Will you give these few louis to the poor?" added Irène, "and I will accept two seats gratefully."

CHAPTER XV.

[Pg 107]

MASTER AND SERVANT.

When the young girl, followed by Madame Ursula, who was choking with rage, emerged upon the Square, all the peasants lifted their hats.

"There is the carriage!" said Ursula.

A lacquey in livery approached, leading a fine English horse. Irène arrested the animal.

"Do you intend to mount again? I thought," said Madame Ursula, "that you had promised to return in the carriage with me."

But Irène was already in her saddle.

The governess continued:

"The Comtesse expected—"

"Never mind that! And now, John, to the Château at once," said Irène, galloping off.

"Who is that lady?" asked Bobichel.

"Mademoiselle de Salves," a peasant replied, "the wealthiest heiress in the neighborhood."

"A handsome girl!" muttered Bobichel.

"She is too haughty to those beneath her," said some one.

"She is made of Paris stuff," said another. "She's not calculated for our village."

A new incident now occurred.

[Pg 108]

A post-chaise, drawn by vigorous horses, now dashed into the Square, and drew up before Master Schwann's inn.

Before the worthy innkeeper could come down the steps to welcome the new arrival, another person had dashed past him. This was the man, who, sheltered by his newspaper, had so closely watched all that was going on around him.

"Monsieur le Marquis," he said, presenting his arm to the gentleman in the post-chaise, "I see my letter reached you in time."

The new arrival is not unknown to our readers; it was he who, earlier in our tale, was known as the Vicomte de Talizac, and who to-day, by the death of the old Marquis, had been invested with all the titles of the Fongereues family.

Ten years had elapsed since we last saw him, and though hardly forty, he seems an old man—his

figure is bent and his stern face covered with wrinkles.

The man who was waiting for him had long been his accomplice; together they had concocted the criminal plan to which Simon fell a victim, and as a reward for his villainy, Cyprien had been made intendant instead of valet.

The Marquis entered the inn and looked around suspiciously, but saw no one but Schwann, who stood hat in hand; he did not advance, as the frown of the Marquis was far from encouraging.

"Serve dinner in my room," said Cyprien, and he showed the silent Marquis up-stairs.

When Schwann had laid the table and placed the dinner upon it, Cyprien took him aside.

"You need not come up again, unless I call you." [Pg 109]

"Very good, sir."

"And this is not all; please do not gossip about my master. If any one questions you, make no reply."

"What could I say?" asked Schwann. "I know nothing!"

"You might indulge in suppositions, which I advise you to avoid."

"Zounds!" muttered Schwann, as he descended the stairs, "all these airs displease me! I very much prefer my rope dancers to this great lord!"

Cyprien looked up and down the corridor, and listened at the doors of the next rooms, to ascertain that they were empty.

The Marquis, in the meantime, had thrown his hat and cloak on the bed.

"We are alone?" he asked impatiently.

"Yes, sir."

"Speak, then. Your letter told me that you have found traces of that miserable Labarre."

"Yes, sir, and I trust you will be satisfied with what I have done."

"Did you see the man?"

"No, sir. Your instructions were to avoid all contact with him. I know, however, where to lay my hands on him."

"You have done well. I wish my presence here to be like a thunderclap to him. And then I expect that in his terror he will make the avowal which will be my salvation."

"May I ask, sir, if your affairs have in any way ameliorated since my departure?" [Pg 110]

"Ameliorated!" Fongereues repeated with an angry gesture, "no, quite the contrary. Ruin is approaching with rapid strides, and in a few months I shall be lost!"

"But the favor of His Majesty—"

Fongereues laughed bitterly. "His Majesty cares little for me. Ever since I was unfortunate enough to displease his fair friend, the tide has turned."

"But can nothing be done?"

Fongereues shrugged his shoulders. "What is the use? I am sick of manœuvering and intriguing. I have told the king that his faithful emigrés should be his best counsellors, and that it was his duty as well as his interest to rely on me. But it was of no use.

"They think they have paid us," the Marquis continued, "because they have thrown us, as food to the dogs, a few louis of indemnity. As if France were not ours, as if we had no rights over these people who have assassinated their king and kissed the feet of an adventurer; but they are afraid, and talk of patience. I told His Majesty, one day, of my embarrassments. 'Sir,' he said to me, 'a Fongereues never begs!' and the next day I received four thousand louis. Confound the nonsense!"

Cyprien could not refrain from a smile. Four thousand louis did not seem to him a trifle, nor nonsense.

"But His Majesty is interested in your son."

"My son! These Puritans have much to say about my son. He gambles and he does other shocking things. One would think, to hear them talk, that they were themselves paragons of virtue. As soon as the Vicomte marries and settles down—by the way, what about Mademoiselle de Salves?" [Pg 111]

"I only arrived last night, and have simply learned that their château is not more than two leagues away, and that they must soon leave it to return to Paris."

"Four millions!" cried the Marquis. "And to think that this fortune may escape us!"

"The marriage is not yet decided, then?"

"Not precisely; and the smallest incident may ruin my plans. This Labarre must be made to speak, even if violence be necessary."

"He is an incorruptible old fellow, and these honest people are sometimes very hard to deal with."

The Marquis looked at him intently for a minute or two in silence, and then, with an indescribable smile, said:

"I think we can manage him, nevertheless!"

Cyprien smiled.

"You know, beside," continued the Marquis, "that I am not ungrateful. Let this Labarre surrender this secret and my son become the husband of young Irène de Salves, and my position becomes stronger than ever. And you may be certain that I shall not forget you!"

"I hope, sir, that it may be soon in my power to render you a most important service."

"What may that be?"

"You are aware, I presume, that I take great interest in the preservation of the present *régime*?"

"I was not aware of that," the Marquis said, with a slight elevation of the eyebrows. It seemed to [Pg 112]
him that the opinions of Monsieur Cyprien were of little importance, and that the government was not likely to benefit by his sympathy and protection.

"The fact is, sir, your future and that of the monarchy are too nearly allied for me to separate the two questions."

"You are right."

"And, in addition, I hold relations with persons who condescend to recognize in me a certain ability in the management of confidential matters."

"Pshaw! Who are these persons!"

"I will give you the name of one, sir—Monsieur Franchet."

And Cyprien stole a glance at his master, who started in spite of all his self-control. This Franchet was at the climax of his celebrity, and exercised the mysterious function of Director-General of the Police. He owed his elevation solely to the Society of Jesus. This occult power, whose ramifications extended all over France, was mysterious and tremendous in its workings. No one could expect any favor if he did not first render this society most abject homage.

Cyprien now became invested with immense importance in the eyes of the Marquis. He was now not only an accomplice, but a protector, who might become a formidable adversary.

A brief silence followed this revelation, and then the Marquis bade Cyprien go on with what he was saying.

"I was saying, sir, that I have employed all the resources of my weak mind in the defence of the sacred interests of the society, and that I had the power to replace you in the position which your [Pg 113]
imprudence has forfeited!"

The lacquey was becoming insolent.

"And how will you perform this miracle?" asked the Marquis.

"By including you in the great plan which will prove our zeal for the monarchy."

The Marquis frowned. He was not pleased at the association!

Cyprien dropped his voice.

"A vast conspiracy," he said, "is forming to overthrow the king!"

The Marquis started.

"Not so—the monarchy is strong."

"There is no chariot so strong that it is not at the mercy of a grain of sand. I assure you, sir, that the danger is real. A Republican party——"

Fongereues shrugged his shoulders.

"A *Republican* party," repeated Cyprien, emphasizing the word, "is covering the country with its net. In a few months—in a few weeks, perhaps—a movement will burst out simultaneously all over France, and it may come to pass that the throne will fall quicker than we think. Royalty is unpopular in these days. Strength is the only sustaining force. And is the throne strong enough to resist a general uprising? I doubt it. And I, poor servant that I am, can arrest this movement, even now! I can betray the chiefs of this association. But I am an insignificant person. No matter how great the services may be that I render, a bone or two will be thrown to me to gnaw, and [Pg 114]
that will be deemed sufficient. But let the Marquis de Fongereues, peer of France, denounce at the Tuileries the formidable association that threatens the throne and the altar—let him present himself in the cabinet of the king with his hands full of proofs—let him show the documents and

the lists of the conspirators, and the Marquis de Fongereues will become master of France. He may exact any recompense he pleases for saving the throne and the altar!"

The Marquis rose hastily. His eyes flashed.

"And you say that this formidable secret is yours Cyprien?"

"I hold the threads of the plot in my hand!"

"And yet, you are ready to abandon the benefits which would assuredly be yours should you decide to make the revelation?"

"I am, first of all, your servant, sir!"

"Throw your cards on the table, Cyprien! What do you want me to do in exchange for this great service?"

"I impose no condition. I have faith in the generosity of my master."

"And you are right!" the Marquis replied. "If I succeed, I will make you rich, and place you so high on the social ladder that the greatest names in France will bow before you!"

"Thank you, honored sir. When the hour arrives, I will remind you of your words. But now we must think of Pierre Labarre. Time presses!"

"I am ready. Where are we to find him?"

"Two leagues from here, near the little town of Vagney." [Pg 115]

"It is now three o'clock," said the Marquis. "We can surely return here to-night. You had best order the horses at once."

When the Marquis was alone, he bowed his face in his hands.

"If I could believe him!" he murmured. "But I am afraid!"

A few brief words of explanation are here necessary. The Fongereues family re-entered France with the allied armies, and immediately obtained the favor of the king. The old Marquis was elevated to the peerage, and Magdalena felt that her ambitious projects were on the eve of fulfilment. The Vicomte de Talizac easily obtained proof of the death of Simon Fougère; his wife and children had disappeared, and probably perished. The Vicomte, therefore, did not hesitate to claim as sole heir the estate on the death of the Marquis in 1817. But this estate, though considerable, was far less important than he and Magdalena had hoped. The Vicomte was deeply in debt, and his creditors became impatient. If he and the Vicomtesse had not been madly extravagant, all the more so from the restrictions they had so long endured, their revenues would have been more than sufficient. But these two persons, who had not recoiled from a terrible crime to ensure their undisputed possession of the Fongereues fortune, were now carried away by a wild thirst for excitement and gayety. The hôtel they occupied became the scene of [Pg 116] perpetual fêtes and the rendezvous of the aristocracy.

Magdalena's son, who now bore the title of the Vicomte de Talizac, brought up amid this mad prodigality, developed early the faults of his nature, which were increased by the foolish indulgence of his mother.

His father read his character at a glance, and cautioned Magdalena, who at the first syllable he uttered silenced him in the most peremptory manner.

"Do you think," said Magdalena, "that my son is to conduct himself as if he were to earn his bread by the sweat of his brow? I am happy to say that he knows nothing of your petty economies."

As her husband protested, she lowered her voice and looked him full in the face. "Do you think," she said, "that it was to make a beggar of my son, that I told you to kill the other?"

The two guilty creatures gazed at each other; the Marquis was the first to turn his uneasy eyes away. From this moment the struggle began, and the Marquis led a most terrible life.

Before long the alliance with Mademoiselle de Salves was projected. This marriage was to the Marquis de Fongereues the last plank between himself and destruction. Unless this plan was carried to a happy termination, he was ruined. Already there were rumors floating about the court of spots on the hitherto untarnished shield of the Marquis de Fongereues. People were beginning to desert the hôtel as rats fly from a falling house. The haughty manners of the Marquis and of Magdalena had conciliated no one. The insolence of Talizac had become [Pg 117] proverbial; he had fought several duels from which he had come off unharmed. The approaching fall of this detested family was hailed with delight. It is therefore easy to understand why the Marquis was so eager to find Pierre Labarre.

He was interrupted in his reflections by Cyprien, who now returned with the innkeeper.

"I am sorry, sir," said the latter, "to be the bearer of annoyances. You know that we at this season are liable to inundations, and we have just learned that the torrent that crosses the road at Vagney is rising rapidly, and makes it dangerous to travel."

"But is there no other road?"

"None which is not equally flooded. Every where the danger would be just as great."

"I am willing to pay any price to get on this afternoon."

The innkeeper did everything to place obstacles in the path of the Marquis, who, however, insisted on going.

"Well!" said Schwann, to himself, "I shall not be easy until they return, for I fear that the inundation has only just begun."

CHAPTER XVI.

[Pg 118]

WALK IN, GENTLEMEN!

While Gudel and Fanfar were making arrangements for the representation of the evening, while Fongereues and Cyprien exchanged their honest confidences, Robeccal went forth to meet La Roulante.

It was this amiable giantess whom Gudel had been foolish enough to marry, although what charms he had discovered in this mountain of flesh it would be difficult to say. But he was alone; he was very unhappy over his wife's death, and La Roulante had consoled him. When once in possession of Gudel's name, this woman frankly threw aside the mask and displayed her real qualities and disposition. She was covetous and intemperate, presenting, in fact, an extraordinary specimen of human depravity. She hated Caillette for her youth and her beauty; she hated Fanfar for his goodness, and hated Gudel for his patience and for his good spirits.

Robeccal joined the troop. Gudel had found him dying of hunger, and had rescued him. Soon he and Roulante were on excellent terms; both were thoroughly vicious. This liaison was furthermore cemented by a common hatred, and now they wanted to kill Gudel and Fanfar. They wished to keep Caillette that they might torture her as children torture young birds.

[Pg 119]

These two excellent persons, Robeccal and the giantess, sat down by the roadside and talked over their plans.

At this time the peasants had long been deprived of all amusements, and the circus company had been welcomed with enthusiasm which would certainly result in heavy receipts. If Iron Jaws should disappear by accident, or in any other way, La Roulante would remain mistress of this money, of the chariot and the horses—a snug little fortune, if properly managed.

The giantess only wished to get rid of Gudel, whom she now hated, and marry this man whom she loved. It was clear that Gudel's suspicions were excited—in fact, his wife and Robeccal were doing their best to arouse him.

If Gudel were dead, La Roulante would look out for his daughter, of course, and the giantess saw opening before her a vista of delightful cruelties she could practice on the girl. But Fanfar would certainly be in the way, for he never would allow the child to suffer, and therefore it was plain that Fanfar should disappear with Gudel.

Such steps as these required serious consideration, and it was growing dark when these two conspirators returned to Saint Amé.

In the meantime, two of our friends were taking a walk. Though the justice of this phraseology may be questioned, my readers shall judge. Bobichel placed his hat carefully on the side of the road, and then gravely began the charming exercise which is called the "frog." Bobichel did this with the most remarkable ease, and his wittiest sallies were uttered in this attitude.

[Pg 120]

Caillette laughed, and at once began to dance, standing on the points of her toes and whirling round and round.

But they were not so absorbed in their practice that they refrained from talking.

"You are sad," said Bobichel.

"No," answered Caillette, suddenly throwing out her left leg.

Bobichel picked up a sou with his teeth.

"Has anybody been worrying you, dear?" he asked, as soon as he had disposed of the coin.

"Nobody," answered the girl, dancing on. "If I am sad, it is about nothing, at all events. Everybody has dark hours—"

"Indeed they have. And Caillette, listen. There are, indeed, people about us,"—and the frog drew up his legs and jumped at least a foot—"this Robeccal will play us a trick some fine day, and your father's wife—well! we will see, we will see. But here they come, and I am sure they have been plotting together."

"Come, Bobichel, do not let us wait until they overtake us," cried Caillette.

"Do you think I shall run away? Now you go on, little girl; after a while I will overtake you. I want to have a little talk with this villain!"

"Don't get into any trouble, papa would be offended." [Pg 121]

"Good-bye, then."

Robeccal saw the girl run off toward the village, and a wicked smile gleamed over his face.

"Good," he said, between his teeth, "we shall make you pay for that!"

When he reached Bobichel, who was still in his frog attitude, the clown gave a flourish with his leg and his foot, quite by accident of course, knocking off Robeccal's hat.

"Look out!" cried Robeccal.

"Oh! a thousand pardons," answered Bobichel, "I did not see you!"

"Didn't you! Well! little Caillette saw me, and ran away, as if the devil were coming."

"A girl's nonsense. Never mind her. I am glad she has gone. The truth is, these people are putting on airs, and I don't like it."

Robeccal was no fool, and these words inspired him with suspicion. "Does he want me to talk?" he said to himself. And he was right in this idea.

"And as for Fanfar!" continued Bobichel, now standing on his feet.

"And what of him? You are as intimate as possible with Fanfar?"

Bobichel, with a sagacious nod, replied, "Of course I am, he is the master's favorite, but all the same I am not pleased with him. He eats our bread, and what does he do?"

"He adds to the success of the entertainments."

"I think, Robeccal, you are trying to provoke me. Because he is strong, because he has learned a [Pg 122] lot of things, and can play on a lot of instruments, does not prove that he is worth more than either of us."

"Oh! if I only knew whether you were to be trusted!" cried Robeccal.

Bobichel in vain tried to preserve utter impassibility. Robeccal surprised a look in his eyes, which he translated at once as meaning, "He is going to speak. I have him."

"I am to be trusted," said Bobichel, "particularly if there is a dirty piece of business on hand!"

This was enough. Robeccal was warned.

"Well then," he said, in a whisper, "I am about to leave Gudel."

"No, not really!"

"And if you desire, we can start together. I know of a place where we shall be received with open arms. What will Iron Jaws do without us! I laugh when we think of it!"

"It is a good idea," said Bobichel. "When shall we go?"

"One of these nights, when it is not cold."

"Have we far to go?"

"What! Already afraid of fatigue? We will make that all easy, but I must go now!"

"Where are you going?"

"Come now, Bobichel, none of that! I don't like questions, and I don't choose to be watched!"

And Robeccal walked off.

The clown looked after him, and then began to pound his own head until tears came to his eyes. [Pg 123]

"Idiot! Fool!" he muttered. "Will you never learn any sense. Why did you let that rascal see your game? You must warn Fanfar without delay."

And as he saw some boys looking at him, they thinking that his despair heightened his comic appearance, he began to run toward the inn.

Gudel met him at the door.

"Well, Bob, what is the matter? You look disturbed. Come in, and take a glass of wine. And Schwann, join us."

An hour later, the Square of Saint Amé was bright with lights, to the great joy of the peasants, who uttered many ohs! and ahs! as they entered the shed. Bobichel stood at the door.

"Come in, gentlemen and ladies, come in!" And then he continued his shouts. "Wonderful Spectacle. The amazing Iron Jaws! The Wild Woman! And Fanfar! Come in, gentlemen, come in!"

Caillette, behind the curtain, was looking through a hole, with beating heart, murmuring, "She is not coming."

And Robeccal, passing La Roulante, whispered in her ear, "It is done!"

A horse, covered with sweat, was pulled up before the door.

"You have not forgotten me?" said Irène de Salves to Bobichel.

Gudel came forward.

"We were waiting for you before we began. But you are alone!" [Pg 124]

"My governess will be here in a moment."

"She has come!" said Caillette, turning pale and looking up at Fanfar, who was arranging an iron chain, and did not seem to have heard.

And the clown continued to say;

"Come in, gentlemen, come in!"

And the peasants, elbowing each other, said, "Oh! we must see this; it won't kill us for once."

CHAPTER XVII. [Pg 125]

ROBECCAL'S IDEA.

The frequenters of the theatres and circuses of the present day would consider this establishment of Gudel's very modest, with its single gallery, a little red serge, and its shabby velvet curtain. There was an orchestra, but what an orchestra! All the actors when not occupied on the stage assisted in it. Gudel at intervals played the trombone. The gallery was crowded; so crowded that, from time to time, there were ominous crackings, but the people in their excitement did not notice this.

But a great silence fell on the spectators, when Irène de Salves entered. Erect and haughty, she moved through the crowd, with the slightest possible inclination of the head in apology for disturbing them.

A word here in regard to this young lady. She was looked upon as a very eccentric person. Her father had followed Bonaparte's fortunes, and had fallen in Russia, leaving his widow sole guardian of this girl, then only four years of age.

The Countess, broken-hearted at her loss, shut herself up in the château, and devoted herself to her daughter. Irène seemed to have inherited her father's adventurous spirit, and her mother encouraged rather than restrained it, so great was her joy in the resemblance. She had his [Pg 126] exuberant vitality, his contempt for danger, and his pride of race. Irène, possessing an enormous fortune and accustomed to the indulgence of every caprice, soon began to look upon herself as of superior clay to these peasants who doffed their hats to her as she passed. She believed in the great power of money, and the Countess encouraged this belief. But illness came, and the Countess was confined to her sofa by paralysis. She lived now only for her daughter, and it was the one bright spot in her day when Irène rushed in, bringing with her fresh air and the sweet scents of the woods.

The child had become a woman, a woman full of contradictions. She was by turns charitable or pitiless, benevolent or disdainful. Sometimes, gay as a child, she rode all over the country—other days she hid herself in the woods or climbed to some inaccessible height, and there, with ardent eyes, indifferent to the wind that tossed her dark hair, she dreamed those dreams in which girls delight. She had moods of motiveless irritation, and of unreasonable indulgence. One day a village boy threw a stone at her horse. She pursued him with uplifted whip. Suddenly he turned, and folding his arms, defied her. She laughed aloud, and tossed him her purse.

Another time she was told that a fire had destroyed a village. She hardly seemed to hear. It was winter. In the middle of the night she arose and saddled her horse with her own hands, and rode off to the sufferers, working over them for hours.

She was not liked—none could tell why. Suddenly she learned, after a visit made by the Notary to [Pg 127] her sick mother, that she was to marry the Vicomte Talizac. She cared nothing about it one way or the other. If her mother's heart was set upon it she was perfectly willing. The only thing she disliked in the plan was that she must leave her beautiful mountains. She had never been attracted by Paris, the streets and the people frightened her, but she was consoled by the thought that it would be a new world to conquer. On her return to the château, the daring words uttered by Fanfar dwelt in her memory: "Make yourself beloved." She had entered the booth where the exhibition had taken place, in a moment of idle curiosity, and was surprised at the impression made on her by the place and the people. She was greatly irritated withal. This mountebank, this rope-dancer, had taken a great deal upon himself, certainly. Why had she not answered him as he deserved? What did he mean—"Make yourself beloved"—as if she were not

already beloved! She remembered the eyes which the peasants riveted on her. Could it be that they did not love her? And now she was seated on a wooden bench, Madame Ursula, who had at last arrived, on one side, and on the other a pretty but dirty child, who was playing with the fringe of her dress.

Meanwhile the entertainment was going on. Gudel gave more than he promised in his handbill. Before the curtain went up, he called together the members of his troupe, and encouraged them to do their best. La Roulante went up to him, and to his great amazement said a few conciliatory words. As Gudel was by no means ill-natured, he shook hands with her. The giantess turned her face toward Robeccal and winked at him. [Pg 128]

Poor Gudel was very happy in this reconciliation. After all, things would go smoothly if he once got rid of Robeccal. Then Caillette kissed him, in her lace and spangles. Light as a bird, she skipped up to him and whispered in his ear:

"Am I not lovely to-night, papa?"

"Adorable!" he answered. He did not know that his darling was comparing herself with Irène.

Fanfar had his hands full, and seemed so little interested in the audience that Caillette was enchanted, for in her heart lurked a fear that some one would love her Fanfar. But after all it did not matter, for he cared little for all the beauties in the world. He handed La Roulante the stones which were to form her apparent nutriment. He whispered a new witticism to Bobichel, and gave Robeccal some advice as to the manner in which he should hold his sword. Then he took a position where he could see without being seen.

"Now, Fanfar," said Iron Jaws, "it is your turn! Look out for Caillette!"

The girl was to execute a new step on the tight-rope, and when she appeared, led forward by Fanfar, and made the three deep "reverences," there was a hum of admiration. She was charming—her delicacy was fairy-like. She lightly placed her foot on Fanfar's hand and sprang upon the rope. Standing there, she looked at Irène, who was leaning back with an air of indifference.

Fanfar now took up a violin, and raising the instrument to his shoulder, he began. He played at first very slowly. Caillette, with her arms folded—she had long before renounced the balancing pole—advanced up the rope. She knelt, and remained absolutely motionless. Then there came a peremptory summons from the violin. She arose and extended her arms above her head, and began to dance. Fanfar was an artist, his playing was wonderful. The music became faster and faster, and Caillette's little feet seemed hardly to touch the rope, they twinkled like stars, while Fanfar's bow looked only like a silver thread. He dropped the violin, and Caillette leaped into his arms. As she touched the ground, she threw at Irène a glance of laughing triumph. [Pg 129]

Then came Robeccal's turn. He was a horrible object when he swallowed the swords. It was not admiration, it was horror, that he inspired. He seemed to enjoy this, and had imitated drops of blood on the sabres that he put down his throat. A few delicate persons shouted "Enough!" and Gudel appeared, not as Gudel, be it understood, but as Iron Jaws, the athlete. His enormous shoulders, his bull neck, contrasted with Fanfar's delicate form. Gudel tossed heavy weights and bent iron bars, and did all sorts of wonderful things. No one noticed the agility with which Fanfar, in his subordinate *rôle*, passed these weights to his employer. And now, the principal feat was to be performed. Fanfar rolled a barrel upon the stage, on which already stood a curious apparatus of bars and chains. Over this was a platform. The barrel was placed under this platform, and filled with stones. A rim was fitted to this barrel, and it was hoisted a little distance from the ground by a chain. It was this enormous weight that Gudel was to lift with his teeth. [Pg 130]

Iron Jaws placed himself on this platform.

Fanfar blew a blast from his trumpet, and Iron Jaws grasped the chain in his teeth. The barrel moved up and up. The crowd was absolutely silent, this excess of strength inspired them with terror. Suddenly, a strange sound was heard.

What was it? No one knew. No one had time to see. Gudel lay insensible on the ground. And Fanfar had caught this barrel in his iron arms. Had it absolutely fallen, for the chain had broken, nothing could have saved Gudel. As it was, the shock deprived him of consciousness. Fanfar himself could hardly stand.

Caillette and Bobichel ran to Gudel. La Roulante knelt at his side, and uttered shriek after shriek. Robeccal did not appear.

The peasants gathered around the injured man. They thought him dead.

Fanfar drew Caillette away, and then leaned over his friend.

La Roulante pushed him aside.

"Don't interfere," she said, "he is my husband."

Fanfar looked her in the face, and continued his examination. He opened Gudel's vest and shirt, and laid his hand on his heart. There was a moment of silence.

"He is living," said Fanfar. [Pg 131]

Caillette uttered a little cry, and would have fallen had not a hand caught her. She turned, and

saw it was Irène.

"Will you give these salts to Monsieur Fanfar?" said Irène.

"Ah! thanks!" cried Fanfar, without waiting for Caillette to give it to him, and took it, as he spoke, from the young lady's hand.

"Pshaw! I have something better than that," said Bobichel, and dashing to the inn he returned with a bottle of brandy.

"Two drops of this," he said, "will do more than all the salts in the world."

Fanfar administered a few drops to Gudel, who presently uttered a long sigh.

"Living!" cried Fanfar.

"Heaven be praised!" shouted Bobichel. Then, turning swiftly toward La Roulante, he added,

"Made a mistake, eh?"

The giantess started.

"Ah! he is better," said a treacherous voice. It was Robeccal who spoke. He feared lest his absence would look badly, and he had come back.

"A physician is wanted," exclaimed Fanfar, turning to Schwann, who was weeping like a child.

"There is none in the village, none nearer than Vagney, a league away."

"Then I will go for him."

"But the inundation. Fanfar, you can't do it."

"I must try it, at all events."

"Monsieur Fanfar," said Irène, "I beg you to take my horse. She is a splendid animal, and goes like the wind!" [Pg 132]

Madame Ursula raised her hands to heaven. "A splendid animal indeed!" she thought, "it cost two thousand francs."

Caillette wrung her hands in despair.

"I accept your kindness," answered Fanfar, simply. "You are very good, Mademoiselle, and I thank you."

"I remembered your words of advice," she replied.

Fanfar looked at her a moment. Then, passing his hand over his brow, he seemed to try to shake himself together.

"Let him be carried to the inn, and the doctor shall see him as quickly as possible," he said.

The peasants slowly raised the injured man, and as they crossed the Square, they beheld a singular scene. Bobichel had Robeccal by the throat, and pressed his knees on his adversary's chest.

"Ah! Bobichel," cried Schwann, "is this the time to fight?"

Bobichel rose, and seemed to hesitate, then he flung the scoundrel from him, with contempt and loathing.

Fanfar leaped upon Irène's horse, and dashed off in the direction of Vagney.

"My father, and he," murmured Caillette, "all that I love and have in the world."

And with her handkerchief to her eyes, she followed the sad procession.

CHAPTER XVIII. [Pg 133]

PIERRE LABARRE.

We have left the Marquis and his most excellent servant Cyprien going toward Vagney, but it was not without anxiety that they ventured on this expedition. Both these men valued their lives highly, and felt no fears of ordinary foes, but with an inundation no cunning would prevail. Cyprien was extremely uncomfortable, and held his breath to listen to the rush of waters. He heard it soon enough, and saw it too. The water looked brown and had a silver foam upon it, but high as was the torrent it was still confined to its rocky bed. The intendant's courage returned. The Marquis stopped short to look at the cataract in admiration, but Cyprien urged him on, for it was growing late.

Suddenly, Cyprien laid his hand on the arm of the Marquis, who started. Criminals are subject to

these involuntary starts.

"We are here," said Cyprien.

"Ah!" answered the Marquis.

"Do you see on that side hill a tiny house, which seems to hold its equilibrium almost by a miracle? It is there that we shall find Pierre Labarre."

"But he may not be at home?"

"He never goes out, this hermit." And Cyprien laughed. [Pg 134]

The house that Cyprien pointed out was much more like a hut—it consisted of one story. Before the door were two or three worn stone steps. The door was of oak, and looked strong. On each side of the door was a window, which had heavy shutters that could be bolted at night. These were now open.

There was not a sound nor a movement about the house, at the back of which was an enclosure of moderate dimensions most carefully cultivated.

The Marquis hastened on, impatiently. He struck two or three blows with his cane on the door.

A voice within called out, "Who is there?"

The two accomplices exchanged a glance. Their expedition promised well.

"The Marquis de Fongereues."

Instantly the door opened, and an old man appeared. It was the man whom we saw in the Black Forest in the beginning of our narrative, the man who then escaped from the assassin, and who told the old Marquis of Simon's retreat. But the ten years that had since elapsed had left their traces on his brow; and perhaps it was not years alone that had lined his brow, faded his eyes, and bent his form. His face was sad—a shadow rested upon it.

"Enter, sir," said the former servant of the Fongereues family.

The room into which the Marquis stepped was simply furnished—one corner was curtained off.

"Please be seated, Monsieur le Vicomte," said Pierre. [Pg 135]

"I am forced to believe, Pierre," answered the Marquis, "that in the nine years that have elapsed since my father's death you have forgotten your good breeding. Will you kindly remember that my title is the Marquis de Fongereues?"

Pierre held himself more erect. His face was like one of Rembrandt's pictures, where each wrinkle hides a thought.

"I know but one Marquis de Fongereues!" he said, slowly.

"And who may that be?" asked the Marquis, bringing his closed hand down upon the table.

"The son of the man who was murdered in 1815, in the village of Leigoutte!" answered Labarre, with perfect calmness.

"Murdered! That man fell when fighting against the true masters of France!"

"Your brother, Monsieur le Vicomte, was killed by those who had sworn his death, and who struck him down, when, in defending his country, he was doing his duty!"

The Marquis could hardly contain himself, his rage was so great. Cyprien feared an explosion. He had no objection to the man being killed, but not until he had been made to speak.

"Let that pass!" said the Marquis, at last. "It is needless to awaken these memories." Then lowering his voice he added, with an affectation of pity:

"It was a terrible affair, Pierre, and I understand that an old and faithful servant must have felt it deeply—the father, mother, and two children to die at the same time!" [Pg 136]

"You are mistaken," answered Labarre. "The father was shot, the mother perished in the flames, but the two children escaped."

"It is strange that you can persist in this illusion, Pierre. Simon's two children are dead."

The old man answered.

"No—they are living!"

The Marquis forgot himself:

"Ah! you know, then, where they are?"

"No; but your exclamation proves that you yourself do not believe in their death."

Fongereues bit his lips.

Cyprien shrugged his shoulders. He felt a little contempt for his master and doubted. The Society

of Jesus would never trust him with a mission of diplomacy. He thought it was time for him to interfere.

"It seems to me, sir," he said to the Marquis, "that absolute certainty in this matter is impossible. I have made the most careful search without the smallest success, though I had no difficulty in finding this house."

"Ah! it was you, then, who discovered my retreat?" And Labarre shook his head.

"That is enough!" interposed the Marquis. "Labarre, all this is useless. Give me your attention. I am about to speak of the honor of the Fongereues family."

Labarre's pale face was lighted by a smile as he repeated the words: "The honor of the Fongereues family!" [Pg 137]

The Marquis shrugged his shoulders impatiently.

"Cyprien," he said to his intendant, "you can leave us!"

Cyprien was astonished. This was no part of the programme, but he remembered that he could return, and also that he could listen.

As soon as the Marquis was alone with Labarre, an entire transformation took place in his manner. He seemed to throw aside a mask. He seized Labarre's hand, who shrank from the contact.

"Listen to me, Pierre, and for God's sake throw aside this distrust, which is an insult to me. You were the friend and the confidant of my father, you knew his secret thoughts, and you know that he did not love me. I am ready to admit that my father had reason to be offended at many of my acts and many of my words. I was young, and very reckless. You see, Pierre, that I am speaking to you with entire frankness. God forgives the penitent. Are you harsher than He?" He felt the hand he held tremble in his grasp. "Guilty though I be," continued the Marquis, "great as have been my faults and my errors, I bear to-day the name of my father, and that name, Pierre Labarre, will be forever dishonored unless you come to my assistance!"

"I do not understand," said Labarre. "I am an old man and poor. What can I do for you?"

"I will tell you. I am ruined, my influence is lost. This is not all—I am crushed under the weight of engagements so heavy that were I to give up every sou I have in the world, and reduce my wife and my son to beggary, I could not release myself and save my honor!" [Pg 138]

Labarre did not speak.

"I have tried every plan," continued the Marquis, "and—hear me, Pierre—I have gone too far. What would you say, Pierre, if the name of your old master should be borne by a forger?"

Pierre did not evince the smallest emotion.

"Well?" said the Marquis, breathlessly.

"What do you want of me?" asked Pierre.

"I will tell you. I know that my father, in order to reserve for Simon a portion of his fortune, and fearing, with the suspicion of an old man, that in some way he would lose it, made a will, which he gave to you——"

"Go on, sir."

"This will contains a secret—it tells where this money reserved for Simon is concealed. This will gives direction that only Simon, or his heirs, shall receive this will. Simon is dead, his children have disappeared. Your duty is plain. This money now amounts to two millions, at least. What was always my father's first wish? Was it not to preserve his family name without a spot or blemish? Give me this will. Without this money I am dishonored!"

The old man released his hand and crossed the room. He stopped before the dark curtain, and then, with a solemn gesture, lifted it. The Marquis leaned forward. This was what he saw: A sheet of iron was fastened to the wall. It was twisted and out of shape. Strange lines were upon it, as if flames had licked it. [Pg 139]

"Do you know what that is?" said Labarre.

"No," answered the Marquis, surprised and uneasy.

"I will tell you. Among the Vosges mountains there lived a man, honest and kindly. He was loved by all. He kept an inn, and taught the children of the peasants, to whom he sold wine. Yes, and this man bore one of the noblest names in France. One day cowards killed him, and at the same time other scoundrels and cowards, in obedience to fratricidal commands, attacked the house where he had so long struggled against poverty; other villains again attacked his wife and tried to kill his children. This, Monsieur de Talizac, is the sign that hung on the front of the inn kept by Simon, Marquis de Fongereues, and I defy you, his brother and his murderer, to repeat to me what you have already said in the face of this witness. Pray and entreat, if you will, if you dare—I, the lacquey of your father, reply: Cain! you are stained with the blood of your brother—begone!"

The Marquis uttered a yell of rage.

"Your memory is short, Monsieur de Talizac, and I will remind you that in 1817, one night the good man whom you killed with your infamy lay dying. You had the cruel courage to enter his room, and knelt at the side of his bed——"

"Be silent!" cried the Marquis.

"My master cursed you, cursed you as a murderer! It was a horrible scene—I saw and heard it all. You implored this dying man to have mercy on you and tell you where this money was placed. But [Pg 140] my master did not yield, nor will I!"

Deadly pale, and with compressed lips, the Marquis murmured:

"Then you refuse?"

"I refuse—the son of Simon de Fongereues is living!"

"And if he be dead—am I not the sole heir?"

"I do not know."

"You have no right to keep back a will. Once more I ask—will you speak?"

"I will not!"

"Very well. The will is here; we will take it!"

The Marquis whistled, and Cyprien appeared.

"We must help ourselves," said the Marquis.

"All right!" answered the lacquey.

Strangely enough, this man who looked so infirm now bounded back and placed himself behind a table. He drew from his pockets two pistols, which he pointed toward his adversaries.

"Monsieur de Talizac," he said, "you tried to kill me once before, in the Black Forest—take care!"

Fongereues had no arms. Cyprien had been wiser. He, too, drew a pistol, but before he could touch the trigger, Pierre had opened the door behind him.

"For a valet," he said, "a dog is all that is required."

A dog of the Vosges, as large as a wolf, with bloodshot eyes and bristling hair, flew at Cyprien's throat, who fell on the floor.

"Help! Help!" cried the scoundrel.

The Marquis, livid with terror, had succeeded in opening the door. [Pg 141]

"Here, Cliepé! Here!" shouted Pierre.

The dog gave Cyprien another furious shake, and dropped him. He rolled himself out of the door. Pierre flung it to and bolted it.

"Farewell!" he cried. "You will get your punishment in another world!"

And from his window he watched two black shadows fleeing toward Saint-Amé.

CHAPTER XIX. [Pg 142]

A FIRST MEETING.

Just as Fanfar mounted his horse, an incident occurred which passed unperceived by the others.

Irène went up to the groom who held her horse, and with the air of giving him some directions, she said to Fanfar, in a low voice:

"Are you not wounded? Are you not risking your life to save that of your father?" She emphasized the word father, as if to make amends for having previously called him master.

"I am always ready to die for those I love!" answered Fanfar, as he examined the animal with attention.

Irène was silent for a moment. She admired the courage and the devotion of this man, but was at the same time irritated at the attraction she felt toward him. Obeying her sarcastic impulse, she said, quickly:

"I have christened my horse since I saw you. His name is Fanfar!"

Fanfar smiled.

"Very good!" he answered, as he patted the animal's glossy side. "We two Fanfars must not shrink from any danger!"

Irène remembered the inundation, but before she could speak the animal and rider were away.

"The carriage is waiting for you," said Madame Ursula, approaching. [Pg 143]

"Yes, let us go," answered the girl, with feverish haste, and as she took her seat in the carriage, she said to herself: "Yes, I see what he means—make myself beloved, is what he said!"

Fanfar, directed by some peasants, was now far on the road. He tore off his hat and flung it away. His brow was burning. Was it his violent exertions that had given him this fever? Or was it the anxiety he felt for his adopted father? But Gudel's pale face was obscured by a mocking though sweet face, which flitted between him and all else. How beautiful she was!

The two men, when they fled from the cottage of old Labarre, were entirely routed and discomfited. It was not the Marquis who was afraid of the pistol—he fled from the echo of his father's words, which the old servant had repeated.

Cyprien could hardly draw a breath without pain, for the dog had wounded him on the throat.

The Marquis was enraged with himself that he had taken no arms with him. He had supposed that he would not have the smallest difficulty in bending the old man to his will. Why had he not leaped at the fellow's throat when he opened the door?

They had reached the rocks near the cataract, when Cyprien, seizing the arm of the Marquis, cried:

"Listen!"

The cataract roared through the narrow passage, but this was not all. What was that sound of crashing rocks? They soon discovered. Huge blocks of granite had rolled down from above, [Pg 144] diverting the course of the water, which now tumbled down on the highway like a sheet of foam. And what was this behind them? Another great sheet of water coming on. The flood was pursuing them. The two men began to run. Suddenly the Marquis stumbled and fell. The water swept over him and carried him toward the abyss.

"Help! Help!" cried Fongereues.

Cyprien gathered together all his strength for one mighty effort—he was saved!

The Marquis clung to the trunk of a pine tree that grew close to the precipice. The water rolled over his head and blinded him, but did not succeed in washing him away. Suddenly, from the summit of the rocks, came a voice.

"Courage!" it cried, "courage!"

The voice came from a man, but how did any man maintain a foothold there? He descended the rock, crying all the time: "Courage! Courage!" Suddenly his hands ceased to clutch the rocks, and he dropped. The water rose to his knees, but tempestuous as was the rush, he maintained his footing.

The voice that had shouted for assistance was growing weaker. But Fanfar, for he it was, soon found the Marquis, but just as he had succeeded in reaching him he slipped, and believed himself lost.

No, a strong hand grasped his arm and drew him up, but the burthen was heavy, for the Marquis was unconscious. Slowly, very slowly, Fanfar raised his load and himself, and finally sank upon [Pg 145] the turf above, nearly as unconscious as the Marquis.

Fortunately, a small lantern, which Fanfar wore at his belt, was not broken; he lighted it and examined the face of the man he had rescued.

Yes, Fanfar, the resemblance is great. This is the brother of the man who died at Leigoutte. This is the man who outraged a woman one terrible night, and that woman was the sister of Simon's wife, and this man, who was then the Vicomte de Talizac, is to-day the Marquis de Fongereues. This man is your father! Does Fanfar know all this? Not he!

The Marquis opens his eyes, he sees Fanfar in the darkness.

"You have saved me!" he murmured.

"Can you stand? Can you walk?" asked Fanfar.

The Marquis struggled to his feet, but uttered a cry of pain.

"Are you hurt?"

"I think not, but I seem to have no strength left."

"Wait!" said Fanfar.

He went to the side of the rock, and examined it with his lantern. He uttered a joyous exclamation.

"Most men," he said to himself, "would find this rock impracticable, but Fanfar can do it."

He returned to the Marquis.

"Put your arms about my neck," he said, "and trust to me."

The Marquis obeyed, and Fanfar, weighed down again by this burthen, climbed the path heretofore trodden only by goats. They reached the top in safety, there they found Irène's horse. [Pg 146]

"I am going to take you on the saddle with me," he said to the Marquis. "I had been to a neighboring village for a physician, and returning I am only too thankful that accident brought me in this direction."

He assisted the Marquis to the saddle, and that his hands might be free requested the Marquis to hold the lantern.

He did so, and, with instinctive curiosity, flashed the light into the face of his preserver. He started back, for he saw before him the living image of the old Marquis de Fongereues. He must know the truth at any price. He fought against his fatigue, and just as Fanfar was about to leap into the saddle, the Marquis pressed the animal with his knee, and the animal was off like the wind. Fanfar believed that the horse had ran away.

"I hope he will get to the inn in safety," said Fanfar, anxiously. "I must get back on foot, it seems!"

CHAPTER XX. [Pg 147]

THIN PARTITIONS.

Gudel had been carried to his room, the innkeeper moaning over and over again, "How could this have happened?"

La Roulante established herself by the sick bed. She was livid with fear. The attempt had been a failure, and Bobichel had guessed it!

The persistent questions of Schwann made her very uneasy. Caillette said the same thing. She hardly knew what had happened; she only knew that her father had been injured.

Bobichel came in.

"The chain has been examined," he said, looking in La Roulante's face.

"What of that!" she cried. "Why do you meddle in what does not concern you? Do you mean to say that any one meddled with the chain?"

"That is precisely what I mean!" answered Bobichel, forgetting all caution.

La Roulante rushed at him. Caillette threw herself between them, and Schwann dragged her back.

La Roulante caught Caillette by the arm and swung her off, then the girl picked herself up and ran to Gudel's bed. "Help! father!" she cried, "help!"

The girl's voice seemed to produce a magical effect. He half rose in his bed, and looked about. [Pg 148]

Every one was amazed and delighted.

"I knew he would get well!" cried Schwann, as he rushed to Gudel, and took his hands.

Bobichel immediately poured out some brandy and gave it to Gudel, whose eyes almost at once regained a natural appearance. He saw Caillette first, and kissed her tenderly.

"Where is Fanfar?" he said. "Was he hurt?"

"He has gone to Vagney for a doctor for you, dear father."

Iron Jaws laughed aloud.

"I want none of your poisoners here, let me tell you." He caught sight of Bobichel, as he spoke. The clown was crying like a baby. "What is the matter with you, Bob?" he asked.

"Nothing, master, nothing at all; I am so happy."

"You have been fighting, sir?" said Gudel.

La Roulante bustled forward.

"No, he was impertinent to me," she said, "and I gave him such a shaking as he deserved, that was all. But have not you a word for your wife?"

Gudel turned his head away. Bobichel took advantage of this movement to shake his fist in the face of the giantess.

"Now let me see if I can stand," said Gudel. "One! two! three!"

He was on his feet.

"I must look at that chain," he said, "when Fanfar comes. And where is he? It seems to me that he is gone a long time." [Pg 149]

"He will be here soon," answered the innkeeper, "unless the inundation has increased."

"Is he on foot?" asked Gudel.

"No, the lady lent him her horse," said Bobichel, but he stopped short when he saw Caillette turn pale.

Gudel could not see his daughter.

"The young lady is kind-hearted, in spite of all her affectations," he said. "And now, good people, I must ask you to leave me. While I am waiting for Fanfar, I must see these men that I am to take to-morrow to Rémisemont."

"You do not really mean to go to-morrow?"

"I can't say yet. Caillette, my dear, you must go to bed and get some rest at once."

Gudel was not in the least hurt; he had received a great shock, that was all.

When La Roulante left the room, she was met at the door by Robeccal.

"You see," he said, in a fierce whisper, "that if I had done as I wished, and used a knife, the whole thing would have been settled by this time."

The two accomplices stood talking in the large room which the men of the company shared.

"Who the devil could have supposed," the one said to the other, "that Fanfar would have been able to save Gudel. Such a tremendous weight!"

While they were talking, Robeccal and La Roulante heard heavy steps on the stairs, and then a knock at Gudel's door.

Robeccal started. He suddenly remembered the brief colloquy which he had had with the unknown—who was in fact, Cyprien. Might it not be if he did what this man desired that in it he would also find his revenge? [Pg 150]

"If you hate Gudel," this man had said, "I will give you an opportunity of paying off old scores."

Robeccal opened the door and looked out.

Yes, these were the men. Turning to the giantess,

"Listen!" he said, "it is by no means certain that all is lost."

"I don't understand."

"No, but tell me quick. Does he seem to have any secrets?"

"He is always reading the newspapers. He goes himself for his letters always, and brings back a quantity."

"Have you never read any of them?"

"I can't read."

"Wait a little. I think we have him now."

The two persons whom we saw in the dining-room now stood at the foot of Gudel's bed.

"You have had a narrow escape," said one.

"Yes, thanks to Fanfar. His brains, his arms and his muscles saved me."

"It was of him that we came to speak," replied the man who was dressed like a horse jockey.

"If it is time to act," said Gudel, "you may rely on him."

"Are you sure? We do not doubt you nor him, but for such work as ours—of which the aim is to return to France that liberty which has been stifled by the iron hand of Bonaparte and by the Bourbons—we need men who are ready to sacrifice their lives—to walk straight on, even if the scaffold stands at the termination of their road. Is Fanfar such a man?" [Pg 151]

"I am not much of a speaker," answered Gudel. "My father was a soldier of the Republic. I myself was condemned to death in 1815. My father gave his life for France, and I lived through accident. It was about that time that little Fanfar fell into my hands, and I have always taught him to feel the greatest respect for the Revolution. You know, too, that his father was murdered by the allies, his mother was burned by the Cossacks, and his sister, poor little soul, died of starvation. Do you

wonder that Fanfar hates the Bourbons? And you ask if you may trust him!"

There was a brief silence, and then the man who looked like an old soldier spoke.

"Gudel," he said, "we believe you. For ten years, over and over again, you have proved to us your devotion and your honesty."

Iron Jaws blushed with pleasure.

"Fanfar will be here presently. You will find him ready to do your bidding, and to risk his life in the performance of his duty."

"You know the situation," resumed one of the men; "our enemies are already quarreling among themselves, our friends are redoubling their efforts. General Foy has stigmatized the purchasers of votes and rendered their names infamous. Roger Collard has distinctly asked a terrible question—'where will you be in seven years?' The excitement is general, and we must send a man [Pg 152] of activity to Paris—a man who is young and active, who is willing to make any sacrifice. Can Fanfar be this man?"

Gudel contented himself with a simple affirmative.

"Then," said the old soldier, drawing out a pocketbook, "here are papers so important that were they to fall into the hands of our adversaries, our heads would be in danger and our plans ruined. These papers Fanfar must carry to Paris; he will give them to the committee, who in their turn will give him orders, which he is to execute without hesitation or curiosity. Can you answer for Fanfar?"

"Upon my honor, I can."

The two men continued to talk in a low voice with Gudel, and then they went out. Absorbed in thought, they did not notice a man who started back when they appeared. Robeccal had heard every syllable.

Cyprien now arrived at the inn. White, trembling and breathless, he could scarcely reply to the questions addressed to him. He believed the Marquis to be dead, and was finally able to tell his story.

Schwann began to be very anxious. Where was Fanfar? Suddenly a horse was heard coming at full speed. Schwann and Caillette rushed to the door. They uttered a simultaneous cry of surprise. It was the Marquis.

"And Fanfar? Where is he?"

"He is coming. But I have not a moment to lose. Take me to Gudel's chamber."

The tone was too peremptory for Schwann to hesitate; being reassured, too, in regard to Fanfar, [Pg 153] he was ready to obey without stopping to ask the meaning of this extreme haste. Cyprien started forward, but the Marquis gave him a look that commanded silence, and as he passed, said in a low voice:

"Patience!"

The door closed. Then Cyprien felt a hand on his shoulder and recognized the man whose assistance he had endeavored to buy.

"Come out with me," said this man.

"You have learned something?"

"Come out with me, I tell you. Do you think I am fool enough to talk under these walls?"

As they stepped out on the square they saw Fanfar, but Fanfar did not notice these two shadows. He entered the inn and Caillette threw herself into his arms, sobbing with joy.

"I am glad to see you," muttered Schwann, half ashamed of his own emotion.

In the silence that followed, the voice of La Roulante was heard singing while drowning her sorrows in a bottle of brandy.

CHAPTER XXI. [Pg 154]

THE GRATITUDE OF A MARQUIS.

After the departure of the two strangers, who, it will be understood, now renounced their trip for Rémisemont, Gudel remained very pensive. He said to himself that after all he had no right to imperil the future of Fanfar and to have made that promise for him. He began to feel very uneasy at the long absence of the young man. There was a knock at the door.

"Come in," called Iron Jaws.

His surprise was great when he beheld a stranger walk in.

"I am," said this stranger, "the Marquis de Fongereues, and I wish to talk with you."

"I am entirely at your service," answered Iron Jaws, bringing forward a chair.

"You are probably astonished, Monsieur Gudel," said the Marquis, "at my coming here at this time. I know of your accident, and I trust you will excuse my indiscretion when you hear my reasons."

Iron Jaws bowed.

"I was, a half hour since, in great danger, and one of your people saved my life. You will hear about that later on, I can not now delay to tell you."

"But who was this person?"

"His name was Fanfar."

"I might have known it!" shouted Gudel, "he is always doing such things. But where is he? Is he hurt?" [Pg 155]

"Not in the least. He assisted me upon his horse, and the animal was uncontrollable; he, however, brought me here in safety, but my preserver was obliged to walk back."

"He does not mind that, let me tell you. He will be here in ten minutes."

"And the more reason why I should make haste in what I have to say. My name tells you the position I hold at court—"

"I know very little of such matters."

"Then I will tell you that my name is well known, and that my credit is great. I am ready to serve your—son—"

"My son! Alas, sir, I wish Fanfar were my son, but, unfortunately, he is no relation of mine."

"But this young man has parents? I can serve them, undoubtedly."

"Fanfar has no parents."

The Marquis bit his lips. With difficulty he curbed his impatience; it showed in his voice and his eyes. Gudel suspected nothing.

"A poor orphan, then?" asked the Marquis, in the most honeyed tones, "entrusted to your care by a dying father?"

"No, sir, I found Fanfar."

"Pray tell me how and where? I am greatly interested in this young man."

"It is a simple story, sir. My father and I were mountebanks, and there are worse trades, let me assure you. I have served my time under the Republic, and was easy in my mind when there came the trouble of 1812. I with the rest was called out again. I had left my wife and my little girl at home in a village which the allies would have gobbled up at a mouthful, so I asked for a short leave and started off. I tumbled my family and their goods into my chariot, where were already packed the things I used in my profession. I must not omit to mention that Bobichel had kept up the business for me. We travelled along not very rapidly, for there was already fighting going on in France, and we were obliged to turn off the highway many times. One morning, passing through a field, I heard the sound of a bugle. It was the French bugle call. It sounded a little queer, but I said to myself, 'Hullo! there are comrades near.' I ran round a hillock, and saw something that I shall never forget in my life." [Pg 156]

"Go on!" cried the Marquis.

Gudel opened his eyes in amazement, but he could not well see the face of his companion, and was flattered by the evident curiosity of the Marquis.

"I saw soldiers, several of them, lying dead, butchered by the Cossacks. I looked around to see who had sounded the bugle. You won't believe me when I tell you that it was a boy, certainly not over ten, who had discovered this bugle and blown it. I ran to him, but I don't know that he even saw me, for he fell back fainting at that very moment."

"And you picked him up?"

"Of course I did! And this was Fanfar." [Pg 157]

"Did you make any search for his parents?"

"How could I! The Cossacks were at my heels, and there was fire and blood everywhere."

"But later on?"

"The child was sick for a long time, entirely out of his head, and when he began to recover we feared that his brain was hopelessly affected. It was not until eighteen months had elapsed that he was able to tell me he came from Leigoutte, among the Vosges mountains."

"Ah!" The Marquis drew his breath with pain. "Go on! go on!" he muttered in a hoarse voice.

"He said his father's name was Simon, his mother's name Françoise, and a little sister was called Francinette, but he gave me no family name. I did my best and found that the father had been killed in an engagement among the mountains, the mother was burned in a fire set by the Cossacks, the sister had disappeared; my little Fanfar was all alone. I kept him, and did what I could for him. I taught him my profession. This is the whole story. On one side good, brave people, on the other cowards and assassins."

The Marquis was livid. There was now no doubt. It was Simon's son who had been thus thrown in his path. He asked one more question.

"But could you not learn the father's name?"

"No, the village was burned, almost all the inhabitants had perished, the Cossacks had done their work well. One of the peasants did tell me that he always thought this Master Simon—he taught a school—was a great lord in disguise, but there are always just such foolish stories, and you know [Pg 158] in those days great lords were not often killed in defending France."

Fanfar entered somewhat abruptly.

"This is the lad, sir," said Gudel, drawing him to his side. "He is good, he is honest, he is strong!"

"I wish to thank you, young man," said the Marquis, turning to Fanfar, "for saving my life."

Fanfar answered courteously.

"You were in peril. I only did my duty."

"Do not forget that if I can ever serve you, you are to apply to me without hesitation," said the Marquis, and bowing he left the room.

Fanfar and Gudel were now alone.

Cyprien waited for his master, who seized him by the arm and dragged him into the room where they had talked together in the morning.

"Cyprien," he whispered, fiercely, "hell has come to our aid; this young man who saved my life, this Fanfar—"

"Well?"

"Is the son of Simon Fougère—the son of my brother!"

My readers will please remember that only Françoise knew the secret of the birth of little Jacques, who was supposed to be the son of Simon. And of Françoise, the fire had destroyed every trace.

"At last!" exclaimed Cyprien.

"Hush! I have reflected. This young man must die, but his identity must be perfectly clear. We require Gudel's testimony, and then, when all this is plain, we can control Labarre." [Pg 159]

Cyprien assented to the wisdom of the plan, but he wished a little delay. He saw evidences of great impatience on the part of the Marquis.

"I am not so simple, sir, as you think. This Gudel is one of the leaders of the conspiracy of which I have told you, and Fanfar is the man on whom these bandits rely to arouse the populace in Paris."

Then in a low voice he told the Marquis how Iron Jaws had then in his possession papers which would prove the whole plot, and give the names of the conspirators.

"Let him fall into the hands of the law," concluded Cyprien, "and the end is certain. We can contrive to give to the plot enormous proportions, and he will be condemned."

The Marquis shrugged his shoulders.

"No, that won't do. We can't rely on these judges. One never knows what whims they may take into their heads."

"But what do you propose?"

Fongereues hesitated.

"Who is this man," he asked, "who has revealed to you the conversation of Gudel and his accomplices?"

"He is a scoundrel named Robeccal, who belongs to their troupe."

The Marquis tore a leaf from his note book, and wrote a few words in haste.

"Take this man with you, and go to Rémisemont," he said. "Go to the Comte de Vernac, who is a rabid monarchist. He has vast influence, and this very night the police will be here, these two [Pg 160] men will be made prisoners, and I have no doubt they will resist. Then I will attend to the rest; a criminal who resists may be silenced."

Cyprien smiled meaningly.

"Now go, at once, there is no time to be lost. Fanfar must be killed; Gudel must be taken alive. Gudel will tell his story in the court-room. The Comte de Vernac can never say that the information on which he acted came from me, and without any trouble we shall get rid of the heir of Simon Fougère. Before these same judges, moreover, Labarre shall deliver the will, and tell the secret. Let no one see you and this Robeccal go away together."

"Rely on me."

Before many minutes, Robeccal and Cyprien started off together.

CHAPTER XXII.

[Pg 161]

POOR BOBICHEL.

More than two hours had elapsed since the departure of the two spies. The little town of Saint Amé was plunged in profound obscurity. The wind raged down the narrow street, and the roar and rush of the torrent was heard in the distance.

One of the rooms in the inn presented a singular aspect. Caillette lay exhausted on her bed, but she was not asleep; she lay with her eyes wide open thinking of Fanfar. The poor little creature's heart was very sore, but she was too innocent to know why. She felt a vague terror complicated by a certain bitterness. She felt without understanding.

Suddenly, she heard a strange noise. She looked around the room, dimly lighted by a night-lamp. On the floor lay the giantess, who had drank too much brandy. Robeccal had said a few words to her before he went away with the lacquey. She did not seem to understand him, but fell into a doze while he was talking. When she awoke, though by no means herself, she determined to rise from her bed. She did so, and staggered half across the room, then fell on the floor. Half laughing she looked about, and met the surprised, half frightened eyes of Caillette. This was not the first time that the young girl had surprised her in this degraded condition but this time she was more than ever shocked, and shuddered perceptibly.

[Pg 162]

All at once, the giantess seemed to recognize in Caillette an enemy. She uttered a sound that was almost a growl, and, unable to stand, crawled across the room to the girl's bed.

Caillette recoiled until she could go no further. She wanted to scream, but her tongue clove to the roof of her mouth.

La Roulante saw her terror, and laughed. Determined to torture the child, she began to talk.

"You want your Fanfar, don't you? Let me tell you that he cares not a sou whether you live or die."

She stopped talking for a few minutes, and seemed to be reflecting.

"No, I won't kill you—it is not worth while. What was it that my little Bob said to me? Where has he gone, I should like to know!"

She repeated these words over and over again. Presently she vaguely recalled what Robeccal had last said to her.

"'He will not be long,' he said, 'he was going—' Where was he going? Oh! for the police—Gudel and Fanfar had better look out!"

She now crawled away from the bed until she found the brandy bottle, which she drained, all the time saying over and over confused words about the police and papers which would cost two persons their lives.

Although Caillette did not understand, she saw that there was danger, pressing and immediate, for both Gudel and Fanfar. She waited until La Roulante's heavy breathing showed that she was asleep, and then the young girl cautiously crept from her bed and to the door, which, fortunately, was not locked. She hurried to her father's room. Some one lay before the door. She stooped and recognized the faithful clown, who had thus mounted guard.

[Pg 163]

"Bobichel! I must speak to my father," she whispered.

"What! is it you, little Caillette? Is there trouble?"

"Yes—and not one moment to lose!"

Bobichel was wide awake and on his feet. He opened the door for Caillette. Her father was on the bed asleep. Fanfar was asleep, too, sitting in his chair.

Fanfar started up. "Caillette!" he exclaimed.

"Yes—wake my father at once!"

"He is so weary, and needs rest."

"It is a question of your liberty—his liberty and your lives!"

Gudel now opened his eyes.

"What is the matter, child?" he asked.

"The police are coming to arrest you!"

"What nonsense!"

Caillette instantly repeated the disconnected words uttered by La Roulante.

"She can't know anything!" said Gudel, uneasily. "Bobichel!" he called.

"I am here, master!" answered the clown.

"Where is Robeccal?"

"I don't know—he went away three hours ago."

"Where was he going?"

"I don't know—I was too sleepy to ask." [Pg 164]

Gudel questioned Caillette again. "Had La Roulante distinctly spoken of papers?"

It was only too clear that there had been spies in their camp.

"Fanfar," said Gudel, "when one accepts a mission like ours his life no longer belongs to himself. We must fly, and at once!"

"But how?"

"We will take the horses that belong to the chariot."

"And do you forget me, father?" asked Caillette.

"No—I confide you to Bobichel."

"Oh! Fanfar, do not leave me!" sobbed the young girl.

"Dear child, there are great dangers to run!"

"Yes, but with you I should not be afraid."

"And master—am I to be left behind?" asked the clown.

"Very well, we four will go, then," answered Gudel. "But you forget that we have not horses enough," he added.

"But I have legs," interposed Bobichel, "and I can overtake you wherever you go. You can take Caillette on behind."

"Yes, that would do very well, would it not, Fanfar?" asked the girl, eagerly.

"Where shall we go?" said Fanfar to Gudel.

"We had best take the road to Paris. If we are pursued, we shall find a hiding-place there as well as anywhere else."

"Shall we wake Schwann?" asked the clown.

"No, no—what is the use? I do not wish him to be compromised, either, and when they question him they will find that he really knows nothing. You, Bobichel, bring out the horses—the saddles are in the wagon. Go, and make haste!" [Pg 165]

Gudel here stopped short.

"My wife!" he said.

"But, master, it is she who has betrayed you!" cried Bobichel.

"It is she who has saved us!" Gudel replied.

"Yes, but without meaning to do so."

"I must see her, at all events."

And Gudel hurried to her room, and beheld her lying in a drunken stupor on the floor. He shook his head sadly.

"After all, she has nothing to fear, and we may as well part in this way as in any other—the end was coming!"

And he returned to his daughter and his friends, who in the meantime had been making a rope of the sheets and blankets on the bed. With their aid Bobichel dropped from the window.

"Now it is my turn!" said Caillette, and, light as a bird, she seized the rope.

"Take care, child! Take care!" cried Fanfar.

"Would it pain you," she asked quickly, "if I came to grief?"

"Hush! child."

Little Caillette was very gay, and it was with a pretty, childish laugh that she swung herself to the ground, where in two minutes her father and Fanfar also stood. [Pg 166]

The two horses, all saddled, stood ready.

"You have the papers, Fanfar?" asked Gudel, in a whisper.

"Yes—I have them."

"Then let us start at once."

Caillette, without the smallest hesitation, sprang on Fanfar's horse.

"And you, Bobichel?"

"Don't be troubled about me!"

"Hark!" cried Fanfar.

They listened, and heard distinctly the tread of horses in the distance.

"The police!" said Bobichel.

"They have lost no time, at all events!" And Gudel laughed. "But we have the advantage, and I know a cross-road which will cut off a good bit."

The two horses stepped gingerly out of Schwann's premises, and when once on the high road dashed madly forward. The inn was wrapped in silence and almost in darkness—only one room was lighted, the one where the Marquis sat, impatient and anxious. He, too, heard the horses galloping. His plan had succeeded, then. In a few minutes the house would be surrounded.

A group of horsemen suddenly appeared on the Square. Robeccal and Cyprien were with them.

When Robeccal went away, he had taken the precaution to leave a window open on the lower floor, which Schwann had not discovered in making his rounds for the night. [Pg 167]

Robeccal entered through this window and opened the door.

Schwann was aroused by footsteps below, and rushed down the stairs. Seeing the police in uniform, he uttered an exclamation.

"The police in my house!" he cried.

"I ask your pardon, sir," answered the Brigadier of police, "but there was urgent need. In the name of the king!"

Schwann repeated the words with a sigh.

"You have conspirators lodging here—enemies of the monarchy!"

"You are greatly mistaken, Brigadier—"

"Not so. Their names are Gudel and Fanfar."

Schwann laughed. "That is ridiculous!" he said.

"That may be, but I have orders to arrest these men! Where are they?"

"I will show you!" said Robeccal, quickly. The door of the chamber was locked.

"Break it in!" cried Robeccal.

"Wait! Law before all else." And standing in a military attitude, the Brigadier shouted: "In the name of the king, open!"

As may be supposed, there was no reply. Then, with his shoulder, the Brigadier burst it open.

"Gone!" roared Robeccal, and looking round he quickly espied the improvised rope at the window, and flew down the stairs.

Cyprien drew the Brigadier aside. "Spare no exertion. The fate of France depends on you, now!" he said. [Pg 168]

The Brigadier became immensely important on hearing these words. He took a lantern and hunted for traces of the fugitives.

"This way!" cried Robeccal, "they have made their escape toward the forest."

"I know every inch of the forest," answered the Brigadier, waving his sword, as if he were about to attack an enemy.

Cyprien stood biting his lips. Could it be that Fanfar was to escape him now? The police rode off at a rapid pace, and Cyprien felt that they must overtake the fugitives.

About two miles from the village the road wound round a hill, on one side of which was a deep precipice. Day was breaking, and Robeccal, who of course had joined in the pursuit, rose in his stirrups in hopes to see some sign of the men they were pursuing.

Suddenly one of the horses fell, then the one behind meeting with the same obstacle, fell also, until five out of the seven were on the ground.

"It is a rope!" cried the Brigadier, "a rope stretched across the road—the rascals!"

The men who were in their saddles leaped to the ground and endeavored to assist their comrades, one of whom had a leg broken.

Robeccal stamped with rage.

"Halloo!" cried a voice, "you had best meddle with honest people again!" And Bobichel, standing on the side of the road, danced with glee. [Pg 169]

"You shall pay for that!" shouted Robeccal, and snatching a pistol from the belt of one of the police, he fired at Bobichel.

The clown flung out his arms. "They are saved, at all events!" he shouted, as he disappeared, falling into the abyss at his feet.

Fanfar and Gudel were far away. Poor Bobichel!

CHAPTER XXIII. [Pg 170]

FRANCE—1824.

The 29th of February, 1824, was a Sunday, and a fête day. At that time the Carnival was in full blast, and the streets were crowded with curious spectators. A carriage drew up before a fashionable restaurant in the Palais Royal. The carriage was driven by a coachman wearing a powdered wig, and the horses were magnificent. Three young men with cigars in their mouths descended from the carriage, and took the path that led to the garden.

They were wrapped in Venetian cloaks and each wore on his shoulder knots of ribbon, different in hue, and each concealed his face under a white satin mask, to which mask the police made no objection, as it was a sign of high birth and nobility.

These young men laughed when they found they were to pass through a double row of spectators, to whose jokes they replied in kind.

Lights were beginning to twinkle among the trees when they established themselves at a table in the café.

"I am thankful to say," exclaimed one of the young men, "that the Carnival is nearly over."

"Fernando is right," said one of the two others. "We have been out now for two hours, and we have not had the smallest adventure." [Pg 171]

"Pshaw!" answered the third youth, who was called Arthur by his friends, "we have a long evening before us, and it would be odd if we did not find some excitement and could not create a little scandal!"

Of these three young men one was named Arthur de Montferrand; his father had made himself a name in the Chamber of Peers by defending the assassins of Marshal Brune; the other, Gaston de Ferrette, was a great duelist, although not more than twenty-four, and belonged to the best blood in France.

The third was less known in Paris. He was an Italian who was traveling in France. His name was Fernando de Vellebri. He came with letters from princes and ambassadors, which opened to him the first hôtels in the Faubourg. This was the time when the word "dandy" began to be used, and these three aspired to the title.

"Where is Frederic?" said one. "Would he fail us now?"

"Of course not. Besides, he wrote to me to say that he was to go with Mademoiselle de Salves to witness some ceremony at Notre Dame!"

"Poor Frederic!"

"He is not so much to be pitied, if you please, for Mademoiselle de Salves is a most charming person."

"But does he love her? That is the question."

"It seems to me that you take a great deal of interest in my private affairs, gentlemen!" said a

clear voice behind them.

"Frederic! Frederic, at last!" [Pg 172]

"Yes, Frederic, who has been listening to you for some minutes, and who thinks you a little venturesome in your remarks."

He whom these young men greeted as Frederic wore no mask. His costume was what in 1824 was regarded as the height of elegance. His friends looked at him with admiration and envy, audibly regretting that they had appeared in mask and costume.

"Then go and take them off," said Frederic. "I will wait for you here, or, better still, you may stop for me an hour later at the *Mille Colonnes*."

Frederic was left alone. He was a youth of about twenty, but looked older. Heavy brows shaded deep-set eyes, his shoulders were square, with a slight deformity of the spine. His name was Frederic de Talizac.

Ten years had elapsed since the son of Magdalena scorned and insulted France. We shall soon discover if the man fulfilled the promise of his childhood.

The Vicomte left the rotunda, and putting up his eyeglasses, began to examine the crowd in the garden.

The Palais Royal was at that time the central point of Paris, and served as a rendezvous for everybody. Each café had its special customers. The Bonapartists went to one, foreigners to another—the *Mille Colonnes*—speculators to the *Café de Fois*, and so on. The *Café de Valois* was frequented by military men, the survivors of the great Revolution, and it was also believed that it was a resort of the Republicans. Wonder was frequently expressed that the police had not [Pg 173] suppressed this scandal. It was toward this café that the Vicomte now took his way. Hardly had he passed the gallery than he was attracted by a group of young men earnestly conversing together. Frederic watched them a moment, and then went up to them. He touched one of the men on his shoulder, saying:

"Will you grant me a few minutes' conversation, sir?"

The young man to whom this question was addressed was about twenty-five. His regular features indicated great determination. He looked at Talizac for a moment, and then replied, very coldly:

"I am at your service, sir."

The two men then walked into an almost deserted street.

"I first wish to know your name," said the Vicomte. "I am Frederic de Talizac."

"As I am well aware."

"And I wish to know your name that I may know also, if I am to speak to you as to a gentleman, or strike you as I would a lacquey."

The young man turned very pale, but with a calmness that was absolutely terrifying under the circumstances, he replied:

"There can be nothing in common between us two."

"I am to marry Mademoiselle de Salves in a month," said Talizac, between his close shut teeth. "Yesterday, at noon, you had the impertinence, when riding past her mother's hôtel, to throw a bouquet over the garden wall."

"Well?"

"You probably have excellent reasons for concealing your name, but I give you fair warning that if [Pg 174] you are again guilty of similar conduct, that your chastisement will be swift and sure!"

The Vicomte stopped short, for the young man grasped him by the wrist with such strength that Frederic caught his breath in pain.

The stranger spoke in a low, calm voice.

"You have insulted me—wait!"

He turned and called to his friends.

"Gentlemen," he said, "this man has insulted me. Shall I fight him? He is the Vicomte de Talizac."

One of the friends, who wore the ribbon of the Legion of Honor, replied:

"You cannot fight with a Talizac!"

The Vicomte uttered a cry of rage, but the other still held him firmly.

"You see," he said, "we do not fight with people whom we do not respect. If you do not understand me, apply to your father for an explanation—he will give it to you. The day may come when you may have an opportunity of killing me—if you can. Now go—return to your shameful pleasures!"

With features convulsed with rage the Vicomte, unable to speak, drew from his pocket a handful of cards, and flung them into the face of the unknown, who started forward, but one of his friends laid a restraining hand on his arm.

"You do not belong to yourself!" he said, warningly.

Talizac disappeared. As he was hurrying on, blind with anger, a voice cried: [Pg 175]

"Is this the way you keep your appointments?"

It was the Italian, Fernando de Vellebri. He added, with a wink:

"You ought to have killed that fellow. You know him?"

"Very little."

"He was concerned in that affair at Tivoli. You will tell me about it."

The tone which the Italian employed was not pleasing to Frederic, who, glad to have found a new adversary, answered quickly:

"I suppose you mean that I can tell you, if I choose. You seem to give me orders."

"Suppose we sit down." And the Italian pointed to two chairs which were unoccupied. He seated himself at once.

"My dear Vicomte," he said, serenely, "it seems to me that, situated as we are, there should be no misunderstanding or quarrel between us."

"How do you mean?"

"I mean what you seem to have forgotten, that yesterday, in a moment of absent-mindedness, you signed a certain paper with a name that was not your own."

The Vicomte turned very pale.

"How did you know this?" he stammered.

The Italian took out an elegant little pocketbook.

"Here it is," he said, opening a paper bearing the royal mark.

"But how did it come into your hands?"

"In a very simple way—I bought it." [Pg 176]

"You—and for what reason?"

"Can you not suppose that my only motive was to render you a service?"

The Vicomte shrugged his shoulders.

"You are right," answered Fernando, in reply to this mute protest. "I have another reason. I do not wish the Vicomte de Talizac to come to grief because my fortune is intimately connected with his—because his father, the Marquis de Fongereues, has rendered and will render great services to a cause that is mine. You must promise me to be guilty of no more imprudences like this."

"Do you mean to give me that paper?"

"No, it is not altogether mine; those who retain an interest in it can alone surrender it to you."

"And who are those persons?"

"Friends, defenders of the Monarchy and of Religion. But we will say no more on this trifle now. I merely wished to prove to you that I had a right to your confidence. Resume your story, and tell me why you hate this man whom you just now provoked."

This trifle, as the Italian called it, could place the Vicomte at the criminals' bar, as both men well knew, but Frederic deemed it advisable not to insist. He suspected the truth, and had long since decided that the Italian belonged to the mysterious association. It was enough for him that the danger was momentarily averted.

"Very well," said Talizac, "you were speaking of Tivoli. The crowd was very great at the fête, the fireworks were going on, at that moment the king's arms were exhibited. Suddenly there was a [Pg 177] grand excitement; part of the scaffolding gave way. Mademoiselle de Salves in her fright dropped my arm and began to run. I saw a great timber falling and believed she was lost. I could not reach her. A man emerged from the crowd, and with incredible strength seized this timber and eased it to the ground. She fainted, and when the crowd permitted me to reach her side, this young man was holding her in his arms. She opened her eyes, and I am certain that this man was no stranger to her. When, however, we all gathered about her, the unknown bowed respectfully and vanished. I noticed, however, that this romantic cavalier carried away with him a ribbon from the dress of the young lady—only a ribbon. I told Irène of this impertinence; she did not even condescend to answer me."

"But the Paladin did not long content himself with this silent homage, I presume?"

"Women are idiots, you know, and this man now passes Irène's windows daily, and even throws flowers over the garden wall; and this woman, who is to be my wife, stands behind the curtain and watches for his coming. This my own eyes have seen, and I have come to the conclusion that it has gone on long enough—"

"Ah! and you wish to get rid of this gallant. The matter ought to be easy enough."

"Yes, one would think so. I have kept my valet on the watch, and discovered that he came every day to the *Café de Valois* at this hour—" [Pg 178]

"My dear Talizac, I can put an end to all your difficulties. If Mademoiselle de Salves has built up a pretty romance, I can banish her dreams by telling her the name of her lover. Your rival, my dear fellow, is or was rather, a mountebank, and his name is Fanfar."

The Vicomte laughed long and loud.

"Upon my word!" he exclaimed, as soon as he could speak, "I should have made a fool of myself, had I fought a duel with the fellow! But do the men who are with him know who he is?"

"Certainly. They know perfectly well. And yet shake hands with him! They call him their friend."

The Italian could stand no more of this. He rose from his chair. "Come," he said, "this is the Carnival, let us end the day merrily."

"I should be only too glad to do so," was the Vicomte's reply, "anything to make me forget the disagreeable scene with that man!"

The Vicomte called the contumely heaped on his father's name and his own, "a disagreeable scene."

The two young men sauntered across the garden. Just as they reached the fountain, Frederic stopped.

"What is it?" asked the Italian.

A young girl was singing to a guitar. A curious crowd had gathered about her. She was a pretty creature; her brown curls were covered by a handkerchief of white wool, her face was perfect in shape and in coloring, her eyes were dark—gay, but at the same time innocent.

She accompanied herself on a guitar as she sang, and her voice was so delicious that the crowd clamored for more. The girl bowed her thanks, and extended the back of her guitar for money. She colored deeply as she did so. When she reached Frederic, he said, in a whisper, as he laid a gold piece on the instrument, "You are alone to-day." [Pg 179]

She started, looked up quickly, and passed on.

"The 'Marquise' is in a lofty mood," said the Italian, stooping as he spoke, and picking the gold piece from the ground. "Take it, Vicomte, it is yours, since she would have none of it."

Frederic uttered a sullen oath.

"And this has been going on for two months!" Fernando laughed, as he stated this as a fact, "and every day the Marquise—by the way, why is she called by that name!—repels the homage of the Vicomte!"

"Do you spend all your time watching me, Fernando? Take care, patience has its limits!"

"I am glad to hear it. You bear too much from this girl!"

Frederic caught his arm. "Listen to me, Fernando, my brain reels with mad projects. Help me to avenge myself on Fanfar—help me to carry off this girl, and I belong to you, body and soul!"

"Well said!" answered the Italian, "as the bargain is concluded, suppose we go to dinner?"

"But this girl?"

"We will talk of her to-night, and I am quite sure you will have no reason to complain of me!"

CHAPTER XXIV. [Pg 180]

THE MARQUISE.

Forty-eight hours have elapsed since the scenes we have described in the last chapter, and the day is Mardi Gras. Opposite the Café Turc, which in 1824 had a European reputation, stood a house of squalid appearance, inhabited, because of the low rent at which rooms could be obtained, by a number of modest tradespeople, who for the greater part of the year carried on the numerous booths on the Square.

Before describing this picturesque corner of old Paris, unknown to the present generation, we will enter this house to which we have alluded, and which bore the number 42 of the Boulevard

du Temple. In a room on the fifth floor, the girl who was called the Marquise was finishing her toilette before the mirror. A poor little room enough, with its faded wall paper, its narrow bed pushed into the corner, its two chairs and pine table. The window closed but imperfectly, and the wind blew out the curtain like a sail. Colored prints were fastened against the wall, and everything was exquisitely clean. A white napkin was spread upon the table, and the bed had snowy curtains. The mirror at this moment was worth more than any from Venice, for it reflected a charming Greuze-like face.

The singer was twisting up her rebellious curls, and endeavoring to bring her hair into some kind of order. Her complexion was exquisite, her big dark eyes were full of sunshine, and her lips were beautiful and fresh. She fastened on her muslin cap, and then the graceful hands fluttered about her dress arranging that also. [Pg 181]

Suddenly a deep sigh, apparently from the next room, reached her ear. She ran to the communicating door, and, opening it cautiously, looked in.

"Poor woman!" she said to herself, "she is awake. I wonder if she suffers still."

Then a voice called, "Cinette! little Cinette!"

"How strange!" said the girl, "when I hear her speak that name, it seems to me the voice is familiar."

"Come, Cinette!"

This time the girl entered the room. She beheld a woman vainly seeking to raise herself in her bed.

Her face was hideously scarred and seared, while the bloodshot eyes could not endure the light. It was clear that the poor creature had been the victim of a horrible accident.

"I am thirsty," she faintly articulated.

"Yes, mamma," answered the girl who was called Cinette.

And the woman smiled. She was mad in addition to her helplessness. No one knew who she was, nor whence she came.

The reader has recognized in the girl who ministered to her needs, little Cinette, the child of Simon Fougère and Françoise. She had run distractedly through those subterranean vaults when she lost Jacques, and finally escaped from the labyrinth to fall into the hands of those people whom Hugo has immortalized. [Pg 182]

These people—a husband, wife and children—were pillaging the dead on a battle-field, but when Cinette appeared they smiled upon her.

The little girl could give no explanation as to why she was thus alone and deserted. To all questions she could only reply by the words "papa Simon," and "mamma Françoise." Of course this was too indefinite for these people to act upon; besides, at that time they had much to do—the invasion promised them much spoil. They took Cinette away, and after the peace they continued to keep her. They had amassed quite a little property, and bought a farm in Blaisois. Cinette was happy in these days, for she was too young to remember her woes.

In the village there was an old soldier whose violin and songs had often enlivened the bivouac. He soon discovered that Cinette, for she still went by that name, possessed a wonderful voice. He took it into his head to start a musical school; he had three pupils, only two of which paid a sou; on the third, Cinette, he built many projects. He was making arrangements to transport his pupil to a wider stage, when an epidemic broke out in the village, and the girl was left alone in the world.

The "Good Sisters" offered her a home in the convent, but she had always been accustomed to the open air, to flowers that nodded a welcome to her as she passed, and to sunshine, and was afraid of the cloister, of its dimness, and of watchful eyes.

She finally took her departure, and begged her way to Paris. Some one gave her an old guitar that had been left behind by some wanderer, which the child had gazed at with longing eyes. She escaped the many snares that were laid for her, and finally found shelter in a house where only the very poor lived, but they were all honest, industrious people. She obtained the necessary permission to sing on the street, and then had another idea. In the part of the city where she lived there was a great deal of poverty, and she undertook the care of a poor woman, she was so confident in her ability to make money. [Pg 183]

"But the person you propose to take care of has been dreadfully disfigured, and is unpleasant to look upon," said one of the neighbors.

The child asked to be told all that was known of the unfortunate creature.

She had been found among the mountains long before, and the people who had found her were dead, but she was still taken care of by these kind, good creatures who, however, found the burthen a heavy one.

Francine went to see this poor creature. There was a long silence, the girl seemed to hesitate,

then, suddenly, she stooped and kissed her.

"Will you go with me, mamma?" she said.

Why did she use the word mamma? She could not have told herself, and yet this woman was really her mother. Yes, this unfortunate, this mad woman was Françoise, the wife of Simon. After the agony of that fearful night, she lost her memory and her reason. She did not know how she [Pg 184] had escaped, and yet she was here and restored to her child. Fate had brought the two together. Mother and daughter were alike victims of the Talizacs.

Francine took this woman, whom she had volunteered to support, and installed her next her own room. Day and night she watched over her with a solicitude that was absolutely filial.

The elder woman was happy only when Cinette was with her, and when the girl was away, she repeated the name over and over.

Francine worked hard. She now had her regular audiences, and could be heard at certain places at certain hours. Her programmes were regularly made out. The name that had been given her of the Marquise was not given unkindly. She was neither vain nor proud, but she wore her simple woolen gown in such a dainty fashion, and put the little kerchief on her head in such a way, that the people called her the Marquise. But to return to our tale.

"I am going out, mamma," said Francine, "and you will be very good while I am away, will you not?"

"Yes, Cinette—yes."

"You will not try to get up?"

"No, Cinette."

"And to-morrow you shall have a pretty new cap—"

"With ribbons?"

"Yes, with ribbons."

The woman laughed with delight, but presently she uttered a cry of distress.

"The box! the box!—where is the box?"

Francine had heard this same exclamation over and over again, and attached no significance to [Pg 185] it, but to humor the invalid, she answered:

"Oh! you shall have the box."

"Yes, I must have it. Everything is in it—fortune, money, titles. Where have I put it?"

Her voice dropped so low that Francine could hardly hear her.

It was time for the girl to go out, and, as it was Mardi Gras, she hoped for large receipts. She returned to her chamber and took her guitar. Just as she was going out, she heard a knock on her door. She started, and called out:

"Who is it?"

"A friend?"

"Your name?"

"You do not know me."

"Tell me your name."

A stifled oath was the reply.

"Open the door, I say. My name is Robeccal."

The young girl drew a breath of relief, for she was becoming sorely frightened by the pursuit of the Vicomte, and an unusual knock made her feel that it was he. But the voice and the name of Robeccal tranquillized her fears. She opened the door—our old friend of the circus stood before her. He began to grumble and scold.

"I beg your pardon," said the girl, gently, "but I am in haste, and if—"

"Suppose you offer me a chair, young lady! What manners!"

Francine repeated that she was in haste, and would be glad to know the occasion of his visit. Her [Pg 186] manner was so decided that Robeccal saw that he must speak.

"I have come," he said, "to put you in the way of earning a little money."

"Go on."

"I assist in restaurants on fête days. I am an 'extra,' you understand, and am now at the *Veau Sauté*, at the corner. You know—"

"I know the establishment, certainly."

"Well, the master wishes to give a little entertainment to his customers to-night, and I thought of you. He will give you twenty francs."

Twenty francs! It was quite a fortune to the child, and yet she hesitated.

"Did the master give you no note for me?" she asked, at length.

"How suspicious you are! What are you afraid of!"

"Nothing. I will call at the restaurant now, when I go out."

"You must decide now, for if you decline I am to go for the man who has no arms, but who sings so well."

Robeccal showed her a card on which was written the girl's address and that of the armless singer.

Francine's hesitation vanished—she accepted the proposition.

"I will go," she said, "and at what hour?"

"At eight o'clock, sharp," Robeccal replied.

"And how long shall I be wanted?"

A wicked light came into the man's eyes. [Pg 187]

"I don't know exactly—until ten or eleven, I suppose."

"But I must be home before midnight."

"Oh! of course; and if you are afraid to come alone, I am at your service. And now, good-bye."

He ran lightly down the stairs. When he reached the street he looked around. A man wrapped in a large cloak, a disguise much employed at that time, and wearing a broad-brimmed hat, approached him.

"Well?" he said, quickly.

"It is all right!" answered Robeccal. "She will come."

This man, who was none other than Fernando, the worthy friend of the Vicomte de Talizac, now slipped a gold piece into the scoundrel's hand.

"Twenty louis more," he said, "when the affair is accomplished!"

"Very good, sir. When I undertake anything, it is sure, let me tell you. La Roulante will see to everything."

The two men separated.

While these two accomplices were talking, Francine had reached the Square where she was to sing.

CHAPTER XXV. [Pg 188]

THE VEAU SAUTÉ.

"Hurry up, Perrette! How about that sauce? Have you forgotten the parsley?"

And the proprietor of the *Veau Sauté* tore about in the most distracted manner. Aubé had dreamed of vast rooms and huge kitchens, but the obstinacy of the people already living in the same building could not be conquered, and as yet he had not obtained the space he desired. They resisted every offer and every threat he made. He could have borne it better had these refractory persons been tenants whose vicinity added *éclat* to his establishment. But it was not so. These tenants were a man known as Iron Jaws, a rope dancer called Fanfar, a girl named Caillette, and a clown with an odd name.

This Fanfar gave lessons in prestigiation, but the people who went up his private stairs were well dressed, and most of them looked like old soldiers.

While Aubé was worrying about these matters and many more, a carriage drove up to the door of the restaurant, and three gentlemen got out. These were Frederic de Talizac, Fernando de Vellebri, and Arthur de Montferrand, the duelist, all strangely alike in their lack of moral sense and in their cynicism, neither of them hesitating to do anything, however evil, to gratify their passions. Room No. 11 was ready for these gentlemen. The waiter took their cloaks and hats. Arthur threw himself on a sofa, and announced that there was to be no heavy talk until the dessert came on. [Pg 189]

"Bravo!" said Fernando. "But perhaps you would kindly define what you mean by heavy talk? As for you, Frederic, I think you had an interview with your father to-day?"

"Champagne!" shouted Frederic, flinging his glass at the door, an original manner of summoning a waiter, which he had invented.

"Yes," he replied, "and the Marquis is resolved that the marriage shall take place in a fortnight—as if I had not other fish to fry!"

"But it seems to me," said Arthur, "that a union so desirable in every respect, a fortune so large—"

"Do you mean to insinuate, sir, that a fortune is essential?" asked Frederic, haughtily.

Here the Italian interfered, and smoothed down the Vicomte's asperities.

At this moment a fresh, young voice rose from the lower room, which was crowded, and when the voice ceased there came loud applause.

"That is a charming voice!" said Arthur. "I would like to see this nightingale a little nearer."

"And why not?" asked Talizac.

Fernando wished to oppose this idea, which might disarrange his carefully prepared plans, but the champagne had by this time affected the Vicomte.

"I say," he persisted, angrily, "I do not see any objection. I for one should like to hear the girl sing up here before the adventure." [Pg 190]

"The adventure?" repeated Montferrand.

"A little surprise we have arranged for her—that is all."

Arthur looked bewildered, and then exclaimed:

"Ah! I see. Bravo!—call the proprietor, and bid him send the singer to us."

"Gentlemen! gentlemen!" said Fernando, "be careful what you do. No imprudences! Remember that you are not in the Palais Royal. The people down stairs won't stand any nonsense!"

Frederic rang the bell furiously, and the waiter was sent for the proprietor. Aubé presently appeared. He was very obsequious in his manner, for the party had ordered bottle after bottle of champagne.

"Who is that girl singing to the people in the café?" asked Frederic, abruptly.

"She is called the Marquise, sir—a pretty little creature, and as good as she is pretty!"

"I dare say! Now send her up here, and tell the waiter to bring up three more bottles of your best champagne."

Aubé stood still, twisting his cap in his hands.

"Well?" said Frederic, "why don't you go?"

"I wish to say, sir, that the girl is very respectable."

"We don't doubt it. We will pay her for her song—three louis, five—is that enough?"

Aubé felt that he had no right to deprive the girl of this money, and it was more than probable that these young fellows were not as wild as they seemed. Fernando's calm superciliousness reassured him in some degree. [Pg 191]

"Are you going?" asked Frederic, somewhat rudely.

Aubé reluctantly left the room.

The restaurant was filled with customers, all respectable people with the exception of those seated around a table in the further corner of the room—they were doubtful in appearance. When Robeccal, in the discharge of his duties as "extra," came to this table he lingered there, even drinking a glass of wine, first taking care that his employer could not see him.

Aubé, greatly disturbed by the orders he had received, returned to the dining-room just as the Marquise was making her rounds to collect the money that was laid on the back of her guitar. Aubé touched her shoulder.

"I want to speak to you, petite," he said, as he drew her into a corner. "You are not rich, I fancy?"

"I should say not!" And Francine laughed. "What a queer thing to say!"

"I have a proposal to make."

"And what may that be?"

Aubé's kindly face inspired the girl with no distrust. He hesitated.

"You know," he said, "that I have no advice to give, but if you choose, you can make five louis."

"A hundred francs! You are jesting!"

"And only by singing two or three songs."

"But that would be better pay than the opera singers receive!"

"That may be!"

"But where am I to sing?" [Pg 192]

"Here—on the next floor."

"Hallo! ambassador, are you never coming?" shouted Montferrand from the top of the stairs.

Francine started.

"They are young men, are they not?"

"Yes, but you need not be alarmed—they are only a little gay."

A hundred francs was a good deal of money. She could buy an easy chair for the poor invalid, and give her a little treat.

"Well?" asked Aubé, who would have been glad had she refused.

"I accept," she answered, "but you must not go far away. You must be near in case I should call."

"All right. No harm shall come to you in my house, let me tell you."

The girl went toward the stairs.

"What does that mean?" said one of the men at the table at the end of the room. "The linnet seems to be going of her own free will!"

"Silence!" said Robeccal, passing the table. "Watch and be ready!"

Meanwhile the people in the restaurant began to grumble at Francine's departure. She looked back from the stairs.

"Have a little patience," she said, with her lovely smile, "when I come back very shortly, I will sing you my best songs."

She followed Aubé to No. 11. The proprietor was astonished to see that the door was open, and that one of the gentlemen had vanished. [Pg 193]

Arthur and Fernando were there. Francine had seen the Italian before in the street, but Arthur was entirely unknown to her.

"I hope, Mademoiselle, you will sing us something," said Montferrand, politely.

Our readers will notice that this young man's instincts were not bad, and when removed from Frederic's influence, they resumed their ascendancy. The girl's gentle manner, her refined, pure face commended his respect.

Aubé, now quite reassured, hastened back to his duties below.

Francine began a prelude to a simple song, when suddenly she stopped, her guitar slipped from her hands. She saw Frederic de Talizac gliding into the room.

"Go on, *ma belle*" he said, "surely you are not afraid of me!" And he tried to take her by the waist.

"No," she replied, "I shall sing no more."

Frederic, though very tipsy, threw himself in front of the door.

"Yes, you will sing, and for each one of your sweet notes I will give you a kiss."

The girl drew back from his extended arms, and turning to the two men who stood looking on, she cried, with infinite contempt:

"Cowards! will neither of you interfere to prevent a woman from being insulted?"

Arthur's heart was stirred by this appeal.

"You are right," he replied. "Come, Frederic, no more of this!" [Pg 194]

"Are you talking to me?" hiccoughed Frederic. "Take her from me if you dare!" And he put his arm around her.

"Help!" cried Francine. "Help!"

At the same moment, Frederic received a tremendous blow from Montferrand.

The Vicomte snatched a knife from the table, and the two men engaged in a hand to hand contest.

Francine was so terrified that she could not move.

Why had not Aubé heard this noise? We will return to the lower floor.

Robeccal was disgusted when he saw Francine go up-stairs. He felt that the ground was cut from under his feet, and that he was to lose the reward he had been promised. He stole partly up the stairs and listened. He went on, and when the quarrel burst out and he saw the knife in the hand of the Vicomte, he rushed down the stairs, and summoned the men at the table, who were on the watch for a signal from him.

Aubé had heard Francine's cry and ran to her aid, but two of the men summoned by Robeccal stood before the door.

"Let me pass!" cried Aubé.

"Softly, good sir," was the reply. "Don't meddle in what does not concern you."

Furious at being thus braved in his own establishment, Aubé thrust the men aside, but was driven back by repeated blows.

He turned to his customers.

"Gentlemen!" he cried, "they are insulting a poor girl up-stairs. Help me to save her; it is the Marquise—the singer!" [Pg 195]

A number of men started up at this appeal.

The two bandits stood on the stairs with knives in their hands, and feet and hands ready to repel any one who attempted to ascend the stairs.

"Help! Murder!" shouted Aubé.

Women screamed, and clung to the arms of their husbands to prevent them from taking part in the contest. Others, less courageous, threw bottles and glasses at the scoundrels who promptly returned them.

In the meantime, Arthur had thrown Frederic on the floor. Fernando endeavored to separate them, but they were no more amenable to reason than if they had been wild beasts.

Pale and trembling, Francine leaned against the wall. Robeccal went to her.

"Mademoiselle," he said, "this is not my fault. Why did you come up here?"

"Why did I?" she repeated in agony.

"I got you into this trouble unintentionally, and now I must get you out!"

She did not distrust him, she was too good for that.

"Follow me!" said Robeccal. "I know a way into the street. No one will see you."

Arthur and Frederic were still fighting; the tumult below had not decreased.

Robeccal took the girl's hand, and led her to the door which opened into the private apartments of Aubé. They passed through these until they reached another flight of stairs. Down these the girl ran, closely followed by Robeccal. They went out through a narrow alley. Suddenly, Francine heard a whistle, and she was seized, a handkerchief over her head stifled her cries, and she felt that she was being carried away by vigorous arms. [Pg 196]

"Well done!" said Robeccal, "and now for La Roulante!"

CHAPTER XXVI. [Pg 197]

A MAN CHASE.

When the men on the stairs heard the whistle blown by Robeccal, they rushed through the crowd brandishing their knives. They disappeared in the street.

Aubé hurried up-stairs. Francine had disappeared. Fernando had finally succeeded in separating the combatants, and pushed Frederic out of the door.

Arthur, foaming with rage, called out to Aubé:

"Make haste, the girl has been carried off by the order of these people! I know what I say!"

Aubé hastened to his private rooms; he found the door that led to the stairs unlocked and open.

"What scoundrels they are!" cried Aubé.

"Yes," answered Montferrand, "but scoundrels who bear the best names in France—one is the Vicomte de Talizac, son of the Marquis de Fongereues."

A young man suddenly appeared on the stairs.

"Who speaks of Talizac and de Fongereues?" he asked.

"Ah! Monsieur Fanfar! heaven has sent you to my assistance. My establishment is ruined, but that is nothing to the ruin of this poor girl!"

"What poor girl?" asked Fanfar. "Pray explain yourself, Monsieur Aubé."

Montferrand had heard that this Fanfar was only a rope-dancer; but his air and manner, his dress, too, proclaimed him to hold a very different position, and he was greatly attracted by his appearance. [Pg 198]

"It is a disgraceful piece of business, sir," he answered, "in which, I am sorry to say, I am in a measure concerned;—the Vicomte de Talizac—"

"I knew it!" murmured Fanfar.

"And his friend, Fernando de Vellebri—"

"The Italian spy, who betrayed his brothers, the Carbonari, and is now the slave of the Jesuits."

"All of which I knew nothing of; but at all events these two men, whom I have called my friends, to my shame, have carried off a young girl, a street singer—

"A most odious crime; but have you any idea where they have taken her?"

"No, not the slightest."

"And this girl, has she no father, no mother?"

"She is an orphan, and is called the Marquise."

"Ah! but her real name? Where does she live?"

"Only a little way from here, but a man named Robeccal can tell you exactly."

"Robeccal! A miserable scoundrel!"

"You know him then?"

"Only too well!"

"I know that the Marquise boards with a woman who is bed-ridden, and I remember that she is sometimes spoken of as Cinette, or Francine."

"Cinette!" cried Fanfar, "how old is she!"

"Fifteen or sixteen, I should say."

"Merciful Heavens! Can it be she! Am I going mad?" [Pg 199]

"What are you saying, sir?" and Montferrand seemed to feel a real interest.

"You can't understand, but I shall save her. If I chance to meet that Talizac, I will crush him as I would a venomous reptile!"

"You are going in pursuit of the girl?" asked Aubé.

"Most certainly, nor will I rest until I have rescued her!"

"Accept my services," said Montferrand.

"Where am I to turn? What shall I do first? My head is dizzy." He held himself more erect. "But this is no time to give way. Thank you, sir, for your generous offer, of which I may avail myself later."

"I regret to have seemed, even for a moment, the accomplice of these men. My name is Arthur, son of the Marquis de Montferrand. Here is my card."

Fanfar took the bit of shining pasteboard.

"And here is my hand!" added Arthur.

"And now," said Fanfar, after a vigorous exchange of handshaking, "and now we have not a moment to lose!"

There was another disturbance below. A great noise, and a voice shouting, "Open! in the name of the law!"

Fanfar started.

"At last!" cried Aubé. "It is the police; probably by this time the men are arrested."

Fanfar laid his hand on his shoulder, and said rapidly, "No, no; the police of Louis XVIII. do not disturb themselves for such trifles; they are after other game than criminals—" [Pg 200]

"Open, in the name of the king! If not, we force the door!"

"These officers are in pursuit of men who have sworn eternal war against oppression and corruption—who detest a despotic monarchy and demand a free and honest republic!"

"Do you speak of yourself?" asked Montferrand, quickly.

Aubé opened his eyes wide. Certainly, this was a most extraordinary evening!

"You are lost!" cried Montferrand.

"Not yet!" answered Fanfar. "Pray, Monsieur Aubé, hold them in conversation, a few minutes. Good-bye, but remember that I shall rescue Francine." As he spoke, he ran lightly up the upper stairs.

Aubé, according to his instructions, slowly raised the bars of the door, at which the police were impatiently knocking. When at last the door was opened, a crowd poured in, headed by a Police Commissioner.

"Keeping me waiting in this way will cost you dear, let me tell you!" foamed this important functionary.

"But why are you here?" stammered the proprietor of the restaurant.

"I don't suppose we are bound to tell you that, are we? But first, who is that man?" and he pointed to Arthur, who pale and covered with blood, was not especially reassuring in appearance.

"That man, sir, of whom you speak so rudely," said Arthur, with some heat, "is the son of the Marquis de Montferrand." [Pg 201]

"I beg ten thousand pardons!" said the official, in the most obsequious tone, "but this house is a den—"

"A den!" gasped Aubé.

"Yes, a den where the enemies of our beloved king plot together."

"And who are these enemies? What may their names be?"

"Gudel, or Iron Jaws, and a scoundrel named Fanfar."

"Indeed! Very good, sir, if you have come to arrest these men, do not let me detain you!"

Arthur and Aubé exchanged a glance. Fanfar was by this time undoubtedly in safety.

"The house is well watched," continued the Commissioner, "and they cannot escape our vigilance!"

Montferrand started on hearing this. The Commissioner ran up-stairs, followed by his men. He reached the upper floor. An oath was heard.

"The birds have flown!" he shouted.

"They went by the roof!" some one called from below. This some one was Cyprien, who had been on guard in the street, and had seen forms against the sky.

"To the roof, then! And remember your orders, take them alive or dead!"

Cyprien, as agile as a tiger cat, now stood by the side of the Commissioner.

"You must go out this way," he said, pointing to the window.

"Zounds!" muttered the Commissioner, drawing back. [Pg 202]

"Take care!" sneered Cyprien, "the king has his eyes on you!"

Thus cheered and encouraged, the Commissioner stepped out on the narrow cornice.

"There they are!" cried Cyprien. "There they are! They wish to reach the next house. We shall have them! we shall have them!"

Gudel and Fanfar had gone as far as they could. They found they must turn. Fanfar stopped short and seemed to be doing something to a chimney.

"Surrender!" shouted the Commissioner, some distance off.

"Surrender!" repeated Cyprien.

At this moment a man was seen to vault into space; it was Fanfar, who had sprang across the gulf between the two houses. With him he had taken the end of the rope which he had fastened to the chimney. He held the rope so firmly that it made a bridge. Gudel began the perilous voyage.

"At all events, we will have a dead body!" growled the Commissioner, who advanced to cut the rope.

Cyprien did not at first understand.

"Stop!" he shouted. "Stop!"

To kill Gudel was ruin, for he was the only human being who could prove Fanfar's birth. But he was too late, the zealous Commissioner had cut the rope.

"Fool!" shouted Cyprien, and then he listened to hear the dull thud of the body falling on the stones below.

But he heard nothing, for Gudel had not fallen. By a movement more rapid than thought, Fanfar, [Pg 203] divining what was to happen, had thrown himself flat on the roof with his arms extended beyond the gutter, and had shouted to Gudel:

"Hold fast to the rope!"

Iron Jaws snatched the rope between his formidable jaws, and when the rope was cut he simply hung and waited. Fanfar slowly drew him up. It was a magnificent display of energy and strength. And presently Fanfar and Gudel stood side by side.

"Now, gentlemen, it is your turn," said Fanfar.

"No! it is my turn!" shouted Cyprien, taking a pistol from his pocket and firing.

The ball broke a slate which fell into the street. As to Gudel and Fanfar, they were far away and a high chimney hid them from view.

CHAPTER XXVII. [Pg 204]

A GHOST.

Although our two friends had made their escape for the time being, they were by no means in an enviable position, for it must be confessed that midnight on the roof of an unknown house is not very delightful. Iron Jaws and Fanfar had accomplished a miracle of strength and audacity, but what were they to do next?

"I must say that I should like a few hours of rest," said Gudel.

"Yes, and we must have a little talk, but where I know not."

Fanfar's tone struck his friend as being rather depressed.

"What is it?" said Gudel. "You have had encounters with the police before, and will have again, I imagine."

"It is not that; but first we will walk over these roofs, to the end."

"Very good!"

They started, Fanfar going a little in front. Suddenly he stopped.

"Zounds!" he said, "here is a wide courtyard; it is impossible for us to cross it. We must get down now."

"And how, for Heaven's sake!"

"By taking hold of the gutters and the balconies."

"One would suppose that we were gorillas," sighed Gudel. [Pg 205]

"We must do something!"

"Yes, but I am a little heavy, as you have reason to acknowledge. How can we tell that guards are not below waiting for us. Let us see if we can't get into some window."

"And find the room inhabited?"

"Oh! I will explain that we don't mean to steal, but that we will give him money if he will aid us."

"Very good. Now do you take the lead, I will follow."

Fanfar was strangely preoccupied. While Gudel talked to him a voice was continually repeating in his ear:

"Cinette! Cinette!"

Gudel saw that there was something unusual going on in the mind of his friend. He had been long accustomed to unquestioning obedience to Fanfar. Ever since La Roulante left him after the attempt at assassination, Gudel had been a different man and subject to fits of great depression from which Fanfar alone could rouse him, and when Fanfar rushed into his room calling out, "The police! the police!" Gudel followed him without a question.

Suddenly Gudel stumbled. Fanfar caught him, but it was too late. There was a crash of broken glass. Gudel had broken one of those small windows in the roof which landlords consider sufficient for tenants who pay only sixty francs per annum for their attics. And from this window emerged a long, strange, white object, which was probably a man, as it terminated in a white [Pg 206] cotton nightcap. This strange form had two long arms. One hand held a candle and the other sheltered it from the wind. There was a yell of amazement from their throats.

"Fanfar!"

"Bobichel!"

"I thought you were dead, Bobichel," said Iron Jaws, severely.

"No, I am not dead; but I was asleep."

"You are alone!"

"Of course!"

"Then you can take us in."

Bobichel uttered an oath. "Of course I can!" he shouted.

It was clear that he was not a ghost. Ghosts do not swear nor carry candles in their hands. Finally the three were seated in a small attic about four yards square. They all talked at once.

How did Bobichel get there? Where had he been?

He had been taken to the hospital and there detained on account of some peculiarities in his condition, which greatly excited the curiosity of the medical students. One day as Bobichel was recovering, he was in the garden and noticed a door in the wall, and saw that the gardener had left his key in it. He selected the moment judiciously, and finally found himself on the road to Paris, where he had arrived that very morning. He had not a sou, but he had rented this garret which the landlord had had on his hands for three months by reason of the rats, and therefore nobly refrained from asking money in advance. A bundle of straw had taken his remaining five [Pg 207] sous, and on this the ex-clown extended himself, thinking of the past and resolutely closing his eyes to the future. His first care was to regain his strength, which had been sorely taxed by his journey. While half asleep, he had heard steps on the roof, and with a vague belief that the whole hospital force were in pursuit of him, he resolved to brave them. Fate had brought to him, however, his two best friends—Gudel and Fanfar.

After they had heard this explanation, it became Bobichel's turn to question.

"Let Fanfar tell you," said Gudel. "I really know nothing except that he bade me fly, that my neck has been nearly broken, and that he saved my life; but why I have been obliged to run about over roofs in this way, I really can't say."

"Perhaps you are still conspiring?" asked Bobichel, innocently.

Fanfar shouted with laughter. "Yes," he replied, "and more than ever!"

"Tell me," asked the clown, "is it a difficult trade? I have nothing in the world to do, and I must have some occupation, of course."

"We will see about that later."

"You have said nothing about Mademoiselle Caillette."

"She is in safety. She knew nothing of the pursuit of the police. To-morrow, before she begins to be uneasy, we will send her word where we are, and bid her come to us."

The clock struck two. [Pg 208]

"Do you hear that, Bobichel?" said Fanfar. "You are far from strong, and must rest."

"No, no. I have found you, and there is rest in that!"

"My dear fellow, you must get yourself into the best possible condition if you join us. You will need your legs, I assure you. Sleep, Bobichel, sleep."

The truth was that, in spite of his good intentions, Bobichel was dead with sleep, and presently he tumbled upon his mattress, and loud snores informed the two friends that he had succumbed to their entreaties. Then, and not until then, Fanfar leaned toward Gudel.

"You will admit," he said, "that I do not easily become a prey to illusions, but the truth is, that I am greatly disturbed by something that has happened. Will you answer a few questions?"

"Certainly, my boy—any questions."

"You know, my second father, the strange accident by which I was thrown in your way. You have told me of the researches you made in the village of Leigoutte. You learned, did you not, that my mother perished in a fire?"

"Yes—a fire set by the Cossacks."

"And my father?"

"Died on the field of battle, in the defence of France!"

"I am haunted by a dim remembrance of a flight through the darkness, leading my little sister by my side, and then she seemed to vanish."

"And you have never seen her since?"

"No; but I have never forgotten her, and I am convinced that if she is living she has not forgotten her brother. Ah! when I think of all this, I hate more than ever the oppressors of France, who have opened a road to the throne over dead bodies!" [Pg 209]

"But why are you troubled with these thoughts to-day?"

"I will tell you. My sister's name was Francine, but we called her Cinette, and this evening a girl was carried away by violence from the *Veau Sauté*."

"And that Aubé has such a good face!"

"Oh! he was not concerned in this villainy. The crime was committed by a man who has more than once crossed our path—the Vicomte de Talizac!"

"Oh! what a family that is!" cried Gudel. "It was his lacquey, or his father's, who denounced us to-night!"

"This is not all. The truth is, Gudel—you will probably think me mad—but I am convinced that the girl who was carried off—the one called Cinette—"

"You mean that you believe her to be your—"

"I can't reason," interrupted Fanfar. "It is the name of my little sister, and the conviction is unalterable that this girl is my sister. And now I can do nothing for her, and she in such deadly peril!" He stopped short. "Gudel," he exclaimed, "you have never seen me shrink from danger?"

"Not I."

"And yet, to-night I feel as weak as a child."

Tears came into the eyes of Fanfar as he spoke. His nerves were thoroughly shaken by the exertions he had made to save Gudel and himself. [Pg 210]

Bobichel here lifted himself up.

"Fanfar," he said, "let me help you!"

At these kind words uttered by this honest, faithful voice, Fanfar started. He had no right to despair, he said to himself, when he had such friends.

"You are right, Bobichel," he cried. "I have no right to talk of my energy, for I am trembling like a woman!"

"I should like to tell you what I think, sir," the clown stammered, "though I do not wish to take a liberty, but didn't you say you thought you had found your sister?"

"Oh! do not say that!"

"Yes, I must say it, and I think it would be best if you made up your mind that it was she, and acted on that supposition."

"I think you are right. I am told that this girl lives with a poor paralytic. I will go to her and question her. From her replies I shall be able to judge if chance has really put me on the track of her whom I lost so long ago. But we ought to follow these scoundrels at once!"

"I will see to them!" said Iron Jaws.

"Can you give me the smallest clue?"

"Only that of Robeccal's name."

"Robeccal's name!" exclaimed Bobichel. "If he has anything to do with this matter I will soon finish him up."

Fanfar laid his hand on Gudel's shoulder.

"My friend," he said, "I hesitate to touch an unhealed wound, but we must speak frankly to each other. La Roulante and this Robeccal went away together. This woman was thoroughly vicious; it is difficult to imagine the scale of vice to which she would not fall. I am sorry to pain you, but I feel sure if Robeccal has assisted in carrying away this girl that he has placed her with La Roulante. Therefore, while I go to see Cinette's sick friend, you will hunt up this woman and her accomplice. Will you do this, Gudel?" [Pg 211]

Gudel, whose face had been buried in his hands, now looked up.

"Fanfar," he said, "were I to die of shame and grief, I will obey you, for I should be doing a good act."

"This girl must be saved! I dare not indulge in the hope that she is Cinette, and, moreover, I need all my courage. Gudel, your hand. Bobichel, I rely on you!"

These friends in a cordial grasp of their hands, exchanged a solemn oath which bound them to the sacred cause of justice.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

[Pg 212]

CINETTE! CINETTE!

Francine's chamber is dark. The little bed with its white curtains looks as if it were built of marble. There is not a sound. The room is empty. The hours pass on, and still Francine does not return. Her absence excites great wonder in the house, for she is always in very early. "Could anything have happened to her?" one person asked another, but not a voice breathed a word reflecting on the girl's purity. Had any one known where she had gone, some one would have started in search of her. The porter looked once more down the street; the clock had struck twelve. No one came.

In the gray, chilly dawn, a hand slowly pushed open the door of Cinette's room. It is the mad woman. She instinctively knows that Francine never goes to sleep at night without kissing her. She has not felt those dewy lips touch her forehead this night. Restless and uneasy this sick woman, who for years has hardly left her bed, has crawled to Cinette's room. She is familiar with it, for she has many times implored Francine to take her there; and when the girl succeeded in doing so, the old woman laughed to see the curtains so white and the flowers so gay.

[Pg 213]

She reaches the bed, and feels with her poor withered hands for the girl's head. Cinette is not there, and the poor creature realizes it and weeps in agony. She would have reminded one of an Hindoo idol had she been seen. An hour elapsed, but the poor deformed woman still lies there.

Suddenly she raises her head. She hears rapid steps on the stairs. When Cinette went out she had locked the door of her room. The porter to be sure had another key. When some one knocked at the porter's lodge he was not yet up, and answered gruffly that the Marquise had not come in and the old woman could not move. There were several rapid knocks on the door.

"Open! open!" a voice called.

The voice had a strange, familiar tone. She listens. And Fanfar, for it is he, repeats his demand.

"In the name of Francine, I beg you to open the door. It is for her sake."

By what miracle did this paralyzed frame struggle to her feet? She takes a step—then another.

"Make haste!" said Fanfar.

The woman obeys. She turns the key in the lock, with many efforts, but it is done. Fanfar enters, and in the pale morning light is confronted by this horrible apparition. He contemplates her with horror and pity.

"Madame," he said, "is not Francine here?"

She did not reply. She is looking at him earnestly.

"She has been carried off, by a man named Talizac."

The sick woman tried to repeat this name.

[Pg 214]

"Tell me," continued Fanfar, "the life of this girl, who cares for you, who loves you, may depend on what you tell me. Have you ever seen any man by the name of Talizac here? And a woman of great size known as La Roulante, has she never been here to propose an infamous bargain?"

But he is interrupted. The paralytic falls upon her knees, and stretching out her arms, cries:

"Jacques! Jacques!"

"Who is this terrible creature," asks Jacques, "who calls me by the name of my boyhood?"

Suddenly a strange idea flashes into his mind. He looks eagerly into the eyes of the poor woman. He recognizes her; he leans over her.

"You called me Jacques, did you not? Yes, that was my name, when I was a boy in a village among the mountains. My father's name was Simon, Simon Fougère, and I had a little sister Cinette."

The woman quivered from head to foot. She threw her arms around his neck.

"Jacques! my child! My name is Françoise, and I am the widow of Simon Fougère."

"Mother! dear mother!"

This shock has been so great that the vail that obscured the poor woman's brain was rent in twain. She sees, she knows, she understands. It is he—it is the boy she held on her knees, in those days so long ago. He took her tenderly in his arms, and both weep.

"Ah! dear mother," he said, "you braved death for the sake of your children. How did you escape?"

But the momentary glimmer of reason had in a measure vanished, and when he spoke of Cinette she did not seem to be aware of who the girl was.

[Pg 215]

"You must listen to me, mother," said Fanfar, rapidly. "Jacques was not alone in that inn. There

was another child; she was small, she had light curls."

His voice was so sympathetic and persuasive that Françoise saw it all, saw the little rosy face once more.

What was to be done? Time was passing, and now Fanfar knew that she who was in the power of a scoundrel, was his little sister Francine. He sees a miniature hanging on the wall, he takes it down.

"Yes, it is she—it is Cinette!" he cries.

The sick woman snatches it from his hand. She looks at it.

"Yes, it is my child."

"And you never knew it before?"

"No, she called me mamma, but I never called her daughter."

"And, mother, your daughter is in danger."

"Ah! I knew it, she did not kiss me to-night. Where is she?"

"In the power of a scoundrel, of the Vicomte de Talizac."

"Talizac!" The sick woman was troubled by the name, but she could not grasp the memories it had aroused.

The door opened hastily, and Gudel appeared.

"Gudel! Have you found Robeccal or La Roulante?"

"They have vanished. They have been living in la Rue des Venaigrurs, but last night they announced that they were about to move."

"And this is all you have discovered?"

"All."

"Then Gudel, I must tell you that this unfortunate creature I have in my arms is my mother, and Francine is my sister." [Pg 216]

Gudel looked utterly aghast. Before he could speak, Bobichel appeared.

"I beg your pardon, sir," he said to Fanfar, "but knowing that the sick lady was alone, I went for some one."

Caillette stepped forward.

The girl said in a low voice to Fanfar:

"Will you allow me to take care of your mother?"

She then turned to Françoise, and kissed her as Cinette would have done.

"Good, kind souls!" murmured Fanfar, "with the assistance of such people we ought to succeed."

He kissed his mother again, then turning to Gudel and Bobichel, he cried:

"Come with me! And may Eternal Justice be with us also!"

CHAPTER XXIX. [Pg 217]

A CONSPIRACY.

When Francine found herself in the power of these scoundrels she fainted away, and these men carried her over their shoulders as if she had been a bag of flour, perfectly indifferent to her beauty.

Robeccal suddenly bade them halt. They had reached the vile place known as the Cour de Bretagne, a part of Paris known for its poverty and vice.

"I think it is about time!" grumbled one of Robeccal's men in reply.

"Oh! I suppose you thought you were to be paid for nothing, did you?"

Without heeding the growling of these fellows, Robeccal stepped up to a door and knocked. It was opened by a person who stood back in the shadow, and a hurried conversation took place. Satisfied apparently with what he heard, Robeccal bade his men follow him. They went to Belleville, which at that time was an excessively pretty place, as almost all the houses of any pretension had gardens and grounds. Robeccal had been extremely adroit in diverting suspicion and the observation of the people they encountered. He now knocked at a door in a wall half

hidden by overhanging ivy.

"Who is there?" called a woman's voice.

"Robec and the kid," was the reply. [Pg 218]

The door opened noiselessly on well-oiled hinges.

"Come in, all of you." It was Roulante who spoke.

Francine was at once carried to a little cottage at the foot of a long garden, where, still unconscious, she was laid on a couch.

Then Robeccal paid his assistants the sum agreed upon. They were not altogether satisfied, but he managed to get rid of them.

La Roulante was unchanged since the day when she and her lover discussed the assassination of Iron Jaws.

"I have done well, have I not?" asked Robeccal, with a friendly tap on the massive shoulders of this monstrosity.

"Her beauty is not marred, I hope?" she asked, anxiously.

"I am not such a fool as that! But I am afraid that the handkerchief was too tight. She is confoundedly pretty, that is a fact!"

"What is that to you?" asked the giantess, angrily. "Now give me that bottle."

"What are you going to do?"

"None of your business! Hand it here."

The woman poured out something that looked like wine, and dropped a spoonful between the girl's lips. She had so much difficulty in doing so, that Robeccal took a knife from his pocket, and inserted it between Francine's close shut teeth. As soon as the liquid disappeared down the girl's throat she started.

"You are not poisoning her?" asked Robeccal.

"Am I a fool? Hark! I hear a carriage. Take this girl up-stairs." [Pg 219]

Robeccal snatched Francine from the sofa, and ran lightly up the stairs.

The room above was elegantly furnished, and had long windows looking out upon the garden, which seemed to stretch out indefinitely. In reality it ended at no very great distance in a wall sixteen feet in height.

As Robeccal laid the girl on the bed, he looked at her again with some anxiety. She was absolutely motionless.

There came a knock at the door. Robeccal started.

"That must be he!" said La Roulante.

It was in fact Talizac, who had arrived. Fernando was with him, but the Vicomte had knocked with the handle of his cane. It was not the signal agreed upon, and the door was not opened. Suddenly Frederic uttered an oath.

"Oh! it is he!" said Robeccal. "That is better than a visiting card!"

But La Roulante insisted on a little argument through the door before she would consent to move the heavy bolts.

"Damned sorceress!" cried Talizac, "you deserve that I should cut your face with my cane, for keeping me waiting so long."

La Roulante made no reply to this gentle address, and Talizac, with blood-stained face and torn clothing, entered the house, followed by Fernando, who was as dignified and correct in costume as he always was.

When Talizac reached the salon, he dropped into a chair. "Water! for the love of Heaven, give me some water!" he murmured. He felt almost ill, and would have been glad of a few hours of rest. "Is she here?" he asked. [Pg 220]

"Yes, she is here," answered La Roulante.

Talizac rose. "I must repair the disorder of my toilette," he said. "Robeccal, come with me."

On Talizac's return, he asked La Roulante where the Marquise was.

"Oh! she is asleep," was the reply.

"Show me where she is, and move a little faster!"

"It strikes me, sir, that you are not over polite," muttered Robeccal.

"Let him have his own way," sneered the giantess; "he is in a hurry to see his darling, and has no time to be civil!" She made a grotesque reverence as she spoke. She preceded the Vicomte to show him the way. "Do you know," she cried, stopping on the stairs, "that the girl is as pretty as a pink."

"That is none of your affairs," answered Talizac, roughly, "I pay you to serve me, not to talk!"

"You are a little hard on us, I think," said La Roulante, with a sneer, "but I suppose when people are rich they can say and do as they please!"

"Is that the room?" Talizac asked, as he reached the top of the stairs, "if so, open the door at once, or I will force it!"

"No, you won't injure my house like that! But you want to see her, do you? Very well, I will show her to you, then."

She quickly slid back a narrow panel in the door, which permitted him to look into the room. [Pg 221]

"Look in, gentlemen and ladies," said La Roulante, in the sing-song tone of a showman at the circus, "look in, it won't cost you anything!" And then the creature laughed.

Talizac did not heed her, but leaning toward the open panel looked at Francine, who lay with her arms folded on her breast like a child. Her hair was loosened, and nothing could have been lovelier than this face with its delicate features, reminding one of Raphael's pictures. Talizac looked, and forgot that this child was the victim of a miserable conspiracy. He was so impressed by her beauty and her innocence that he was ready to kneel before her. But La Roulante touched his arm with a cynical laugh.

"Open the door, I say!"

La Roulante closed the panel with a snap, and slowly drew a key from her pocket and stood with it in her fingers, and then said quietly and firmly:

"If I unlock that door, it will cost you twenty thousand francs!"

Talizac started back. "What do you mean?" he exclaimed.

"Just what I say, twenty thousand francs!"

"But this is abominable. Have I not paid the sum agreed upon?"

"A trifle, yes; but that won't do!"

"It is robbery, bare-faced robbery—"

"None of that, sir, you are not so honest yourself, that you can afford to taunt others!"

He looked at her in astonishment, and then rushed at the door as if to force it open. She called for Robeccal, who hurried to obey her summons. Talizac called Fernando, and Robeccal turned back. Drawing an enormous knife, he said, fiercely: [Pg 222]

"Don't you interfere! My wife will settle her own matters with this gentleman!"

Fernando's attitude during the fight between Frederic and Montferrand has already informed us as to the courage of this man. Perhaps he was wise in not risking his life to defend Talizac, whom he estimated at his proper value. He was interested in the Fongereues family only as an emissary of that Society which at that time labored to strangle Liberalism at its birth.

"Very good!" answered Fernando, shrugging his shoulders indifferently, but as he did not propose to be mixed up in any disagreeable affair in this house, he determined to take himself off.

The giantess was not alarmed by Talizac's mad attempt. She calmly lifted him by the collar and landed him on the stairs, half way down.

"Robbers! Murderers!" shouted the Vicomte.

"Confound you! hold your tongue!" said Robeccal, flourishing the knife which had such an effect on Fernando.

"Why do you not keep your word?" angrily asked the Vicomte; "you promised—"

"People like us do not keep our promises," answered La Roulante, cynically. "You paid us for carrying off the girl, you paid us for giving her a shelter; we have done both. But if you wish to enter that room it will cost you twenty thousand francs!" [Pg 223]

"But that is an enormous sum!" moaned Talizac.

"Not to a man like you, who has a grandee for a father, and a mother rolling in wealth. She has diamonds, plenty of them!"

"Wretches that you are!"

"Thank you! I don't care for any more of these hard names, if it is all the same to you! And now let me tell you, if you don't hand over this money that the police will be at your heels."

At the word police, Fernando went to the Vicomte. "Come," he said, "we had better not remain in

this cut-throat place. You must give the matter up, that is all there is to be said."

"No, I tell you, no!" Feeling in his pocket, Talizac drew out a handful of gold and flung it at the woman.

"Take this," he cried, "and unlock that door!"

La Roulante counted the money. "No," she replied, "this is but thirty-two louis."

"Come," persisted Fernando, dragging Talizac away.

"Call again!" shouted the woman. "You need not be in a hurry, but call again!"

And the door closed.

"My idea is a good one," said La Roulante to Robeccal. "He will come back, and will bring the twenty thousand francs!"

CHAPTER XXX.

[Pg 224]

MACHIAVELLI & CO.

Day was breaking. The Marquis de Fongereues was standing in his dressing-room, listening with frowning brow to Cyprien, who was narrating the events of the night.

"I assure you, sir," said the valet, obsequiously, "that every precaution was taken, and yet we failed."

"There is one comfort—that Fanfar is every day compromising himself more deeply with these conspirators."

"Yes, and when the hour comes, Fanfar's condemnation is certain."

"But if he escapes us?"

"Impossible! We shall have him, even if we are forced to put the entire police on his track!"

A lacquey knocked at the door and entered.

"The Marquis de Montferrand desires to see you, sir, on a matter of great importance."

"Show him up at once!" said his master, who added to Cyprien: "Do not go away. I do not like this visit—I may need your services. Take your position behind that portière."

The heavy folds had scarcely fallen over him when the Marquis appeared. He was a noble-looking, white haired old man. He was excessively pale.

"Monsieur de Fongereues," he said, "we are morally responsible for the crimes our children commit, are we not?" [Pg 225]

"How do you mean?"

"I speak of the Vicomte de Talizac, who is dishonoring himself, dishonors you, and compromises the cause to which you belong!"

"My son is young—if he has committed some peccadillo——"

"Peccadillo is hardly the word to use. Are you thus lenient toward one who is some day to bear your name?"

Fongereues writhed under this severe language, and yet he tried to contain himself, for De Montferrand was a precious ally. It was he who had induced Monsieur de Salves to accept the overtures of marriage made by the De Fongereues family.

"Speak," he said, "speak frankly. Your age and the long intimacy existing between our families give you the right to do so."

"The Vicomte de Talizac has this night endeavored to murder my son!"

"Impossible, sir!"

"My son never lies. He endeavored to prevent an infamous act, and Talizac attacked him with a knife. Arthur in return slapped the Vicomte's face."

Fongereues started forward.

"Wait!" said the old gentleman. "Hear my tale. Talizac paid scoundrels to abduct a girl, a street singer. My son became disgusted with the adventure, and it was then that the Vicomte attacked him. To-morrow the journals will all have this tale. I shall lay the facts before Monsieur de Salves, as it was I who acted as intermediary in the proposed marriage." [Pg 226]

Fongereues became livid. He staggered, and caught at a table for support.

At this moment a portière was lifted, and Magdalena, Talizac's mother, appeared. Fongereues exclaimed:

"Madame! your son is a scoundrel. He is ruined, as are we all! This is the result of the education you have given him!"

Magdalena looked perfectly unmoved.

"Monsieur de Montferrand," she said, "I am aware that my son has been unfortunate enough to quarrel with yours. I come with his apologies."

"Apologies!" repeated both gentlemen, in amazement.

"You are astonished, I see, but remember that I am a mother, though I bear the name of de Fongereues. I know that my son has been greatly in the wrong. I know the whole story, and I cannot see why there should be so much said because the Vicomte de Talizac chanced to admire a daughter of the people. You talk of crime, of infamy. These are large words for a small matter. But the quarrel between the young men is of more importance. They had both been drinking, and I sincerely trust that such folly will be forgotten in view of the old friendship between the families. And I authorize you to kiss my hand as a token of forgiveness and reconciliation."

This little speech had been delivered with such assurance and ease that the old Marquis was nearly taken off his feet. The fair Magdalena was still beautiful. [Pg 227]

Monsieur de Montferrand bowed over the fair hand, and Fongereues wondered and admired.

"And now let us talk a little," the lady said, as she seated herself. "I must not omit to say that my son promises not to see this girl again—it was but a passing fever. I realize that, and I promise to use all my influence with my son to induce him to forget this affair. But what are we to do to silence the scandal which will certainly be on every tongue to-morrow? Yes, that is the first consideration. The girl will be free in a few hours, and her silence can be bought. I am particularly anxious that there shall be no talk, as it would interfere greatly with my plans."

Fongereues ventured to ask to what plans his wife referred.

"You are aware," she said, "that for some time I have been anxious to obtain for my son a captaincy in His Majesty's Guards."

"Well?" asked her husband, breathlessly.

"I have received the royal promise, and to-day Talizac will have his commission, and also the order of Saint-Louis."

This was an immense joy to Fongereues, and from that moment the monarchist—the Marquis de Montferrand—felt that Talizac, a captain in the King's Guard, could do no evil.

"Forgive a mother's vanity," continued Magdalena. "I have sent out a large number of invitations for this evening, and as soon as the officer of His Majesty's household hands to my son the [Pg 228] commission which he has won by his merits and the badge of the Legion of Honor, Monsieur de Fongereues will officially announce the marriage of his son to Mademoiselle Salves. I rely on your aid, Monsieur de Montferrand."

"Ah! Madame," cried the old Marquis, "you are excessively clever, and you are an angel!"

She smiled.

"Arthur will come with you, I am sure, so that no cloud shall remain in our sky."

"Certainly, Madame, my son will come. Captain of the Guards—Chevalier de Saint-Louis. Zounds! that is a good deal for one day!"

"To-night, then, I shall see you, Marquis!" said Magdalena, as she rose from her chair.

Montferrand raised her hands to his lips once more, and took his leave.

Instantly Fongereues turned to his wife.

"Is this true?" he asked.

She shrugged her shoulders disdainfully, and left the room in silence. She went to her son's chamber.

"It is all settled," she said to him. "In a few hours you will have the twenty thousand francs you need to silence this scandal, and you will try to make yourself worthy of the favor of your king."

As soon as his mother left the room, Frederic sent to the house at Belleville, by a trusty messenger, the following note:

"I will be with you at four o'clock—shall bring the sum required. I desire that you shall leave me alone in the house with——you know."

CHAPTER XXXI.

TRIUMPH.

A triumph like this was, of course, to be celebrated by La Roulante and Robeccal after their own fashion. They sat opposite each other at a table covered with bottles. In the centre lay the bag of gold. As they talked they played with it, making it up in little piles and arranging it in figures.

"We will buy a little place in the country, now," said La Roulante, as she filled her glass.

"Why does the girl sleep like this?" asked Robeccal.

"Oh! it is a secret that I learned some time ago—to make little girls submissive."

There was a sudden sound, a long, shivering sigh from above stairs.

"Did you hear that?" asked Robeccal, in a startled tone.

"It is nothing!" answered La Roulante, superciliously. "It is only the girl waking up at last!"

"But she will scream, I am sure!"

"Let her, if she dare!" and the giantess clenched her enormous fist. "I would crush her to jelly if she did!"

"And then you would lose the twenty thousand francs!"

The woman nodded in a tipsy manner.

"That's so!" she answered. "I had best go and talk to the Princess, anyway." [Pg 230]

Another long sigh.

"I am coming! I am coming!" grunted La Roulante, slowly feeling her way up the stairs that creaked under her weight. She drew the key from her pocket with considerable difficulty, and finally succeeded in opening the door.

The young girl lay in the same position, but she seemed oppressed by a nightmare, for big tears rolled down her cheeks and sighs rent her breast.

La Roulante went to the side of the bed.

"Well, my child," she said, endeavoring to soften her harsh voice, "how are you to-night? Do you want anything?"

Francine's eyelids fluttered, and then slowly opened. A look of terrible horror came on her face as she beheld this most repulsive creature.

"Where am I?" faintly ejaculated the poor child.

"You are with good friends, who are anxious to make you happy."

Francine frowned. She was evidently trying to remember what had taken place.

La Roulante grew bolder. She seated herself on the foot of the bed.

"Virtue is a very good thing," she said, "but it neither feeds you nor clothes you. And it is rather a hard thing to starve and be cold when you are young, and then die in a hospital when you grow old. If a girl only realized this, she would never refuse what a nice young fellow offered!"

Francine started up with a burning face. [Pg 231]

"What are you saying?" she cried. "But I do not wish to understand. Where am I?" She wrung her hands. "I remember now! I was gagged and carried away. I am not an ignorant child—I know too well the wickedness of this world, and I understand all. A villain, whose name my lips shall never pronounce, has placed me in this woman's house." Francine grasped La Roulante's arm. "Move aside," she said, "let me pass!"

La Roulante now stood in front of the door.

"Listen to me," said Francine. "I will forgive you if you let me go now. If you refuse, I will call for aid, and I will denounce you to the police!"

"It is too late, little girl, too late! Your lover was here with you all night!"

Francine uttered a terrific shriek and rushed to the window. She threw it open, and leaning out, cried:

"Help! Help!"

La Roulante immediately seized her and pulled her back. Robeccal ran in. The girl struggled until, breathless and exhausted, she was thrown on the floor.

"Give me that bottle!" said La Roulante.

Robeccal understood, as did poor Francine, who resolutely closed her lips. The man brutally

pried them open with his fingers, while the woman poured a teaspoonful down the girl's throat, who in another moment lay unconscious.

Then La Roulante and Robeccal put the room in order, and going out, closed the door and returned to their wine below. They began to play cards, while waiting for the arrival of Frederic, from whom they had received the note. [Pg 232]

The weather was still stormy, and about six o'clock Frederic, wrapped in a cloak, arrived. As soon as he rapped on the door the giantess opened it, but barred all passage.

"Have you the money?" she asked.

"Yes, yes—give me the key!"

Talizac threw down a pocketbook, and the giantess, with most exaggerated respect, pointed to the stairs.

As soon as Talizac had left the lower floor, she turned to Robeccal.

"And now we will make ourselves scarce!"

Hardly had the door closed on their retreating forms than an angry cry rang through the house. Talizac rushed from Francine's room. The girl had disappeared.

CHAPTER XXXII. [Pg 233]

SURPRISES.

By what miracle had Francine vanished? How could she with her frail strength escape from that room, situated as we have said on the second floor of this house, and from the garden surrounded on all sides by walls which no man could climb.

When these wretches gave Francine the narcotic, they in their eagerness gave her too much, and the girl was utterly prostrated. She lay for an hour motionless while her jailers played cards and drank; and then her pulse began to flutter and nervous contractions shook her frail form, still she did not open her eyes. Her brain was over-excited. Suddenly she started up with eyes wide open, but eyes that saw not. She moved slowly and noiselessly. Did she reason? Not in the least. Instinct was her only guide.

Have you ever when half asleep heard the same words repeated over and over again? In Francine's brain the words "too late! too late!" were repeated with the regularity of a pendulum. The old woman had struck a cruel blow. The girl had believed for a few moments that she was dishonored and this thought now haunted her vaguely. She placed her feet on the floor, then glided toward the door. She tried it and found it locked. She turned to the window; she slowly and gently opened the blinds, and then stepped upon the cornice outside; then she feels her way down to another projection where she places one foot and then the other until she finds herself on the ground. She then glides on until she reaches the wall. [Pg 234]

Ah! child, it is useless for you to try! Not so! The clinging vines form a rope-ladder for her light weight. She reaches the top of the wall, and easily descends on the other side. She is saved! But she does not know this, and her pale lips murmur,

"Too late! Too late!"

Where is she going? Ah! she knows not. She feels no fatigue, but goes on and on. She has crossed the outer Boulevard, and moves swiftly on through the now crowded streets, where no one seems to notice her pallor. The fog is so thick that she is but dimly seen. She reaches the bridge over the Saint Martin Canal; here she stops, and leaning over the parapet seems to contemplate the dark water running below. While she stands there, we will see what is taking place in the house she has left.

Robeccal and La Roulante when they left the house, went to take the diligence in the Rue Saint Denis. Their plans had been long made; they meant to return to Robeccal's former home. They were groping their way through the fog, when suddenly Robeccal was lifted from the ground, and then flung some distance, while a voice shouted:

"Scoundrel! I have you at last!"

At the same moment, an iron grasp nailed the giantess to the spot where she stood. The two wretches gasped out the names: [Pg 235]

"Fanfar! Bobichel!"

"Where is Francine?" said Fanfar, sternly.

La Roulante laughed, and would not reply.

"Speak!" said Fanfar. "I know the whole story. Where is that girl?"

La Roulante knew that Fanfar was not to be trifled with, and after all why should she not now tell? She wanted to be free, that she and Robeccal might go far away.

"Take your hand away, and I will tell you."

"The truth, you understand, and make haste."

"Well, the girl is not far away."

"Alone?"

"I do not know."

"Show me the house."

"It is easy enough to find."

"Show me the way."

"No, it was not in the bargain."

"Show me the way."

Bobichel looked upon this delay as worthy of being celebrated, by lifting Robeccal by the skin of his neck as he would have lifted a cat.

These people now took their way to the deserted house.

La Roulante uttered a cry as they reached the house, for the door was open. She ran into the house, and flew toward the stairs. Fanfar was behind her. She beheld the window open.

"Look!" she cried, "he has taken her away!"

"Of whom do you speak?" [Pg 236]

"Of the Vicomte de Talizac."

"Talizac!" exclaimed Fanfar, "would that I could kill that man!"

The house was searched, and found entirely deserted.

A folded paper lay on the table in the lower room. She snatched it up. It contained only these words from Talizac:

"You have infamously swindled me. You have taken the girl away, but I shall find her and be even with you."

"The man lies!" yelled the woman.

Fanfar was nearly stunned. He now had not the smallest clue to Francine.

"Bobichel," he said, sadly. "Fate is against us. Come with me."

"But what am I to do with him?" asked Bobichel, pointing to Robeccal, "Ah! I have it."

He seized a rope and bound Robeccal firmly, and then bundled him into a closet, which he locked and put the key into his pocket. They drove La Roulante out of the house, and locked that door also, and then hurried back to the city.

La Roulante when she was thus left hesitated a moment.

"No," she said, "if I let him out I shall have to divide the money."

And without more thought of Robeccal she too went away.

CHAPTER XXXIII. [Pg 237]

FACE TO FACE.

The hôtel of the Marquis de Fongereues was ablaze with lights. Magdalena having determined that her son's triumph should be dazzling, invitations had been sent to every one of distinction. For a long time rumors had been in circulation adverse to the Fongereues family, and the gay crowd, always ready to desert a falling house, had shown great coolness to them all. But as soon as the favors shown by the king became known at the clubs, the family were quickly reinstated in public opinion.

About nine o'clock carriages began to roll through the streets near the hôtel, the doors of which were thrown wide open to welcome the coming guests, who bore the oldest and noblest names of France.

Fongereues, under an air of great dignity, concealed the joy and pride that swelled his heart. Magdalena was superb in her matronly beauty and her diamonds. Talizac was excessively pale,

his worn face telling the story of his excesses and the excitement of the previous night. Francine's flight, which he believed to have been arranged by the man and woman whom he had employed as his tools, had driven him nearly mad with rage, from which he had not yet recovered.

Suddenly a murmur of admiration ran around the room. Mademoiselle de Salves had just come in. Her mother had with difficulty risen from her sick bed to witness the triumph of her child. [Pg 238]

Irène was certainly very beautiful, and her toilette was characterized by exquisite simplicity. But her face was sad, and the brilliancy of her eyes was due to fever. Why had she come? Why had she not resisted the wishes of her mother? A great change had come over the girl. All her former energy and innumerable caprices had given way to a charming timidity. She was all the time conscious that she concealed a secret in her heart, and that since a certain memorable day she thought of but one person. Her vanity, her patrician pride, all revolted against this truth. The name she repeated over and over again, was that of Fanfar. Whenever she closed her eyes she saw him, haughty and courageous, risking his life to save that of his adopted father. She heard his rich voice and the words he uttered:

"Make yourself beloved."

She struggled with all her power against this infatuation, and had come to Paris. There she saw him again, no longer in his theatrical costume, but dressed like the young men she met in society. He had saved her from being killed by the heavy timber. He had held her a minute in his arms, and she had felt his heart beat against her own. A hundred times since then she had seen him ride past the house, and over and over again she knew that he had thrown flowers over the wall. With trembling joy she had carried these flowers to the privacy of her own rooms. She questioned them, but they were mute and kept the secret that Fanfar had undoubtedly confided to them. [Pg 239]

Who was this Fanfar? Irène's imagination ran riot. She heard him called a conspirator whom the police watched. He belonged to the party who aimed at the overthrowal of the royal power. How did one so lowly venture to menace one so high? Irène meditated and studied; her youthful mind awoke to great truths, and she realized that men like Fanfar were working for a great cause, and her soul was filled with noble wrath against those persons who were ruining and dishonoring France. How solitary she felt herself! How ignorant! How she longed to interrogate Fanfar on these great subjects. But she well knew that this was an impossible dream. He was far away from her, and love had made her timid. She ceased to struggle, but all the time asked herself why he did not come to save her from the fate hourly drawing nearer. She knew that her mother had promised her hand to the Vicomte de Talizac, and she knew that if she made any resistance it would break her mother's heart; but as the hour drew near when her sacrifice was to be consummated, Irène felt herself very weak.

She entered the Fongereues salon in a state of suppressed excitement, very pale but very beautiful. The Marquis met her and drew her arm through his. This marriage was his salvation. He, too, thought of Fanfar with a certain pity, for he knew that this mountebank, as he scornfully called him, was the only man who had the right to call himself the Marquis de Fongereues.

Irène's arrival was the signal for the opening of the ball. The orchestra began to play a waltz. Then came a sudden silence. A magnificent person entered, an officer of the Royal Guard, in his white and gold uniform. He was received by the Marquis de Fongereues. [Pg 240]

"Marquis," he said, "I come in the name of the king."

Every one listened with bated breath. Fongereues was radiant.

"Desirous of recompensing services rendered to the holy cause of monarchy, His Majesty has condescended to lend a favorable ear to certain applications, and, Monsieur, I am the bearer of the commission which confers on your son the rank of lieutenant in the King's Guards."

Magdalena laid her hand on Frederic's shoulder.

"Talizac," she said, "remember that your life and the lives of the Fongereues belong to the king."

Talizac bowed low, and as he turned he gave Irène a look of triumph. She, poor girl, knew that her fate was sealed.

"How happy you will be!" whispered her mother, tenderly.

"Happy!" repeated Irène, drearily.

But this was not all. The Royal Envoy had not completed his mission. La Vicomte de Talizac was made a Chevalier de Saint-Louis.

"*Vive le Roi!*" cried the women, gayly.

Monsieur de Montferrand turned to his son Arthur. "You see, sir," he said, in a severe tone, "how our King, a worthy son of Henri IV., rewards those whom he finds worthy of his protection." [Pg 241]

Arthur de Montferrand had, in obedience to his father's wishes, accompanied him to this entertainment. The two young men exchanged a few words of feigned cordiality, but Arthur felt the most profound contempt for the Vicomte; while the image of Francine in the power of those scoundrels haunted him perpetually.

Fernando did not make his appearance, and Arthur dared not talk to any one else of this miserable affair in which he had been engaged. He listened with a shudder to the congratulations and compliments showered upon the Vicomte, who finally had the audacity to go up to Arthur and demand his felicitations.

Arthur started, and said low in his ear, "I will congratulate you, sir, when the mark upon your cheek, which I imprinted there, is no longer to be seen."

Talizac uttered an exclamation, but Monsieur de Montferrand, suspecting what was going on, stepped forward.

"Arthur," he said sternly, "apologize to the Vicomte for your rash words, or leave this house!"

Arthur looked reproachfully at his father, and moved toward the door. At the same moment a great tumult was heard in the hall.

"What can it be?" said De Fongereues, nervously.

A door was flung open, servants were thrust aside, and a man bearing the inanimate form of a young girl, entered the ball-room.

"Fanfar!" cried Arthur de Montferrand. It was, indeed, Fanfar.

Standing in the centre of the ball-room, for no man ventured to oppose his progress, he addressed himself to the crowd. [Pg 242]

"Gentlemen," he said, "behold the body of the unhappy girl whom the Vicomte de Talizac has murdered!"

There was a moment of silence, then the women screamed and fled, while the men turned pale and looked at each other.

Talizac caught at the mantel for support. Fongereues had heard Arthur utter the name of Fanfar, and shuddered at the ill-omen.

From Francine's drenched garments water was dripping upon the floor, and the pale face rested on Fanfar's shoulder.

The Marquis hastened forward. "Who is this man? What is he doing here?" he cried.

"Monsieur," said Fanfar, "a crime has been committed, the guilty must be punished, and this guilt is upon your son's head. You, gentlemen, seem to think that to your rank everything is permitted. Behold a young girl who, pure and industrious, toiled for her daily bread. This Vicomte de Talizac abducted her with the assistance of his paid emissaries. The poor creature, driven to despair, committed suicide. This is what your son has done, Marquis! Can you conceive of a more cowardly or infamous act?"

And Fanfar, with head erect and lightning in his eyes, looked with contempt on the people about him.

Arthur rushed to his side. "Dead!" he cried, "is she dead?"

Fanfar gently laid Francine upon the floor. "Is there no one among all these ladies who will see if this girl lives? Beats there not one heart under all this silk and velvet?" [Pg 243]

A woman advanced and knelt by the side of Francine. It was Irène de Salves.

"What does this senseless comedy mean?" asked the Marquis de Fongereues, angrily.

"It is no comedy, it is a horrible tragedy," answered Fanfar, coldly. "Ask what explanations you please from your son; he must answer you. See how he trembles; ask him if what I have said is not true?"

Talizac made a violent effort, and turning to his father, said, "This man lies!"

"And I, sir, swear that he speaks the truth!" cried Arthur de Montferrand. "Ah! Monsieur de Talizac, you forget too quickly; but my memory recalls the fact that the marks now on your face were imprinted yesterday by my hand, when you attacked me with a knife, because I endeavored to prevent you from committing this crime!"

"Liar!" shouted Talizac. Then turning to the crowd of spectators: "Gentlemen," he said, "I am the victim of a most monstrous calumny, and I call on you to treat this scoundrel with his trumped-up tale as he deserves!"

Not one moved. Fanfar, with folded arms, stood looking at them.

"She lives!" cried Irène. "She breathes! Mother, dear mother, permit this girl to be carried to our home. I will bring her back to life; you will give me permission?" she asked, turning to Fanfar. [Pg 244]

"She is my sister!" said Fanfar.

Irène imprinted a kiss on Francine's brow. This was her reply to Fanfar's words.

Talizac ran to the door of the salon and summoned the lacqueys. "Here, take this man away!"

And, as they crowded in, Fanfar said: "Who dares lay a hand on me?"

"I do!" answered a voice behind him, as a hand was laid on his shoulder. "In the name of the king, I arrest you!"

The man who uttered these words wore a white scarf, fringed with gold. Soldiers filled every doorway.

"Monsieur," said the Magistrate, to Fongereues, "a man has just been found endeavoring to conceal himself in the apartments of His Majesty. He had arms concealed about his person, and did not hesitate to confess that he came with the intention of killing the king."

A cry of horror ran around the room. Fongereues was overjoyed. Cyprien had kept his word.

"And this man," continued the Magistrate, "when summoned to name his accomplices, said that he obeyed the instructions of a secret society, of which this Fanfar is the chief."

"An infamous falsehood!" exclaimed Fanfar.

"An assassin! never!" murmured Irène, as she rose from her knees, hastily.

Arthur held her back. He had divined her secret. "Do not betray yourself," he whispered, "rely on me."

Fanfar looked around. Escape was impossible. He turned to Irène. "Save my sister!" he said to her. [Pg 245]

She bowed assent. Then Fanfar spoke to the Magistrate. "This unfounded accusation will recoil on the heads of my calumniators. I have been against the monarchy, but I have had no hand in any plot with murder as its object. I am at your service, gentlemen!"

Arthur whispered in the ear of de Talizac:

"To-morrow, if you are not a coward, I shall expect you!"

"And I will kill you!" answered the Vicomte.

In another hour the guests had left the Hôtel de Fongereues.

CHAPTER XXXIV. [Pg 246]

LEIGOUTTE.

The kind reader who has followed thus far, has not forgotten a certain little village among the Vosges mountains, where in January, 1814, brave peasants fought and died in the defence of their country.

When Simon left Leigoutte with Sergeant Michel, he had no idea that the fury of the invaders would lead them to commit the crime of killing women and children, and to burn their homes. The Cossacks and the emigrés avenged themselves on French flesh and blood, and French homes and firesides.

While the Russians burned the cottage where Françoise and the children had taken shelter, Talizac, in order to ensure his possession of the title and Fongereues estates, set fire to the inn which was Simon's home. The emigrés took fiendish delight in destroying the school-room. Was it not there that the Republicans talked of duty and their country to the children? And when this band of royal thieves had passed, desolation settled down upon the valley.

The king was proclaimed at the Tuileries, and lying on his bed embroidered with purple *fleur de lis*, never condescended to think of the villages in the East that had welcomed the invaders with powder and shot.

By degrees Leigoutte, like its neighbors, began to hold up its head once more, and the few survivors agreed to take care of the women and children who had been left without protectors. The oldest among them remembered Simon's teachings, and repeated them to their children. [Pg 247]

One day they experienced a great surprise. It became known that a stranger had purchased the land on which had formerly stood the inn and the school of Simon Fougère. Every one wondered what the old man, who seemed to be an intendant, meant to do with this place, about which hung so many sad legends. Then came an architect, who employed the workmen in the village. They were paid well and promptly. The older inhabitants were consulted as to the plan of the old inn and the school.

When wonder had passed, the villagers were amazed to find the inn had been built exactly like the old one that had been burned by the emigrés. Yes, there was the large, well-lighted room where Françoise, with her little girl in her arms, had cordially welcomed the travelers, while little Jacques flew about with bright cheeks and brighter eyes. The sign, too, was just the same as the old one. The only difference was that the tri-colored flag did not wave in the morning breeze. The new proprietor was named Pierre Labarre. Who was he? No one knew. He had a benevolent face,

and he liked to talk of Simon Fougère, and made the villagers tell him the story of his death over and over again. Sometimes he was seen to listen with tears in his eyes.

"He knew him, that's sure!" said the peasants.

He selected a man and his wife to keep the inn. They had two children, a boy and a girl. The girl was named Francine. This completed the resemblance to the past. As a schoolmaster, Pierre appointed an old soldier, who was intelligent and honest. [Pg 248]

Once more Leigoutte began to take heart. Pierre Labarre spent several days each year in the village, and yet the good people knew nothing of him more than his name. Pierre Labarre was not the real benefactor, who slept in his tomb, but when dying he had said to his old servant:

"I have been unfaithful to my duty toward Simon. I have been cowardly toward him. I have a large amount for my grandchildren, where, you alone will know. Seek these children, and make them rich. If Fate be against us, if you cannot find these children, consecrate this fortune to making the name of Simon beloved. Go to the poor village of Leigoutte, and let those who loved him, that is, all who knew him, be the heirs of that son whom the Marquis de Fongereues adored in his heart."

For many years he sought in vain for the smallest clue, but one day, after much discouragement, a new hope sprang to life in his heart. It was when the so-called Marquis de Fongereues came to demand at his hands the secret entrusted to the old man by his master. The very violence of the two men on that day proved that Simon's son was living. Had he been dead, the heirs of the Fongereues would have applied to the courts.

Then Pierre Labarre resumed his search, and an old man was continually seen on all the highways and by-ways of France, entering the humblest cottages and asking, in tremulous tones: [Pg 249]

"Do you remember? It was in 1814."

But this was ten years ago. No one had seen two children flying for their lives. How many hopes were based upon a word, and how many disappointments followed!

Finally, he determined to act on the last words of his dying master, and he went to Leigoutte. It was an idea of his own to restore to Leigoutte its old look, the look it had one day long before when Simon Fougère gave him a seat at his fireside, and Jacques looked at the stranger with his big, earnest eyes, while Cinette ran around the room.

The evening of which we write, this old servant of an emigré sat under the trees opposite the school-room. He had gathered the village children about him. Night was coming on, but the spring air was soft and sweet. He spoke in a low voice, for the authorities of the village might have considered his words as somewhat of an incendiary nature. He said, softly:

"In other days, in Simon Fougère's school, all the children said, 'Vive la France! Vive la Republique!'"

And the little children repeated these words: "Vive la France! Vive la Republique!"

At this moment a strange scene took place on the Square. Two shadows, dimly seen in the twilight, were kneeling before the inn. No one had seen them approach. Pierre Labarre was the first to notice them, and he felt a quick contraction of the heart that heralded some unlooked-for event. He rose quickly, and signed to the children to keep perfectly still. He nearly reached the two unknown without their hearing him. He saw that one was endeavoring to raise the other, who seemed to be infirm. She extended her hand to the inn, and seemed to be saying something, and then the two slowly mounted the steps of the inn. [Pg 250]

Pierre, who was very near them, heard a sob. Who could they be? Pierre asked himself. The two strangers were now in the large room, where nothing seemed changed since the day that the wounded soldier leaned against the wall, exhausted by suffering and fatigue. There was the huge chimney, and there the shining tables.

The infirm woman now walks unaided. She goes straight to the fireplace, and seats herself in a chair. She looks at the door eagerly and expectantly.

Labarre again asked himself who this woman was, and what frightful accident had so injured her. Suddenly, while Labarre was watching her, the woman smiled.

"Ah! you have come, Simon!" she said with a smile, as if speaking to some one who had just come in. "The children are waiting for you, and the soup is ready. Jacques has been good, but you must talk to Cinette—she is a perfect little fiend, sometimes!"

Labarre, with his heart in his mouth, clutched at the wall to prevent himself from falling.

"Come! Cinette—come; you must not be naughty!"

It was plain to Labarre who this person was—he had heard her voice before. But this girl—who was she? [Pg 251]

The old man now entered the room. The girl saw him, and said, apologetically:

"Pray, do not scold us—we mean no harm."

"Whoever asks hospitality at this door receives it," answered Labarre. "But tell who you both are."

Caillette, for it was she, laid her finger on her lips and whispered low:

"She is mad!"

Tears came to the old man's eyes.

"I beg of you," he asked again, "to tell me who this woman is."

"A poor, sick creature, who was once very happy. She has lost her husband and her children, and met with some terrible accident beside."

"But her name?"

"I have not the smallest idea. Cinette always calls her mamma."

"Cinette! Who bears that name?"

"A good little girl in Paris, who earns her bread by singing in the streets. It now seems that she is the sister of Fanfar. It is a very strange sorrow, one fall of sorrow!"

"And Fanfar—whom do you call Fanfar?" asked the old man, with a troubled face.

Caillette started. She remembered that her love had been disdained, but she was kind-hearted, of the stuff of which martyrs are made.

"Fanfar was a foundling. He is now a young man both good and handsome."

"Where have I heard that name?" Labarre said to himself. [Pg 252]

Suddenly the woman seated in the chair looked up.

"Excuse the simplicity of the arrangements—the inn does as well as possible."

"Françoise Fougère!" he cried.

Françoise started up, as if sustained by supernatural strength.

"Who calls me?" she cried. "Who is it that speaks my name?"

"Françoise, do you remember Simon, Jacques, Cinette?"

"My children? Yes, yes—I remember them. Where is it that I have just seen them? Oh! yes—I remember. I was all alone. Cinette's little bed was empty, and then the door opened and Jacques came!"

"Is he alive?" cried Labarre.

"Yes," answered Caillette. "They knew each other at once."

"But where is Francine?"

"She has been abducted by the Vicomte de Talizac."

"Talizac!"

Labarre caught at a chair for support. Françoise heard these words.

"Talizac! Oh! the base, cruel man. Quick! we cannot stay here. I must save Francine and Jacques. Oh! my box—where is my box?"

My readers must now learn how Françoise and Caillette found themselves at Leigoutte. They will remember that just as Fanfar recognized in the poor, sick woman the mother whose loss he had so deeply deplored, and in Francine the worshipped little sister whose agonized cries he had [Pg 253] heard in the subterranean passages among the Vosges, all clue was lost, for Bobichel vanished, and with him Caillette.

And Gudel's daughter, who loved Fanfar with a love that was without hope, said to him:

"She is your mother. Will you allow me to take care of her?"

Fanfar looked at Caillette with loving, grateful eyes, and then hastened away with Bobichel and Gudel.

Then Caillette was left alone with the sick woman, who began to cry and sob. Her mind had been so long torpid that now this shock seemed to have swept away the last vestige of her intelligence. But Caillette was good and patient, and finally the sick woman slept. Caillette watched her and waited through the twilight, and at last, holding the hand of her charge in hers, she too fell asleep.

When the girl opened her eyes it was daybreak, and the bed was empty. Yes, Fanfar's mother, whom she had promised to guard, had vanished. She ran into the next room. No one was there, and the door was open.

Caillette ran to the concierge. "Where is she?" she cried.

"Do you mean the old woman? Oh! she went away before light."

"Impossible! She cannot walk."

"I was astonished myself, but my wife said to me, who is that coming down stairs? I looked, and I saw a ghost—not a pretty one either, begging your pardon. It was the paralytic, the old woman who had never walked a step all the while that the Marquise took care of her. [Pg 254]

"'Where are you going?' I said to her.

"'To save Jacques.'"

"Jacques is her son, go on, quick," interrupted Caillette.

"'But you can't save any one,' I then said. This was not kind, Miss, but I was so astonished. She did not seem to mind it though, for she began to talk about a box, and told me to open the door. I had no right to disobey, you know."

"And she went away?" cried Caillette.

"Yes, and quick enough, too."

Caillette did not wait to hear more. She flew down the stairs also.

It was seven o'clock in the morning. Caillette did not dare to find Jacques, and tell him she had been faithless to her trust. No, she must find Françoise herself. She asked questions of all she met, and at last she had a ray of light. An old rag picker told her that he had seen a woman answering to the description given by Caillette. She at once started in the direction he pointed out; it was the road to Germany she took. She sold a small gold locket, which held a bit of ribbon from a sash Fanfar had once given her. She kept the ribbon, and received several crowns for the locket. She walked all day, finally certain that Françoise was not far in advance. It was not until the morning of the second day that the girl was rewarded by seeing Françoise at the door of an inn. Caillette rushed forward. [Pg 255]

"Mother!" she cried.

"Ah! you know her?" said the innkeeper. "She is very strange."

"What did she say to you?"

"She asked for bread, and ate it without a word. Then, just as she saw you, she asked me where some village was. I never heard the name before."

The old woman now came to meet Caillette.

"Leigoutte!" she said. "Leigoutte!"

"Leigoutte!" repeated Caillette, "that is Fanfar's village."

The old woman shook her head, she did not know the name.

"I mean Leigoutte is where Jacques came from."

"Yes—yes—Jacques. I must save Jacques and the box!"

What was going on in the impaired mind of Françoise? Fanfar's sudden appearance had carried her memory back to the last interview she had with Simon, when, our readers will remember, he had given his wife the papers that proved his birth and that of Jacques. And now Françoise had but one idea, to return to Leigoutte. In vain did Caillette urge her to return to Paris, and the girl had promised Fanfar not to leave his mother. She therefore went on toward Germany with her. Fortunately, a wagoner took pity on these two women, and took them up. In this way they reached Leigoutte. Françoise was silent, except a few low words that she muttered under her breath at long intervals. Caillette thought with despair of Fanfar, and his agony at his mother's disappearance. [Pg 256]

Alas! poor girl, she did not know that the night when she and Françoise entered the inn at Leigoutte, Fanfar, alone in his prison, thought of his mother whom he had scarcely seen, and of the sister whom he had held in his arms. Ah! it was a bitter trial for the strong, faithful heart.

Caillette and Pierre Labarre watched Françoise, when finally she arose from her chair, and went toward the door. On the threshold she seemed to hesitate. She thrust back her gray hair, and pressed her hand to her brow. Then, as if she suddenly remembered something, she turned and went toward the door in the back of the house, Caillette and Pierre following her every step she took. She went out into the garden, and up a winding path to the hill, which she began to climb with panting breath.

"Ah! she is going to the little farm of Lasvène which was burned," said Pierre to himself.

Then, all the time watching Françoise, he began to question Caillette.

What motive had Françoise in these persistent wanderings? Was it merely the whim of a mad woman or had she some fixed design?

Françoise walked on. Sometimes she stopped short, and called Jacques, then Cinette. Labarre asked himself if it were not his duty to stop this poor woman, but a secret instinct bade him

watch her to the end.

An hour elapsed, but Françoise seemed to feel no fatigue. At the cross-roads she did not hesitate. [Pg 257] Finally they reached the Gorge d'Outremont. In the fast gathering darkness, the place was horrible and gloomy. As in a former description we have said, the mountain seemed at this gorge to have been cleft in twain by a gigantic hatchet.

At this moment, the clouds parted, and a pale young moon looked down on the landscape.

Françoise stopped short, Pierre well knew why. The little cottage of old Lasvène had vanished, and the poor woman was bewildered. Labarre went to her, and took her hand. He knew where the foundations of the cottage were, and convinced that this was why she had come, he led her to the ruins. She laughed in a childish way.

"Burned? Ah! yes;" she repeated the cry of the Cossacks. "Death to the French!" And then she began to run.

It was an outbreak of madness. Caillette and Pierre uttered cries of fright.

The mystery of such a strange occurrence may never be solved, but Françoise threw herself on the ground in a corner where the little garden had stood, and began to dig furiously in the earth. Presently, she screamed:

"The box! The box! Jacques is not my son; Cinette is the Marquise de Fongereues. Jacques—Fanfar is Vicomte de Talizac!" And she fell unconscious into the arms of Labarre.

CHAPTER XXXV. [Pg 258]

THE NEST.

Two white beds stood near each other. Muslin curtains tied with blue ribbons covered the windows with billowy folds. Among the pillows of one of the beds lay a beautiful face, and a young girl at her side held her frail hands.

This chamber was that of Irène de Salves, and very unlike it was to the chamber of the spoiled child in the Château des Vosges. There she had created a mixture of all colors—violent reds and yellows. Now everything was delicate and calm. The sweet face among the pillows was Francine's. The two young girls were like sisters. Irène felt that to love, protect, and care for Francine, was to love Fanfar. The shock Francine had experienced was terrible; she hardly knew what had taken place—whether she deliberately threw herself into the water, or whether faint and dizzy, she fell in; when Fanfar leaped to her rescue she clung to him convulsively. Then came the fever and delirium, and when she was at last conscious she beheld a sweet face bending over her, and Irène said, "Courage, sister, courage!"

Francine, surprised and touched, extended her thin hands, but suddenly imagining that she was again in the house where she had suffered so much, she shrieked "Let me die! Let me die!" [Pg 259]

A relapse took place, and for several days her life hung on a thread. Irène was indefatigable in her care, and finally she began to recover very slowly.

She questioned Irène as soon as she was able. What had become of the poor woman, the care of whom she had assumed? Hardly had she escaped from the jaws of death, than she began to think of others. Irène could tell her little. Ever since the violent scene of the ball, Arthur de Montferrand, without confessing his real motives, for he loved Francine, had placed himself at the disposal of Irène. He had divined her secret, and prevented her from betraying it to the curious crowd.

Fanfar was in prison. His trial was soon coming on. It was believed that his condemnation was certain. The disturbance to the health of the king, consequent on the attempted assassination at the Tuileries, had, it was said, greatly embittered the monarchists. A report was in circulation that an infamous comedy had been enacted by this Fanfar and his sister in order to break off the marriage between Talizac and Mademoiselle de Salves, a money-making scheme, worthy of a street singer and a mountebank.

The sick woman had disappeared. This intelligence drove Francine to despair. Who was this Caillette, who had pretended to take her place, and then disappeared, leaving no trace behind her?

"But," said Francine, "who was it who saved me?"

"Do you not know?" answered Irène, coloring deeply. [Pg 260]

"No, I heard you mention a name that I do not know."

"Yes, that of Monsieur Fanfar."

"Who is he?"

Irène looked at her and wondered if in her fever the girl's reason had deserted her.

"I do not understand. Do you not know your brother?"

"My brother!"

Irène passed her hand over her troubled brow.

"My brother. Ah! what is it you say? I never had but one brother, dear little Jacques, who was always so good and kind to me!"

"Jacques! but that is the name of—Monsieur Fanfar!"

"I tell you," answered Francine, "that I never met any one of that name. Stop a moment, I remember a company of mountebanks on the Square; they were under the management of a man called Iron Jaws, and with him was this Fanfar, if I don't mistake."

"Precisely, and this Fanfar is your brother, I heard him say so, himself, when I went to help you. He said to me, 'she is my sister—'"

"Where is he? I must see him. He saved my life. Suppose that he is Jacques! But no, poor Jacques is dead!"

Irène could not help the poor girl; although she fully believed in the truth of what Fanfar had said, she could offer no proof.

Suddenly Francine exclaimed, "If he is my Jacques, he ought to be about twenty. He ought to be very handsome." [Pg 261]

Irène colored, as she said, "He is handsome!"

"With black eyes, and brown curling hair?"

Irène was unwilling to admit that she had studied Fanfar in all these details, but she stammered out, "Yes, that describes him."

"For pity's sake, tell me all you know!"

Irène asked herself why she should hesitate. After all there was nothing to be ashamed of in her sentiments towards Fanfar.

"I will tell you all," she said, in a low voice.

"Why are you so disturbed?" asked Francine. "When you mention the name of this Fanfar, you have tears in your eyes."

Irène buried her face on her friend's shoulder: "I love him!" she whispered, "and I love you as if you were my sister!"

The two young girls embraced each other tenderly.

"But where is he?" said Francine, disengaging herself, "I wish to see him."

Irène started. Alas! amid all these emotions she had forgotten the sad truth that the brother, whom Francine ardently desired to embrace, was in a narrow cell, crushed under the accusation of an attempt on the life of the king.

"Why do you not tell me where I can find him?" asked Francine, her eyes bright with fever.

At this moment the door opened, and a tall and stately individual, known as Madame Ursula, made a sign to Irène, who instantly obeyed the summons, glad to avoid the necessity of replying to Francine's questions. [Pg 262]

"What is it?" she said.

Madame Ursula was unchanged. She was still in a constant state of horror at Irène's conduct and defiance of conventionalities.

"A very strange looking man wishes to speak to the young lady."

"She can not receive him," replied Irène, promptly.

"So I supposed, but I delivered the message because I thought she knew this person, and I myself have seen him before." Madame Ursula looked down in some confusion. "He was pretending to be a frog, on a certain occasion—"

"I do not understand you."

"He is one of those clowns who amused the peasants at Saint Amé."

"His name! his name!" cried Irène, impatiently.

"I don't know his name. He wore a gray hat—"

"Bobichel! It must be Bobichel!"

Irène had forgotten none of these names.

"Let him come in!" she cried. "Let him come in!"

In another moment Bobichel appeared. Was this the poor clown? No; there were no smiles on his lips, no quips and cranks on his tongue. His thinness had become emaciation.

Irène went forward.

"You come from him?" she said, hastily.

"From Fanfar? Oh! no—not directly, at least. They won't let me see him, you know."

"Who sends you here, then?" [Pg 263]

"Gudel—Iron Jaws, you know."

"Why did he not come himself?"

"Ah! that I can't say. Gudel bade me give this note to you."

Irène broke the seal. The envelope contained two letters. One was directed to "Miss *Irainne*," the other to "Mademoiselle de Salves." Why did she open the latter? Did she know from the defective orthography that the first could not come from Fanfar? The letter she opened was from Fanfar. This was it:

> "You, who are so good and kind, be doubly so to the sister I found when too late. The hour draws near when the so-called justice of man will strike an innocent person. You do not doubt me, I know. I am not one who would dishonor a sacred cause. Say to my sister that little Jacques has endeavored to be worthy of his father—Simon Fougère.
>
> "I beg my adopted father, Gudel, to explain to you in detail the singular events of my life. I place entire confidence in you. I leave to your care poor Françoise and little Cinette. Love them, and they will return your affection. You have not forgotten the words addressed to you so long ago: 'Make yourself beloved.'
>
> "I do not know whether I should now bid you an eternal farewell. I recognize the fact that I am the object of venomous hatred to some one, but to whom? Let no one seek to solve this mystery. I forgive this enemy, whomsoever he may be.
>
> "In a few days—to-morrow, perhaps—my fate will be decided. Do not despair." [Pg 264]

Tears filled Irène's eyes as she finished this letter.

Bobichel watched her all the time, restraining his sobs with difficulty.

"You love him!" he said softly, "and you are right, for he is the best man I ever knew!"

Irène extended her hand, and the clown knelt to kiss it.

"But we must save him!" cried Irène. "He shall not be condemned—"

"Condemned?" said a voice. "Of whom do you speak?"

Francine, obeying an impulse, had thrown on a peignoir of white cashmere, and appeared, white and trembling, at the door. Irène ran to her side.

"Courage! sister," she cried, "courage!"

Then Irène herself gave way, and burst into passionate weeping. Francine took her brother's letter and read it slowly, but when she came to the words "little Jacques" and "Cinette," her eyes closed, and she would have fallen had not Bobichel caught her.

"You must not cry like that!" he said. "You must not weep. We will save Fanfar! Please, Mademoiselle Irène, read the letter Iron Jaws sends you. He has an idea, and he knows what he is about. He will save Fanfar!"

Bobichel's confidence was so great, his honest affection was so apparent, that the two girls exchanged a hopeful glance.

"Read!" said Francine. [Pg 265]

Iron Jaws' letter was not faultless in respect to orthography. Its errors we will not repeat:

> "Fanfar must be saved! I know your attachment for him. You have great influence with people in power. Try to see him, and give him something that Bobichel will hand you. I rely on your doing this."

"What am I to say to Iron Jaws?" asked Bobichel.

"Tell him that I will do all he asks. But you have another note for me?"

"No, not a note." And Bobichel, with infinite care, took from the flap of his coat a pin, an ordinary pin though of large size, not large enough, however, to excite the smallest suspicion.

"Do you see that?" cried the clown, with much of his former gayety. "Do you see that, ladies and gentlemen? This pin does not look like much, does it, now? But you can screw off the head, and

then you will find a tiny note—"

"It is most ingenious," said Irène, with a smile "and it shall be delivered as you desire."

"Ah! you are a brave creature, and if some day you want some one to amuse your children—that is, when you have any, you know—send for me, and I will be frogs for them all day long!"

And with this somewhat startling promise, Bobichel departed.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

[Pg 266]

SUPREME EFFORT.

Monsieur de Fongereues was alone in his cabinet. Magdalena had left him only a few moments before. A violent scene had taken place between the husband and wife.

The ruin that threatened the Fongereues mansion had been temporarily staved off by the marriage that had been arranged between Irène and the Vicomte, but as soon as the world knew that the marriage was broken off, the tongues of gossips began to wag.

The Fongereues felt that their doom was sealed when they knew that Irène's millions were forever lost to them. Then this unhappy pair began to quarrel. To Magdalena's violent reproaches Fongereues answered by violent recriminations. Was it not her senseless indulgence that had caused the Vicomte to become the depraved and worthless person upon whom every one now turned a cold shoulder? If they were ruined, was it not because of the mad extravagance of mother and son?

And Magdalena replied:

"If I have been weak, was it not still more your duty to be strong? Who is the proper guide for a young man if not his father? You have been faithless to your duties, and, moreover, has he a vice which is not yours?" [Pg 267]

Fongereues foamed with rage, and before he could speak his wife had the audacity to say:

"You are choked by the blood of your brother!"

She thus reproached him for a crime that he had committed at her instigation. A moment more and this great lord would have demeaned himself to brutalities worthy of a lacquey, but with a look of contempt Magdalena swept past him and left the room. And now, crushed into a large arm-chair, the Marquis sat with his eyes fixed on the floor.

"Count Fernando de Vellebri wishes to see you," a servant knocked at the door to say.

"One moment!" answered the Marquis.

He hurried to his dressing room, bathed his face in cold water and hastily brushed his fast whitening hair. He took his seat at his desk, which was covered with papers.

"Show Monsieur de Vellebri up," he said.

He shuddered as he spoke, for he had learned through Cyprien that this Fernando belonged to the society of the Jesuits. The young man entered.

He was no longer the obsequious person with the stereotyped smile, who had done the will of the Vicomte de Talizac. Dressed in black, a long single-breasted coat, Fernando was the type of the Jesuits who pervaded French society. His dark hair rendered his pallor more remarkable. His half closed eyes were brilliant in spite of their heavy lids.

Fongereues divined a contest. What new struggle would he be compelled to undergo? He pointed to a chair, but the Italian bowed and remained standing. [Pg 268]

"You wished to see me," said the Marquis, "and I am at your service. But what is this costume? I was not aware that you belonged to any religious society, officially, at least."

"As to my claims to this dress," answered De Vellebri, coldly, "I am quite ready to explain them, if you will condescend to listen to me."

His voice was monotonous, as he continued:

"You are not ignorant, sir, of how greatly the conduct of the Vicomte de Talizac has compromised himself and his family."

"I beg your pardon," interrupted the Marquis, "but may I ask if you were not the companion of my son in most of his excesses?"

Fernando smiled satirically.

"Perhaps you are not quite aware of the part I played in these excesses. Monsieur de Talizac is not a child, to be influenced for good or evil by his friends. Perhaps, instead of accusing me, you

should thank me for having saved the honor of your house more than once."

"Indeed, sir! I confess I do not understand."

"It seems to me," said Fernando, still very calm, "that we are wandering from the real subject of this conversation. A powerful Society, sir, attached above all else to the practice of all virtues and to the triumph of God's cause, has for a long time been watching you. Your influence and your talents all give a guarantee that you may become a most useful auxiliary to the society to which I have the honor to belong." [Pg 269]

"The Society of Jesus?" interrupted the Marquis.

Fernando did not reply to this direct question other than with a slight bow.

"This society," he continued, "is disposed to come to your aid. It is they who have prevented His Majesty from revoking the favors shown to your son."

Fongereues uttered an exclamation of surprise.

"And they, too, will enable you to re-conquer the rank to which you belong."

"On condition that I will be their slave!" said the Marquis, with a constrained smile.

It was certain that in this terrible crisis the Marquis was ready to snatch at anything that would save him. But in spite of himself, he felt an invincible repugnance to giving himself up entirely to the control of these people and to have no will of his own. He hesitated. Fernando seemed to read his every thought.

"I think, sir," he said, "that you exaggerate the consequences of the step I suggest."

"And if I refuse?"

"You will not refuse," said the Italian, quietly.

Fongereues bit his lips.

"What does the Society of Jesus require of me?"

"Two things—a great service and a guarantee."

"What do they offer me?"

"The position of Prime Minister."

The Marquis started.

"I do not understand you," he said.

"The position of Prime Minister."

Beads of sweat broke out on the brow of the Marquis. He knew that the society was strong enough to keep its promises. He knew that as Prime Minister all his dreams of power and wealth would be realized. [Pg 270]

"You spoke also of a service and a guarantee," he said, quietly.

"The service is the greatest that can be rendered by any man to the Catholic world and to his Holiness the Pope."

Fernando lowered his voice.

"You are aware, sir, that by a Royal Edict of 1764 the Jesuits were expelled from France. Two years since, in 1822, His Majesty, unable to elevate in its integrity the standard of Catholicism, contented himself with authorizing the sojourn in France of the Fathers of the Faith. The time has now come to arrest these persecutions entailed on the Society of Jesus. We are resolved that they shall be solemnly re-established under their own name, with all their rights and privileges, and this not by virtue of a royal edict, but by a legal measure emanating from the Chamber of Peers. This is a bold act and one full of danger. We are fully aware of it, and do not propose to deny it. To carry out this plan successfully would require great dexterity and astuteness, as well as profound faith in the justice of the cause you defend. The reward would be the dazzling recompense I have named. Monsieur de Fongereues, are you—can you be this man?"

Fongereues started to his feet.

"Yes—I can!" he cried.

"We will assist you," said the Jesuit. "We are certain of the support of a respectable minority. It is for you to scatter rewards, and warm lukewarm consciences, and I repeat, sir—a work like this is magnificent." [Pg 271]

"I belong to you, heart and soul," said Fongereues, "and to-morrow—"

"Wait," said Vellebri, laying his hand on the arm of the Marquis, thus forcing him back to his seat. "I spoke of a guarantee."

"Ah! yes," answered Fongereues, "my word of honor, I presume, is enough?"

Fernando did not seem to think a reply incumbent upon him. He continued:

"The man in whom the Society places enough confidence to entrust him with arms which will ensure his victory, should be bound to them by strong ties."

Fongereues listened with interest and curiosity.

"And the strongest ties are those of gold," said the Jesuit, slowly and distinctly. "You questioned me as to my claim to my dress. I am the Secretary of the General of the Society, and I am required to ask, if you are willing to aid in the establishment of houses like those of Montrouge and Saint-Acheul in Parma and Tuscany?"

"Most certainly," answered Fongereues, uneasily, for this allusion to money was most unwelcome. "I am ready to second all efforts of this Society, but still it would be necessary for me to know just what amount would be required of me. My resources are just now greatly restricted, and—"

"Do not be concerned," said Vellebri, coldly, "the amount need not disturb you." Fongereues [Pg 272] sighed with relief. "You will have to give but one million."

"A million!" repeated the Marquis, in despair.

"In fixing this sum our Superiors have merely carried out their plan of attaching you to their cause."

"But a million!" repeated the Marquis, "it is impossible. Were I to sell all that I now have in the world, I should not realize the half of this sum!"

"Is this, then, a refusal?"

"By no means. But a million!—I haven't it," and he repeated these words over and over again.

"But you have resources which should make such a sacrifice easy."

"No, you are mistaken. I am ruined, entirely ruined!"

His agitation was so great that he forgot to dissimulate.

"But the fortune of your father was very large, and cannot be exhausted."

"But I was robbed of that!"

Fernando rose from his chair.

"Permit me," he said, "to decline to enter into any affairs foreign to the matters we have under consideration. I came to offer you peace or war. Peace means fortune and power, and war—"

"War!" repeated Fongereues, "I do not understand you."

"When the Society proposes a compact, when, as I have just done to you, she unveils her secret designs, she holds in reserve a weapon which places at her mercy the man of whom she wished [Pg 273] to make an ally, and whom she does not choose to have for an adversary."

"I! I an adversary of the Society of Jesus! You cannot mean what you say."

"Everything is possible, Marquis. This is our ultimatum—either you will accept the proposals I have made, and placing in my hands within five days the million I ask, you will at once begin the campaign whose success is certain, or within five days a certain person will place in the hands of the Procureur de Roi papers which will be your ruin."

"What do you mean?"

Fongereues was livid as he asked this question.

"They are notes, forged by the Vicomte, your son!"

"Talizac a forger! Impossible!"

"I assure you that it is only too true. Once more, let me ask for your decision."

"I beg you to remember that my devotion to the Society is unalterable. But a million—you know!"

"You understand," repeated Vellebri, "it is a million that is demanded?"

"Yes, I know. Grant me a little time."

"We give you five days, as I said, at the end of which time the proposition I have named must be presented to the Chamber of Peers."

"I will present it."

"But the Society will not permit you to interfere until you have given the required guarantee. And now, good-morning, sir."

In vain did Fongereues petition the Italian to remain, but Fernando bowed coldly and departed. [Pg 274]

Fongereues sank back in his chair, utterly crushed. For a few moments he had indulged in the

hope of a proud future, and now, knowing that he could not raise a million, he felt that he was in deeper perplexity than ever.

Cyprien now appeared.

"You made a mistake, sir, in hesitating for a moment. Write to the Society that before five days have elapsed you will have fulfilled the conditions imposed."

"That would be folly!"

"Is not Fanfar in prison?"

"What of that? He will not be condemned."

"By the judges, possibly not—but by us."

Fongereues held himself more erect.

"Tell me what you mean, Cyprien?" he asked.

The lacquey laughed.

"I mean simply, that I will kill this Fanfar!"

CHAPTER XXXVII. [Pg 275]

THE TRIAL.

Political trials are all much alike, and this of Fanfar was no exception. On the day that it was to take place the pretended assassin and his pretended accomplice (that is to say Fanfar), were led to the court-room, where the magistrates, in their red robes and ermine, were seated. The newspapers, while attacking Fanfar furiously, had not omitted to mention that the accused was excessively handsome. This naturally brought a large number of women to the trial, and when the prisoner appeared, there was a low hum of admiration and surprise. Fanfar's companion, the man of whom Fanfar had made, it was said, a tool, excited neither admiration nor sympathy. Fanfar looked at him once and turned away in disgust.

It is now the proper time to say that this man, whom Cyprien had chosen to play the part of regicide, was none other than Fanfar's former enemy, Robeccal himself, who had been found in the closet and liberated by Cyprien.

This man had fallen so low that it mattered little to him what he did. The lacquey Cyprien profited by this mood, and in a short time obtained the result he desired.

To the declaration of the accused, who had been found secreted in the Tuileries, Fanfar replied with contempt. He told who this man was, and the crimes of which he had been guilty. All this, [Pg 276] however, by no means proved that he himself was innocent of participation in the crime. Fanfar had not mentioned the affair of the deserted house, for he did not wish his sister's name to appear. This was a great relief to Robeccal, who, in spite of the manner in which he had been treated by La Roulante, did not wish to get her into trouble.

The trial took its course. Robeccal wept and expressed great penitence, said that he loved the king, etc. All this produced an excellent effect on the jury, who considered the fellow a little simple.

Then came Fanfar's turn. He stood with arms folded on his breast, and once turned and looked toward the end of the court-room. He probably saw what he wished, for he smiled, and a light came into his eyes. Then he looked again at the President, and waited. In reality there was no other charge against him than the persistent declaration of Robeccal, but this was by the judges considered quite proof enough of his culpability.

"You belong to a secret association, do you not?" asked the judge.

"I am a Frenchman," answered Fanfar, "and like others of this heroic nation claim liberty of thought and action. Do you call France a secret society?"

The President reproved Fanfar for this speech, and called him in his anger an assassin. The young man replied, in a voice of great feeling:

"Only those," he said, "should be called assassins who have cut the throat of France and plucked [Pg 277] a blood-stained crown from the men!"

There was a great tumult. "Bravo! Fanfar," said a voice among the audience.

Naturally a dozen innocent men were accused of uttering this incendiary exclamation, while Gudel, in a quiet livery, was not interfered with. Irène de Salves never moved her eyes from Fanfar. Finally, quiet was restored.

"Mr. President," said Fanfar, "my father fell in the French frontier, fighting against the Cossacks

and the emigrés. There are no assassins in our family!"

From this moment the trial went on rapidly. The sentence was a foregone conclusion.

Robeccal was condemned to death. Fanfar, under the name of Jacques Fougère, was sentenced to the galleys for life.

But just as the sentenced was pronounced, a singular event occurred. Fanfar rose and opened his lips as if to speak, extended his arm, and fell full length on the floor. Cries of astonishment arose from the crowd.

"He has killed himself!" cried some.

"He has been poisoned!" said others.

Irène hastened to find Gudel. She had seen him near the door, but he had vanished. The crowd departed, saying to each other, sadly:

"He is dead!"

Robeccal was carried off more dead than alive. His sentence had frightened him. Perhaps he had not unbounded confidence in the honest people who had employed him.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

[Pg 278]

THE CRISIS.

"At last!" cried the Marquis, when the news of Fanfar's death reached him. He sent for Magdalena.

"Madame!" he said, "rejoice with me. Let us forget our mutual wrongs, for a new horizon stretches before us. All our anxieties are over. The man who stood between us and the possession of a fortune is dead!"

"Of whom do you speak?"

"Of this Fanfar, who, after making an attempt on the life of our king, was struck dead in the court-room during his trial."

"And this Fanfar was the son of Simon de Fongereues?"

"Yes, Madame, of my brother. And our father, who hated us, as you know, left the larger part of his fortune in the care of a fanatical body-servant of his, who held it as in trust for Simon's son whenever he should find him. He refused to relinquish this trust until he had proof of the death of the youth. Now he must be made to speak, for the only heir of the Fongereues fortune is myself, and I shall appeal to the law."

[Pg 279]

The Marquise talked with her husband for a long time. The next thing to do was to make Gudel speak frankly. This he had no hesitation in doing, and he again told the story he had told to the Marquis.

As to Pierre Labarre, of course he could make no further resistance. So long as the Marquis knew that Fanfar was living he had been obliged to be cautious; now no such reason existed.

The dreams of the Marquis were realized—a million for the Jesuits, and the gratification of his ambition and pride.

"Our son will be rich and happy!" said Magdalena, in an ecstasy of joy. "But where is the boy? Write, Marquis, write to him at once. He must be suffering intolerably in this exile you have imposed upon him."

But Fongereues did not heed her words. He was thinking of other things.

"Cyprien has served me well!" he said. "How is it that I have not seen him for two days?"

"I was speaking of our son!" answered Magdalena, angrily. "Do you not think of your son? Do you not love your son?"

The Marquis took her hand. "It is time that we understood each other," he said, sadly. "For twenty years I have lived a melancholy life. I have yielded to your caprices, I have followed your counsel, and to what end? Look at me—my hair is gray, my face is seamed and lined. I have never had one hour of repose. For whom have I carried this burthen? For myself? I despise mankind, I despise power, I despise you, and despise myself. I have but one real passion in life, and that is my love for this wretched boy who bears my name. What have you, his mother, done for him?"

[Pg 280]

Magdalena turned away from her husband's melancholy eyes.

"Why I love him," continued the Marquis, "I know not, except that criminals love their children as wild beasts their young. You have questioned me, and I have answered you. Are you satisfied?"

There came at this moment a hurried knock at the door.

"Come in!" cried the Marquis, angrily.

A valet entered with a very pale face.

"Monsieur! my young master—"

"Ah! he has come!" cried the Marquise, rushing to the door.

But the lacquey extended his arms, as if to stop her.

"Madame!" he began.

"Well! what is it?"

"My young master is dead!" said the lacquey, with trembling lips.

Then there went up the cry of two stricken hearts. The two criminals looked at each other. They must have misunderstood the servant, who now pointed to the stairs, up which were coming men bearing a bier. What was underneath the cloth? Was it their son? Impossible!

A young man appeared. Magdalena rushed toward him, without a word. The youth bowed his head.

"Yes, he is dead. Monsieur de Talizac has been killed in a duel!"

Magdalena sank upon the floor, unconscious. Fongereues laughed hysterically. [Pg 281]

"Nonsense! My son has fought no duel," he said.

"Yes—with Arthur de Montferrand, whose sword pierced his heart!"

Fongereues tore the cloth from the bier. Yes, it was the Vicomte de Talizac. The wretched father tried to speak. Every muscle in his face quivered. The servants fell back, shocked by all this agony.

"Tell me all!" he said at last.

"There is little to tell, sir, beyond the bare fact. I have, however, a letter which the Vicomte gave me before he went on the ground."

Magdalena snatched this letter and tore it open. It contained but one line:

"Faithless parents, I curse you with my dying breath!"

These words, coming from beyond the tomb, were terrible.

At this moment the door opened. An old man, with head uncovered and long, white hair, stood there.

"The Vicomte de Talizac is dead!" whispered one of the servants.

The stranger started, and, with a compassionate look, laid his hand on the shoulder of the Marquis, who was kneeling by the body of his son. The Marquis looked up and shrank back, saying:

"Pierre Labarre!"

It was, indeed, the old servant, sad eyed and hopeless. He had come to Paris as quickly as possible, leaving Françoise and Caillette to follow. He went at once to the court-room, and there heard that Fanfar had been carried to one of the lower rooms. Physicians had been sent for, who had attributed his death to an aneurism. [Pg 282]

"You are avenged, Pierre!" cried the Marquis. "Why are you here? Leave this house at once!"

But the old man did not move.

"No!" he said, "you must hear me. We have not done with each other." He extended his hand toward the dead body. "You may well weep for your son, Marquis, but you may also weep for Fanfar."

"Yes, because this fellow, for whom you would have stolen my father's fortune, is dead. This Fanfar was my brother's son—I know it, and you know it, too, but you do not know that I killed him!"

Labarre drew back in terror.

"No, no—do not say that!"

"Why should I not say it? It is true. I discovered the secret of his birth, and I removed him from my path—I poisoned him!"

The old man staggered to the wall, where he leaned for support.

"Now, denounce me!" cried the Marquis, "and I am ready to mount the scaffold. I killed this Fanfar, and this thought is all that gives me a ray of comfort!"

"Hush! This Fanfar was not the Marquis de Fongereues, he was not Simon's son. Do you remember a night which you once spent in a humble cottage at Sachemont?"

"Sachemont?" repeated Fongereues. [Pg 283]

"That night two men claimed the hospitality of an old man. One of these strangers was a Frenchman, but he was base enough to insult the daughter of the old man. He did worse—he committed a dastardly crime. That man, sir, was known as the Marquis de Talizac!"

Fongereues sat with his eyes fixed on the old man.

"The Vicomte fled like a scoundrel, leaving dishonor and despair on his track. But he never knew that the poor girl gave birth to a child—a son."

"What of that!" cried Fongereues, who did not choose to understand.

"Silence! I have not finished. Do you know who took that child and educated him? It was the brother whom you hated. Your victim was dead and he married her sister, and later, when you set the Cossacks on the village of Leigoutte and bade them to kill women and children, there was one child named Jacques and that child was your son."

Fongereues was deadly pale; large drops stood on his brow.

"You lie!" cried the Marquis, "Fanfar was my brother's son."

"Here is the certificate of his birth," said Pierre. "You knew Simon's writing, for you intercepted his letters to your father. Look! these lines tell the story."

> "I, eldest son of the Marquis de Fongereues, declare, on my sacred word of honor, that the child who bears my name and passes for my son, is the child of Jacqueline Lemaître and the Vicomte de Talizac." [Pg 284]

"The paper is signed with Simon's full name."

The Marquis fell on his knees.

"Ah! Monsieur, these are terrible days, but you will not say again that you poisoned Fanfar."

Fongereues shuddered, and endeavored to hide his face.

Labarre felt dizzy with horror. "Answer me," he repeated.

Fongereues answered in a low voice:

"Kill me! I have killed my son!"

The old servant started forward as if to fell the Marquis to the earth, but suddenly he remembered his old master, the man whom he had loved so tenderly, and he could not harm his son. He half turned away.

"Tell me the whole," he faltered, "I must know the whole."

"Yes," stammered the Marquis. "Cyprien, who is my slave, poisoned him. I determined to have the fortune without longer delay. I bade him do this deed, and he obeyed me. I am accursed!"

Labarre went toward the door.

"Farewell!" he said.

"No," cried the Marquis, "you must not leave me alone with this dead man. I am afraid! You must take me too to see the other."

Labarre stopped short. "Where was Cyprien?" he asked hastily.

The Marquis understood him. He rang his bell furiously. It might be after all that he was not guilty of Fanfar's death. [Pg 285]

A servant entered. The Marquis asked for Cyprien; he had not been seen in the hôtel for two days, the lacquey replied.

The Marquis turned to his father's servant.

"I have grave duties to perform," he said, quietly, "first I must see my son. You must go with me."

Labarre shook his head.

"In the name of my brother!" said Fongereues. Then stopping, he said, suddenly, "Does this fortune left by my father really exist?"

Labarre started. Could it be that this man at this time could be thinking of money?

"You misunderstand me!" cried the Marquis, "but never mind, answer me!"

"The money is safe," said Pierre.

"And you can give me a million to-morrow?"

"What do you want of a million?"

"Can you give it to me, that is the question?"

"I can."

Fongereues wrote a few words, and rang the bell.

"Take this letter to Monsieur Fernando de Vellebri, and see that there is no delay. And now, Pierre, come with me."

CHAPTER XXXIX.

[Pg 286]

THE AUTOPSY.

In a house opposite the Palais de Justice, two men were talking together in an attic room. One of these men was seated, the other was standing. The one who was seated, robust and vigorous, was anxiously questioning a person, who answered slowly and coldly.

"Then Doctor, you are sure?"

"Have no uneasiness. I know what I am doing."

"You understand that it is for to-morrow, and nothing can be done during the night. It means, in short, forty hours."

"When I accepted the terrible responsibility which you proposed to me, I weighed every detail. And once more I bid you have entire confidence in me and in science, and in the devotion of those who are brothers in a common cause."

"Forgive me!" repeated the other. "Forgive my anxiety and apparent distrust."

"I am at your disposal at all times and seasons; if the important moment be advanced or retarded, be sure that I shall be in readiness."

The two men shook hands cordially, and the Doctor went out. The other threw himself on a chair, and covering his face with his huge hands, wept bitterly—wept like a child, did this poor Iron Jaws. Suddenly he started up, and cried:

[Pg 287]

"This must succeed! This must succeed!"

He heard hurried steps coming up the stairs, and then a knock at the door.

"Who is it?"

"Bobichel!"

It was indeed Bobichel, red and much out of breath.

"Well?" asked Gudel.

"Oh! she is an angel! she had been crying when I got there. She brought me here in her carriage, and she wants to see you."

Gudel strode from the room. On the lower floor he found Irène waiting; she was pale and dressed in black.

"Ah! sir," she said, anxiety sharpening her voice, "tell me what all this means!"

"Fanfar is not dead."

The girl swayed to and fro. Gudel caught her, and went on.

"No, he is not dead. I thought you ought to know it."

"Where is he?"

"Ah! dear lady, he lies at this moment in a dark room, and looks as if he could never again rise."

"Horrible!"

"Yes, in a way, but not so bad when you come to think about it, for to-morrow Fanfar will be alive and free."

"Alive and free! Ah! I dare not hope. But tell me the whole."

"You remember that I sent you a note to give to Fanfar?"

[Pg 288]

"Yes—I have it still."

"Now, if you are not afraid of a little dampness, I will show you something."

Irène looked at Gudel in amazement.

"Very good, but first about Fanfar?"

"I assure you, dear lady, that he is safe. Now, Bobichel, go; see and hear all you can, and if you find out anything new, come to me at once."

"All right, master," and with a double somersault Bobichel vanished.

Gudel lighted a lantern, and then said to Irène that he was ready. They went out into a corridor, and Gudel, taking a key from his pocket, opened a small door which showed stone steps going down.

"Be careful," said Iron Jaws, "for the steps are very slippery."

He held the lantern high and guided her steps. It was like a gnome guiding a fairy into some mine of wealth. But it was not toward any treasure that Gudel conducted Irène. He opened another door after pushing several bolts.

"Up with you!" he cried, "you have company!"

Notwithstanding all her courage, Irène started back.

"Have no fear, Mademoiselle," said Iron Jaws, "he is a ferocious beast, but he is chained!"

Irène beheld a man fastened to the wall with an iron chain. At first she did not recognize him.

"This individual," said Gudel, "is Cyprien, the man who does all the dirty work of his excellency the Marquis de Fongereues, going so far as to do a little poisoning on occasion." [Pg 289]

"Undo my chain!" cried Cyprien.

"Not if I know it! But if you answer my questions, you shall have something to eat."

"I am hungry!" murmured the rascal.

"Pshaw! one meal each day will certainly prevent your being miserable. Now, why did you poison Fanfar?"

The fellow sighed.

"Tell me what interest you had in poisoning Fanfar."

"I don't know."

"That is a lie!"

"He can tell you nothing," whispered Irène, "let him go."

"No, Mademoiselle. This scoundrel bribed one of the jailers to give Fanfar a drug that would have killed him in five minutes. Fortunately, I was on the watch. I captured Cyprien and I brought him here. But I confess I am greatly puzzled by one thing—it is that I can't make out what the Marquis had against Fanfar, and this animal will not tell me."

"My friend," said Irène, "however guilty you may be, you are but the instrument of others. Why, then, do you not try to make amends for your errors by telling the truth?"

Cyprien hesitated, but he said again:

"I do not know."

"Then good-night, my dear fellow!" said Gudel. "Here is a loaf of bread for you, rascal that you are!"

Irène hastened from the dungeon, and when they had again ascended the stairs, Gudel said to her: [Pg 290]

"These fellows are all alike, after all!"

"What are you trying to do?" asked Irène.

"It is simple enough. Instead of poison, Fanfar took a narcotic, and lies as if dead. He will be buried, of course, but we will look out for that, and he will be taken care of."

The shock to Irène was so great that she burst into passionate weeping. Gudel was doing his best to soothe her, when suddenly the door was thrown open and Bobichel rushed in, all pale and dishevelled.

"Oh! master," he cried, "all is lost! There is to be an autopsy. One of the great physicians advises it."

Irène uttered a shriek of agony and dropped on her knees.

"Run!" she cried, "the truth must be made known at once. Oh! save him!"

Gudel tore his hair. Suddenly a thought struck him.

"Who is the physician?"

"Dr. Albant, from the Tuileries."

Iron Jaws reflected. He took Irène's hands in his.

"I am but a poor fellow, dear lady, only a strolling player, but I swear to you that Fanfar shall be saved!"

Irène was comforted.

CHAPTER XL.

[Pg 291]

BETWEEN CHARYBDIS AND SCYLLA.

The situation was indeed a terrible one. Bobichel's words were true.

When Fanfar fell as if dead, it was supposed that it was an attack of apoplexy, and some good people ventured to call it a judgment from heaven for his crimes. Others again spoke of poison, and arraigned the governor of the prison for carelessness. There was one physician among those who were called in who could not agree with the others. He used a number of scientific expressions, but the fact remained the same—Fanfar was dead. But there was so much discussion that a post-mortem examination was deemed essential. The body, therefore, was carried on a litter to the hospital, where he was examined by a crowd of curious medical students, who declared that he was so splendidly developed that he ought to have lived to be a hundred years old.

A messenger was sent to Dr. Albant, and the dissecting table was prepared.

This time the plan of the heroes of the right had failed. Fanfar was alive, but he would certainly be killed now, as his torpidity was so great that he would not utter a cry or a groan until the instruments touched some vital organ.

[Pg 292]

The door opened and Dr. Albant, a handsome old man, entered with smiles and nods. He removed his coat and tied on a large apron. Trying the edge of his scalpel on his nail, he turned to the students and physicians, and began to talk of the German method of conducting a post mortem.

"We French, however, begin here," he said, lightly placing his scalpel on the tender flesh.

"Dr. Albant!" cried a stentorian voice.

The surgeon turned. A messenger in the king's livery stood in the doorway.

"Gentlemen, excuse me—the king communicates with me!"

A close observer would have thought it singular that the king should send a letter by an ordinary servant, like a simple bourgeois. But this did not seem to strike Dr. Albant, who, with a face beaming with smiles, turned to the students, saying:

"Excuse me, gentlemen, but the king demands my presence."

"But the autopsy?"

"Oh! that may be given up. This man died from cerebral congestion—I see it as plain as day!"

As he spoke he tore off his apron, and got himself into his coat again with all possible speed.

"Bury the man at once!" he said as he left the room. A carriage awaited him at the door, and he drove off.

[Pg 293]

The royal messenger waited a moment and then he, too, walked away, and going down a narrow alley he entered a little wineshop by a back door, and throwing himself on a bench, exclaimed:

"I was just in time, Bobichel. A second later and Fanfar would have been no more!"

The hospital was now anxious to get rid of this useless body, and orders were given that it should be buried without delay. Gudel and his friends had bribed the functionaries.

All went smoothly, and in an hour the hearse was to take Fanfar away. But before this, a card was brought in to the governor of the hospital. On this card was the name of the Marquis de Fongereues, and in the corner of the glossy bit of pasteboard was a tiny sign, which signified that his visitor was especially recommended by the Society of which he was a member. He gave orders that the Marquis should be shown in at once.

Fongereues appeared, leaning on the arm of Pierre Labarre. The Marquis had suddenly grown old, his strength was gone, and his feet were as uncertain as those of a drunken man.

The governor rose to receive him. Fongereues tried to speak, but his voice died in his throat. He handed the governor an order from the minister, directing that the body of the man named Fanfar should be surrendered to the Marquis de Fongereues.

Our readers will notice that the promised million had already borne fruit in the granting of the

first request made by the Marquis, who had laid aside his ambition and thought only of recovering the body of his son in return for the million.

"Can I see the body?" asked the Marquis. [Pg 294]

The governor bowed assent and led him to the room where Fanfar still lay. Fongereues looked down on the noble features and manly form. How entirely they differed from those of the son for whom the Marquis had sacrificed everything. The Marquis knelt in silence for some minutes, while Labarre shed bitter tears.

"What does the Marquis propose to do?" asked the governor, who did not understand this scene, and was becoming impatient.

Labarre said, in a low voice, "The men will come up with a bier."

In a few minutes Fanfar's body was carried to the Hôtel de Fongereues and laid by the side of the Vicomte.

Labarre made no attempt to resist this caprice of the Marquis. The old servant, now that De Fongereues showed such humility and grief, had become his devoted servant.

The Marquis asked for his wife, and was told that she had left the hôtel alone and on foot.

"Pierre," said the Marquis, "I must say a few words to you. With the exception of this million I have required at your hands, the fortune which should have been Simon's must be given to his daughter. Tell her the whole truth; it is only just. Watch over this girl, proclaim her right to the name and property of our house. When I am dead do not lay me in French soil—I am not worthy of France—but place me where I am unknown and unheard of. You will obey these wishes?" [Pg 295]

Labarre answered, solemnly, "I will obey them."

"Very good; we will start to-night for the château, and there side by side we will bury the two sons whom I have murdered."

While Fongereues, crushed under the weight of his remorse, was thus announcing his last wishes, another scene was taking place in the hospital. Gudel and Bobichel had applied for Fanfar's body.

"Too late!" answered the concierge. And the two men heard with consternation that Fanfar had been taken away. And where? No one knew.

Delay was inevitable. Gudel and the former clown went out into the street and there abandoned themselves to their distress.

CHAPTER XLI. [Pg 296]

VIDOCQ, THE CHIEF OF POLICE.

To be condemned to death cannot be a very pleasant feeling, and Robeccal, though assured that he should not suffer, was naturally very uneasy. He did his best to keep up his courage, hoping every minute that some one would appear and furnish him with the means of leaving France. Finally the door opened, and Vidocq himself, the Chief of Police, entered.

Robeccal, in a state of suppressed delight, had the audacity to wink at him.

"At last!" said the prisoner. "Really, sir, I think I have had about enough of this. When am I to leave France?"

"I think, my dear sir," answered Vidocq, in a somewhat sarcastic voice, "that you will not leave France."

"Ah! I am glad to hear that."

"A residence has been assigned to you in a most delightful climate."

"And where may that be? What is the name of the place?"

"You will have no difficulty in remembering it, I fancy. Toulon is the name."

"Toulon!" repeated Robeccal, his eyes fairly starting from his head.

"Yes, your punishment has been changed. You are condemned, not to death, but to imprisonment for life." [Pg 297]

Robeccal tried to smile. It was a joke, of course, but he did not like it.

"My dear sir," continued Vidocq, calmly and politely, "You are a scoundrel, and you accepted a base rôle. You think we have broken faith with you, but faith can not be kept with creatures like yourself."

Robeccal protested and raved, all to no purpose.

Vidocq went to the door and called; four men, each Hercules, appeared.

"Take this fellow away," said Vidocq, "he is to go with the other prisoners to Toulon in the morning."

Robeccal began to curse and swear.

"You will gag him," added Vidocq, "it is better. Good-bye, Monsieur Robeccal, I don't think we are likely to meet again!"

Vidocq looked on with a satirical smile while Robeccal was carried off.

Some months later he endeavored to make his escape from Toulon, and was shot.

CHAPTER XLII.

[Pg 298]

TO THOSE WHO LOVE FANFAR.

Night was coming on. The last rays of the setting sun shone on the water at Havre.

Down on the shore among the rocks, was a fisherman's hut; in it was a man alone; he was restlessly pacing to and fro. Occasionally he stopped and seemed to listen, but he only heard the lapping of the water on the beach. Hour after hour elapsed; he seemed to be waiting for some one.

Suddenly he started; he heard a stone fall. He went to the door and looked out. Two figures were to be seen dimly in the fog. He waited a minute, and then he said, "Whom do you seek?"

A brief silence, and a sweet voice replied, "Fanfar."

The two shadows were two women—Françoise and Caillette.

The young man seized a lamp and went to meet them.

"But Fanfar! where is Fanfar?" asked Caillette.

Presently other steps were heard.

"Whom do you seek?" asked the young man, once more.

"Fanfar!" answered a trembling voice.

And under the yellow rays of the lamp two more women were seen—Irène de Salves and Francine. When the latter beheld Arthur de Montferrand she started, while Irène impulsively pronounced his name.

[Pg 299]

They all entered the cottage, and looked around the room anxiously. The same name was on every lip. Fanfar, where was he?

The night after Fanfar had been carried to the hôtel Fongereues, a mysterious note had been sent to Irène, to Francine, and Caillette.

"*To all who love Fanfar:*

"Repair at once to Havre. Go to the cottage of the fisherman Pierre. Wait! Hope!"

Similar instructions had been sent to Arthur, but to the questions addressed to him by these four ladies, he could only say that he knew no more than they.

"We must wait," he said.

"But Gudel?" asked Caillette. "Where is he?"

"I know not," Arthur replied, "and yet I am almost sure that these notes are from him."

Caillette went to Irène's side. The poor girl loved Fanfar with all her heart, and she believed that he was lost to her, for if by a miracle she were to see him again it would be as Irène's lover. But she accepted the sacrifice. She said in a low voice to Irène:

"I am glad you came, for you love him."

Irène pressed her hand; she could not speak.

Suddenly Irène started, her instinct had told her the truth.

"And you," she exclaimed, "you also love him."

The two girls embraced each other tenderly. All this time Françoise sat perfectly silent, she was content now that Cinette was near her, but still she thought of Jacques with longing.

[Pg 300]

Where was old Labarre?

Arthur leaned against the window looking out into the night, and listening to the voice of the waters. He had long since discovered that he loved Francine, and he said to himself:

"If I restore her brother to her, she may learn to love me."

And now he waited anxiously for a signal, which would give him the right to speak a word of hope to this little group of friends. He uttered a little exclamation.

"Come here!" he cried, gayly, "come here, and look out!"

From among the dark waters rose a brilliant rocket which, darting through the air, fell in a shower of brilliant sparks.

The three girls ran to the window. How long were those last moments of waiting. Finally the measured beat of oars was heard, the prow of a boat struck against the pebbly beach, and shadows were seen coming toward the cottage. The door opened.

Irène and Caillette burst into tears.

Francine cried, "Fanfar! my brother!"

"Zounds!" cried Gudel, "it was not such an easy matter getting here."

Fanfar sank on his knees before Françoise. "My poor mother!" he exclaimed.

And the invalid took Fanfar's head in her trembling hands, and kissed him tenderly. [Pg 301]

"And Bobichel! you here, too!" cried Caillette, overjoyed.

Irène went to Fanfar's side. "I have come," she said, quietly.

Without leaving his mother he took the girl's fair hand and pressed it to his lips.

Arthur began to question Gudel, and from him learned the whole truth.

The friends, after Fanfar's body was removed, decided on reflection that Cyprien was the sole person who could aid them. At first he refused to give them the smallest information, but finally he was made to speak. They went to the Hôtel de Fongereues, but the sad party had left for Alsace. Two leagues away they were overtaken however. Labarre was told the whole truth. Fanfar was liberated, and restored to life by the physician whom Gudel had brought with him. The Marquis de Fongereues went on to the château with the body of the Vicomte.

"And Labarre, where is he?"

"In the boat waiting for us, but I have not yet told you all. We should have made an end of Cyprien, for he threatened to denounce us. The only thing for Fanfar is to flee the country. A quarter of a league from shore a vessel awaits us. Come, Fanfar, there is no time to lose, you know that you start for America to-night."

There was a long silence. Labarre entered.

"Marquis," he said, "it is time."

There was a startled exclamation. Whom did he salute by this title? [Pg 302]

Fanfar rose.

"Do not call me by this name. I am Jacques, the adopted son of Simon Fougère."

Irène went to him.

"Jacques," she said, "you long since bade me seek to make myself loved. Have I followed your advice?"

"I love you," answered Fanfar, simply.

"Do you wish me to become your wife?"

Caillette uttered a smothered exclamation.

"Fanfar," she said, "the lady loves you truly."

The young man pressed his hand upon his eyes.

"Thanks," he said, "your hearts are all noble and good."

"Come one and all!" cried Iron Jaws, gayly.

"Are you going?" asked Arthur.

Francine replied with downcast eyes: "Can I leave my brother?"

"Then I too will go," Arthur exclaimed, "I too will begin to take life seriously, if you will aid me."

After the Vicomte de Talizac was buried, the Marquis disappeared and was no more heard of.

Magdalena committed suicide. Bobichel married Caillette, whom he adored as much as he adored Fanfar. Françoise and Labarre neither of them lived long. Cyprien continued to act as spy for the French government. And La Roulante was assassinated in a drunken frolic.

This was the story of Fanfar, which we have completed, for Fanfar's modesty was too great to allow him to say what we have said for him. [Pg 303]

The party all went to Algeria, intending thence to start for America, but finally decided to remain where French activity finds such a wide field. They lived contented and happy, forgotten and forgetting.

"And I am truly thankful," said Fanfar, in conclusion, extending his hand to Monte-Cristo, "that I have been permitted to utilize my former talents for your benefit."

Monte-Cristo lingered a week or more that Esperance might recover from his fatigue of both body and mind, but the day finally came when the caravan started for France.

"Monsieur Fanfar," said the Count, "are we never to meet again?"

"Ah! who can say!" and Fanfar smiled. "I shall never forget my beloved France, and I am sometimes sick with longing to return."

"Then, some day if I need you for the protection of my son, and send for you," said Monte-Cristo, "you will come?"

"I swear that I will." And Fanfar laid his hand on the boy's head.

"We will all swear!" cried Iron Jaws. "The son of Monte-Cristo is sacred to us. Who ever touches a hair of his head shall suffer."

We have now to learn how Fanfar and his friends kept this promise.

CHAPTER XLIII. [Pg 304]

A LETTER FROM MONTE-CRISTO.

"My Dear Child:

"Twelve years have elapsed since that terrible day when, with the assistance of our dear friends in Algeria, I was enabled to save you from a most awful death. Since then many events have swept over my head, which is to-day becoming very gray.

"I am over sixty, and yet I hope to do a little more good in the world. But I must hasten.

"I have borne up against many misfortunes and great catastrophes, and one, even alone, prostrated me and deprived me of courage, and that was the death of your beloved mother. I realized then that I was only a man. I said to myself: 'Monte-Cristo, the color has fled from your cheek, the fire from your eye. You are in possession of old Faria's secrets and science, but you are powerless against Death. You have triumphed over Villefort, Morcerf, Danglars, Benedetto and Maldar, but you cannot triumph over Death! Remember that you are only a man!'

"You were just sixteen, Esperance, when your mother was taken from us, and your tears fell with mine, but you said to yourself: 'My father remains!' But, my beloved son, something in that father died at that time, or rather, I should say that something was born—his self-confidence vanished forever, and doubt took its place. For many long years, my son, your father deemed himself master of his own destiny, and with a certain simplicity at which I smile to-day, he fancied that he could make all wills bend to his. From that moment wrinkles came to my brow and my hair grew white, and I cannot smooth away those wrinkles, nor can my will, strong though it be, bring back the color to my lips nor fire to my eyes. I have punished the evil-doers, but when I sought to repair the evil I had committed, I have not always succeeded. [Pg 305]

"I released the son of Mercédès from the fanatics of Ouargla, but two years later, in December, 1851, he fell, on the day of that '*attentat*,' which is not yet avenged.

"Where is Maximilian Morel, where is the daughter of Villefort, the gentle Valentine, whose happiness was dear to me? Did not they all perish in the frightful revolt of the Sepoys in India in 1859? It is clear to me that my love was powerless to protect.

"If I write this to you, my son, it is not with a wish to sadden you. But you are not only my son but my confessor, as well as my one joy and my hope. From your mother you inherit generous instincts and a spirit of devotion. From me you have received vigor and energy, but I trust that you inherit none of my pride.

"When this letter reaches you I shall be far away. Yes, and I wish you to know why. There is a suggestion of weakness in your nature which I wish to eradicate. When you are with me you do not do justice to yourself—you are content to walk in my shadow and see life through my eyes. But I desire to remind you that you have arrived at man's estate, and that you must live your own life and think your own thoughts. You are free, you are twenty-two, and you are wealthy. You [Pg 306]

have, therefore, no reason to fear that any obstacles will be thrown in your path. You have no enemies—I have scattered them from your path. Think only of making friends for yourself. I have had protégés rather than friends.

"I know you to be sincere and generous. Believe and give. It is good sometimes for a man to make mistakes. True experience is made up of errors. Do not be afraid of their consequences. But, nevertheless, be cautious. Avoid the irreparable. To kiss is a crime, the only one, possibly, because it is the only one that cannot be repaired. If, however, you commit great faults, do not hesitate to acknowledge them.

"Make your own way through life, my son. I have left you that you may do so. You have near you devoted hearts. Coucon will never forsake you. I have taken my old Bertuccio with me. I did not wish you to think that I had left any one to watch you and report to me. In case of danger, summon Fanfar.

"Up to this time I feel that you have had no secrets from me. Your heart is free, let it be your guide. Remember that love, often great happiness, is more often great sorrow.

"I love you, my son, though I leave you. I know not where I am going. I long to do good, and hope to find happiness.

"Dear, dear child! Oh! how I love you!

"MONTE-CRISTO."

CHAPTER XLIV.

[Pg 307]

ESPERANCE.

The youthful son of Monte-Cristo was twenty-two years of age, and wonderfully handsome. His dark curls shaded a fair, white brow, and his eyes were haughty like his father's. His slender white hands were womanly in their delicacy. But we will examine his surroundings.

Whenever Monte-Cristo established himself in a new home, the house became transformed as if a magician of the Arabian Nights had touched it with his wand. There was not a dark or gloomy corner to be seen. Lights blazed everywhere. The rarest pictures and choicest furniture were to be seen. Everything was magnificent and harmonious. The tall stature of the Count, his excessive pallor and the exaggerated attention he paid to his dress, added to this effect, as did the dark face of Ali, who, invariably draped in soft, white folds, stood like a bronze statue near the many colored portières. With the Vicomte, however, all colors were softer than with his father. The cabinet, for example, where we find him, was hung with gray and black velvet, and the rugs were fur, of the same soft gray.

The Vicomte's dress was in no ways peculiar, though careful. He disliked anything that made him conspicuous. His face and his voice had a certain sadness that contrasted strangely with his [Pg 308] name of Esperance. [A] Books lay open on the table before him; they were on philosophical subjects, heat and cold. Imagination had never touched him with her golden wand.

[A] Esperance means Hope.

Esperance was very pale as he read his father's letter. He extended his hand and rang the bell.

Coucon entered, looking very differently from those old days in Africa. Not that he wore a livery, but his brown suit was simple and well cut. In his eyes, however, was much of the old fire.

"Has my father gone?" asked Esperance.

"Yes, sir, while you were asleep."

"Why was not I awakened?"

"Because the Count forbade it. He simply said, as he went away, that a letter was to be given to you."

"Was Bertuccio with my father?"

"Yes, sir."

"In what direction did he go?"

"I know not, and I assure you that no one in the hôtel knows more than I."

Coucon was glad when this examination was over. Esperance was never harsh or severe with his people, but they never felt at ease with him as with his father. But in fact Bertuccio had given no hint of where the Count was going, and when Esperance was fully convinced of this he dismissed Coucon; but as the Zouave was leaving the room, the young master stopped him.

"I want to say to you, Coucon, that I am fully aware of your fidelity, and that I trust you implicitly. You once assisted my father to save my life."

"Never mind that, sir." [Pg 309]

"And if my manner is cold toward you, my heart is not. Shake hands with me."

Coucon, greatly pleased, laid his huge hand into the delicate one of the Vicomte, who pressed it warmly.

The Zouave uttered an exclamation.

"What is the matter?"

"Nothing—only—"

"Only what?"

"Well, sir, you have a tremendous squeeze, I must say. Your fingers felt as if they were made of steel."

Esperance looked at his hands in some surprise.

"Yes," he said, in a dreamy voice, "I am strong, I believe."

"Strong! I should say you were."

"I did not hurt you, I trust?" and Esperance still gazed at his hands in a troubled sort of way.

"Where will you breakfast, sir?" asked Coucon.

"In the gallery, I think."

"And alone?"

"I don't know; I do not remember inviting any one."

Coucon departed, proud of the shake of the hand he had received, although he still rubbed his fingers to restore the circulation.

CHAPTER XLV. [Pg 310]

"WHAT WILL HE DO?"

Esperance was alone; his brow was thoughtful. He sank into a chair and buried his face in his hands. Suddenly he started up, and drawing aside the heavy portière over a door, entered a small, dark room that seemed to be an oratory.

Stained glass windows admitted an uncertain light. Esperance threw open the sash and the daylight streamed in, and with it the delicious breeze of spring. Esperance turned to the wall, on which hung a fine picture of Monte-Cristo. Next this portrait hung one of his mother.

The young man spoke aloud. "Father!" he said, "mother! listen to me, judge me and counsel me. Who and what am I? What is my future to be? Am I guilty or am I—mad?"

Esperance shivered. Then throwing his head back proudly, he said, "No, I am not mad, and yet I cannot understand myself. Oh! father, why did I not have courage to speak to you frankly? You would have understood me and encouraged me. I am afraid of life, I am afraid of myself—afraid of the very name I bear, and of your greatness, the shadow of which falls on me."

In the letter written by Monte-Cristo to his son, he had spoken the truth. He had not thought [Pg 311] sufficiently of developing the especial characteristics of his son, and had made of him a philosopher.

Esperance had been compelled to reason calmly on all subjects, and the inconsequence of youth had been frowned upon by his father.

Edmond Dantès had been young, vivacious and full of illusions and hopes. Monte-Cristo forgot this, and forgot that Esperance was but twenty. He had been kind and loving to Esperance; he had, as he believed, armed him for the battle of life, but he had extinguished his boyishness and engrafted the seeds of distrust.

Esperance never accused his father, but the result of this education was that he was afraid of himself and others. Monte-Cristo saw his son silent and sad at times, but he did not realize that it was because he had quenched the youth in him and made him prematurely old. He moreover suddenly became convinced that it was best for Esperance to leave him, and therefore departed silently and mysteriously.

Esperance was armed against the tragedies of life, but not against its daily annoyances.

Esperance had enormous muscular strength, and yet he was weak to resist sorrow. He could have held his hand on a brazier of burning coals, but he would have started at a pin-prick. And now that Monte-Cristo had gone, Esperance felt like a child deprived of its mother.

A bell rang, announcing a visitor.

He passed his hand over his brow. Then addressing the dear portraits once more, "Beloved mother!" he murmured, "give me your enthusiasm and your delicacy, and, my father, give me strength and courage. God grant that I may be worthy of you both!" [Pg 312]

He went to the window, and gazed up at the blue sky with an expression that was almost mystical. Then he closed the room, and returned to his chamber.

Coucon appeared bearing two cards on a silver tray.

Esperance looked at the cards, and uttered an exclamation of joy.

"Lay two more covers," he said, "I will come down at once."

CHAPTER XLVI. [Pg 313]

FORWARD!

Esperance hurried down, and in the dining-room, a marvel of marqueterie and mosaic, was a young man.

"My dear Goutran," he said, as the stranger advanced to meet him, "I cannot tell you how obliged I am for this visit."

This Goutran, Goutran Sabrau, was a tall young fellow of about twenty-five, with blonde hair and a frank face. He was a painter, and had already attained some celebrity.

"Upon my word, this is a welcome worth having," said Goutran. "But what is going on here, you do not look like yourself. Your eyes are much brighter than usual. Have you not some secret to confide to me?"

The two young men took their seats at a table, laid with great elegance.

"No. I have no secrets," answered Esperance, "and I am unaware of any change."

"And yet the very tones of your voice are altered."

Esperance interrupted his friend with some impatience.

"Never mind that! I assure you that so far from having anything pleasant to communicate, I am out of spirits. My father has gone away."

Goutran looked at him with some surprise. [Pg 314]

The intimacy between these young men had begun by Esperance wishing to buy a picture of Goutran's, which had obtained a great success at the Salon. The picture was of a gipsy girl playing a violin and dancing. Bertuccio went to the painter's studio, and offered an enormous sum for the picture, which was refused by Goutran. Accustomed to the gratification of all his caprices, he went himself to the studio. But the young man replied:

"You offer me, sir, twenty thousand francs for a canvas for which a picture dealer would not give me fifty louis, and yet I refuse. At the same time I am immensely flattered, and feel that I owe you an explanation. The picture is dear to me for reasons which are neither a drama nor a poem. I had a friend whom I adored. She had an affection of the lungs and I often took her into the country. We were one day at Mendon when we heard strange music, wild barbarian music. We approached softly, and beheld through the trees a young gipsy girl playing a violin and lightly dancing as she played. We listened in astonishment, for the music was most singular. Suddenly I felt that my companion was clinging heavily to my arm. She had fainted. I seized her in my arms, and bore her away. In a week death was very near. Then she said to me:

"'I must hear that gipsy again!'

"I could not leave her, but I sent a friend to find this unknown girl. Each morning I discovered that the search had been fruitless. The sick girl said when I told her, 'Very well! I shall not die until she comes.' On the fourth day she half lifted herself from her bed exclaiming: [Pg 315]

"'There she is! I hear her!'

"I ran to the window, and beheld the gipsy in the garden. How did the sick girl know she was there? The gipsy had not played a note. I could not refuse my poor Aimée anything, and sent for the gipsy to come at once to the room where the sick girl lay. The gipsy began to play such soft, mysterious melodies. Poor Aimée listened with a faint smile. Suddenly she drew me to her, kissed me, and died. This gipsy, sir, is the one I have painted. You see therefore that I could never part with this picture."

At this time Esperance was doing his best to copy his father's manners. He was but twenty-one and he affected impassibility. He adopted his most phlegmatic English air, and replied to the painter:

"Your story is most interesting, but I will give fifty thousand francs."

Goutran was surprised and somewhat displeased. He repeated his refusal, and Esperance departed discontented with himself and with every one else.

On thinking the whole affair over he was heartily ashamed of himself. On the third day he went to the studio, and, on entering, said simply:

"For two days I have been uncomfortable. I beg you to accept my apologies for my ungentlemanly conduct."

Goutran was an excellent person, he had early learned indulgence to others. He at once saw that this handsome young fellow was a boy in reality, with plenty of theories, but no experience of life. [Pg 316] He therefore received this apology frankly, and talked for some time to him as to a younger brother.

Esperance listened without a word. The distrust which was a part of his nature struggled against the cordiality shown by Goutran.

Finally Esperance had a friend. To Goutran alone did he ever open his heart, and even when he had been with him for hours, laughing and talking with gayety, he appeared before Monte-Cristo as impassive as ever.

Goutran did not attempt to penetrate the secrets of his life. He knew, however, that the day could not be far off when the butterfly would emerge from the chrysalis.

"My father has gone away," Esperance had said.

"Indeed! And where has he gone?"

"I have no idea. He simply wrote me a few lines announcing his departure."

Goutran did not think it worth while to be astonished, for this was a most singular household.

"Then you are entirely your own master?"

"Yes," answered Esperance, "I am free."

"I have a favor to ask," said Goutran, after a minute's silence.

"Ask it. You know every thing I have is yours."

"Yes—another minute you would offer me millions."

"No, I did not think of doing so. I am rich, I know, but it is not my fault. And I do not think it generous in you to reproach me with these millions."

"I did not mean to offend you. If I needed money I would ask you for it."

"Money! what is that? I should have only to fill out a check, you know. But ask me to fight for you, [Pg 317] to be killed for you!"

Goutran took the hand of the youth in his, and smilingly said:

"Do you know, Esperance, the greatest sacrifice I can ask of you?"

"Go on."

"It would be to mount upon the imperial of an omnibus. Ah! you are astonished, and are asking yourself if I am not laughing at you, but I assure you that I am in solemn earnest. The truth is, Esperance, that you are not happy."

"I assure you—"

"No, you are not happy because you are hampered by conventionalities. You never were in an omnibus, I suppose?"

"No, never."

"When you wish to go out you ring the bell, and your carriage is brought round. If you go to the theatre a spacious *loge* is in readiness for you. You go into society—you are received with smiles. Do you know that a life like that would be my death?"

"Why do you talk thus to-day?" asked Esperance.

"I can't tell you why. The words come of themselves, but they express my feelings precisely. You millionaires know nothing of life. You are like a drop of oil in a pitcher of water—you do not mingle with the rest of humanity, and you are bored!"

Esperance was annoyed that his mood had been so readily divined.

"But you have not told me what sacrifice you desired of me." [Pg 318]

"I did not say sacrifice—I said service."

"Well, whichever it may be, I am ready."

"Very good! You are certainly the best fellow in the world!"

Here it must be mentioned that Esperance never drank wine. The table was supplied with several kinds, but, like his father, Esperance never touched them.

Goutran poured some sherry into the glass of his friend.

"I have come," he said, "to make a confession and ask a loan."

He tossed off a glass of wine as he spoke. Esperance mechanically drank also.

"This is my confession: I, Goutran, a painter, propose to give a *soirée* to-morrow night."

"You!"

"Yes, neither more nor less, and I intend to add to this *soirée* a ball."

"In your atélier?"

"Why not? It is not as large as the Square, to be sure, but it will be a success."

"But what is the occasion of these festivities?"

"Oh! thereby hangs a tale. A great Italian lord was, when I was in Rome, extremely kind to me. He treated me like a son. He has come to Paris, and I must do something for him and for other friends. He is immensely wealthy himself—not to be mentioned the same day with you, to be sure. I intend to kill two birds with one stone, and invite my friends to send their pictures on exhibition. [Pg 319] I need your assistance, and I need some tapestries."

Esperance listened attentively, and did not notice that Goutran had filled his glass with sherry again.

"I want my studio to be magnificent on this occasion, and as we artists are not rich enough to buy oriental hangings, we are all going to our friends to borrow of them. You have treasures of this nature—will you lend them to me? And the great service was simply that you should lend me some of those marvelous Japanese hangings of yours."

"I regret extremely that you ask such a trifle at my hands, and now beg that you will grant me one."

"What is that?"

"Will you give up the arrangement of the studio to me? I will send men and all my Smyrna and India stuff to-morrow morning, and they will do it all."

"No, no! Do you think I would allow common upholsterers to touch your treasures! I wish to mount step-ladders in my shirt sleeves, with a big hammer in my hand, and put them up myself."

And, as Esperance looked at him with troubled surprise, Goutran continued:

"My dear friend, open your boxes for me, let me select what I want. We two will study the effects, and then I will carry off a bundle in my arms with joy and gratitude. By the way, I shall expect you at my *soirée*!"

"Oh! you know that I always work in the evening."

"What has that to do with it? You need not work unless you choose. Come—there will be ladies there!"

CHAPTER XLVII. [Pg 320]

JANE ZELD.

A thoroughly artistic atmosphere was that of Sabrau's studio. There was not a picture nor a picture frame, a bronze nor a bit of china that did not attract attention. Uniformity had been carefully avoided—all tints, all forms, blended into one original whole.

Goutran had arranged the place with his own hands for the fête, which, as Goutran said, had a double aim. He wished not only to return the princely hospitality he had received, but to make of the affair a private exhibition of the works of his young friends; he himself only hung his gipsy. Rachel Marstens, the great actress, assisted by Emma Bruges, consented to do the honors. Every artistic celebrity accepted his invitations. Even the critics came, and were amiable.

Comte Velleni was among the earliest arrivals. He was a fine-looking old man, and extremely courteous to all the young artists, and as he was very wealthy, his compliments on their work excited many hopes. He was not alone. He was accompanied by his secretary, by whom the young painters were not favorably impressed. His eyes were deep-set under bushy eyebrows, his hair and beard were black as jet.

"A bad looking fellow!" murmured one to another.

The age of this individual was uncertain—he might have been fifty. A deep scar ran across one cheek. His expression was crafty, his eyes shifting, and he kept in the background. [Pg 321]

There was a little stir when Monsieur and Mademoiselle de Laisangy were announced, for that same morning the official journal of the empire had announced the opening of the Banque de Credit Imperial, with a capital of sixty million. Monsieur de Laisangy was the director of this new bank.

Goutran advanced to meet this gentleman with an eagerness that would have marred the interest which we feel in him had it not been explained by the presence of the charming daughter of the banker, Carmen de Laisangy.

Goutran had painted Carmen's portrait, which had excited much commendation at the Salon, to which fact was probably due the presence of the banker and his daughter at this *soirée*.

Carmen had no mother, and she had been brought up somewhat in the American style, but as she was very beautiful and had committed none but the most trifling indiscretions, many things were overlooked in her which in other girls would not have been tolerated.

The banker was an old man and excessively thin, he held himself with English stiffness; a muscular contraction affected his upper lip. He stood well at Court. He had, it was said, made large loans at the time of the *coup d'etat* in '51, and Bonaparte's accomplices called him their friend.

"I am deeply indebted to you, Mademoiselle," said Goutran, "for your acceptance of an invitation which I was almost afraid to send." [Pg 322]

Carmen was very pretty, as we have said. Her dress was cut very low, and revealed too much of an admirably modelled bust. Her manner was not that of a young girl, it was more assured. But she was charming.

She laughed, and said, in reply, "You are my especial artist, you know, and history tells us that even queens visit their painters—"

"For example, the Duchess of Ferrara!" said a young man to a friend, in a low voice. He had caught her words as he passed, and hazarded this allusion, somewhat too broad, perhaps, to the visit paid by the Duchess to Titian, when she was painted in the costume of mother Eve. He undoubtedly supposed that the young lady would not understand his remark, and yet it was plain that she with difficulty restrained a laugh.

She led Goutran to the picture gallery. "I am told," she said, "that you have two great surprises for your guests, to-night."

"Oh! no; only one. You have heard of Jane Zeld, that marvelous bird who has come to us from Finland, Lapland, or some other place—we will call it Russia?"

"But I was told that she had refused to sing in Paris at present—declined even to go to Compiègne."

"Yes, but for you," and Goutran bowed low, "I have obtained what was refused to an Emperor!"

He pressed Carmen's arm against his own, as he spoke. [Pg 323]

The girl turned and looked him full in the face for a moment. "Take me to my father," she said.

Was it fancy, or did she emphasize the two words, "my father," in an odd sort of way?

As in silence he obeyed her request, which though brief, was by no means stern, a singular scene was taking place.

Signor Fagiano, who talked little, was wandering about through the salons. Suddenly he found himself face to face with Monsieur de Laisangy.

Signor Fagiano started back, and half covered his face with his hand, but in turning to make good his retreat, he half stumbled and fell.

The banker instinctively extended his hand to assist him. Fagiano bowed low as he recovered himself, and went into another room.

There was certainly nothing very remarkable in this incident, but Carmen started and instantly hastened to the side of the banker, who seemed calmly indifferent to what had taken place. Seeing this, her anxiety, if she felt any, was dissipated, and she began to talk to Goutran.

At this moment the footman announced two names: "Mademoiselle Jane Zeld!" "The Vicomte de Monte-Cristo!"

"You see, I did have two surprises for you," said Goutran.

But suddenly he exclaimed, "My dear Monsieur de Laisangy, you are ill, I fear—"

"No, no," stammered the banker, "but it is very warm here, and I will go out on the terrace a while, if you will permit me." [Pg 324]

He left his daughter, who seemed to attach little importance to this sudden indisposition of her

father's.

Goutran went forward to receive his new guests. A murmur of admiration greeted the lady—Jane Zeld, the cantatrice.

She was tall and slender, and dressed in black tulle with crimson roses. She advanced with a smile on her lips. She was young, not more than twenty-two, with dark hair raised over her brow like a diadem and falling at the back of her head in loose braids. Her complexion was clear but pale, her eyes were almond-shaped with long lashes and had a singular fixity of expression.

Who was she? No one knew. She had appeared on the stage of public life in a singular way. There had been a fire about two months before at one of the theatres, and a musical evening had been organized for the benefit of the victims.

Society, which likes amusements and is willing to be benevolent at the same time, had responded to the appeal, and on the evening of the performance the hall was crowded. The principal attraction was the return to public life of a tenor, who had had a fit of the sulks and had deserted the stage. He had promised to sing with the Diva a celebrated duet. When the audience had assembled a message arrived at the theatre. The Diva was ill, or pretended to be so, and now, at [Pg 325] the last moment, announced that it was impossible to appear.

This was terrible. The tenor was implored to sing alone, but he positively refused, and the non-appearance of the two stars made the affair an utter fiasco. Artists and journalists, director and secretaries assembled in the *foyer*—all talked together in their excitement. The tenor, half lying on a couch, caressed his black beard, while he listened with nonchalance to the entreaties addressed to him. But the moment was rapidly approaching when the fatal announcement must be made to the audience.

Presently a voice began to sing the jewel song from Faust. The singer was at the piano in the *foyer*, but was so enveloped in black lace that she could hardly be seen. Her voice was so good, her method so perfect, that every one listened in delight. Even the tenor, for he was a thorough musician, was completely carried away.

The lady finished the song, then rising from her seat she stood leaning against the piano without the smallest embarrassment.

The tenor went forward. "Madame," he said, "do you know the duet we were about to sing?"

The singer reseated herself at the piano and playing a prelude, sang two or three bars with exquisite expression.

"Madame," began the tenor.

"Mademoiselle," corrected the lady, raising her vail.

"You have a hundred times more talent than Mademoiselle X."

"We will not talk of her, and she must always remain in ignorance of this defection of one of her [Pg 326] greatest admirers."

But the feeling against the prima donna was that day of excessive bitterness, and every one agreed with the tenor.

"Will you sing with me?" asked the tenor.

The lady answered, "As this fête is for charity, I cannot decline."

The director then said:

"We will express our thanks later, dear lady; please give me your name that I may make the announcement."

The tenor lifted his head.

"I will lead the lady on, and that is quite enough."

When the public saw that the singer was not the celebrated X. they were for a moment confounded, but the tenor was the guaranty, he could not be mistaken. The duet began; never had the tenor sang so well.

The unknown was a thorough artist. She looked like a statue of Passion, as she stood at the piano, and her triumph was so great that it was the talk of Paris for three days. But the strangest part of all was, that after receiving this ovation she disappeared. The reporters could not find her. Finally one of them, more indefatigable than the others, discovered her in a small hôtel on the Champs Elysées. Her name was inscribed as Jane Zeld, from Russia, and she was accompanied by an intendant named Maslenes.

The reporter, armed with this information, proceeded to concoct a legend. She belonged, he said, to a great family in Russia. She had left her home "for reasons which the *Journal* was not at [Pg 327] liberty to reveal."

For a fortnight, managers and directors were on the *qui vive*, but as a poetical personage of importance took this time to commit suicide, the name of Jane Zeld was gradually forgotten.

When two days before his fête, Goutran received a perfumed note in which Jane offered to sing for him, he was charmed.

The lady entered the room, followed at some little distance by Esperance, who had conquered his timidity and come. His father had bidden him "live," and the young man felt that he was in a measure obeying his order when he drove to Goutran's studio, where he arrived just in time to assist the fair stranger from her carriage.

The horizon of Paris is so vast that there is always room for a new star. And Jane Zeld, even if she had not shrouded herself in so much mystery, and without a voice, would have been conspicuous for her beauty, which was of aristocratic delicacy. Her lips were like pomegranate flowers in their rich red. Her bust was discreetly vailed, her arms were beautifully rounded, firm and white, and terminated in exquisite hands.

Goutran had begged Esperance to come to his fête. The Vicomte did so, and Goutran seemed to forget his presence. Only a few curious glances were turned upon him. All eyes were watching Jane who, too, seemed to forget the person who had so gallantly assisted her from her carriage. Every one was eager for an introduction to this queen of the evening, and when she went to the [Pg 328] piano a great hush fell upon the room. She sang melodies, Slavonic airs, that had never before been heard in Paris, and then an aria of a great composer, and when she concluded there was immense applause.

"Do you know," said a voice, in the ear of the host, "that you are a most eccentric person!"

The painter colored deeply, for it was Carmen who spoke. Goutran had indeed behaved very strangely to her. He apologized in some confusion, his duties as host, his many interruptions, etc.

"I forgive you," answered Carmen, "on one condition."

"Any thing!"

"Oh! I shall only ask a trifle. Can you spare me a few moments?"

"Certainly."

"Then give me your arm, and take me out on the terrace."

"The terrace! How did you know that I had a terrace?" asked Goutran, astonished.

"Pray do not be uneasy. I never visited your studio in your absence. I heard Monsieur Laisangy say, just now, that he would go to the terrace for a little fresh air."

"Yes," said Goutran, "your father came one day to talk about your portrait, and I showed him the place which I dignify with the name of terrace. It is but a small square of zinc, on which a few sickly plants are withering. It was not worthy to be shown to my friends." [Pg 329]

"But you will make an exception in my favor?"

"Most assuredly."

They crossed the studio. Goutran started. He had seen Esperance leaning against a door, pale and absorbed in thought. The liquid strains of Jane's voice had reached him here, softer and sweeter than ever.

"Will you allow me to present to you the Vicomte de Monte-Cristo?" asked Goutran.

"Is he the son of the celebrated Count?" Carmen replied, looking at the young man with curiosity.

"Precisely, and one of the best fellows in the world."

"Is that the reason you let him stand there all by himself?" she asked with an *étourderie* that did not seem quite natural.

"It is my misfortune to-night," answered Goutran, "that I am forced to neglect all that is dear to me."

Carmen did not reply, but again she turned and looked him full in the eyes.

"Yes," she said presently, "introduce the young man, if you choose. Being both forgotten to-night, it is well that we should be together."

Esperance looked up at this moment, and Goutran made him a signal.

"Mademoiselle," said the host, "permit me to present to you the Vicomte de Monte-Cristo."

Esperance bowed low.

"I think I have never had the pleasure of meeting you before, Vicomte," said Carmen. [Pg 330]

"Oh! Esperance is a workingman!" cried Goutran. "He disdains our worldly pleasures."

Esperance protested with a gesture, but evidently his mind was elsewhere.

"I rely on you, Mademoiselle, and on your charming friends," continued Goutran, "to cure this misanthrope of his bad habits!"

Carmen, probably displeased at the indifference manifested by Esperance, now drew her host away.

"What do you think of him?" asked Goutran.

"He is good looking, certainly, but I cannot judge of his mind."

"He is entirely upset of late. I have just taken his education in hand."

Carmen seemed trying to recall something.

"The Count of Monte-Cristo is the person who met with such a series of incredible adventures, and is named Edmond Dantès?" she asked.

"Yes, you are right."

"And tell me, if you can—excuse the question—if Monsieur de Laisangy had ever any relations with him?"

"Ah! that I cannot say. Your father has not been in Paris for some years, and the Count has been here very little of late. But I can easily find out for you."

"No, no—pray make no inquiries!" said Carmen, eagerly. "But the terrace—where is it?"

"Here it is!" answered Goutran, raising a curtain.

The apartment that Goutran occupied was on the second floor, and the terrace, of which he had [Pg 331] spoken so slightingly, was draped with clematis, and commanded a beautiful view down the avenue to the Place de la Concorde.

The evening was calm and the air delicious. Carmen certainly deserved to be called imprudent. She looked very lovely in the moonlight, and Goutran was young and passionately in love. Carmen still leaned on his arm. She murmured softly:

"How delicious it is here!"

He slipped his arm around her waist, and as she threw back her head to look up at the moon, Goutran leaned forward and kissed her. Let her who is without sin throw the first stone!

At this precise moment a clear voice came from the garden below, and this voice said:

"Do not be too anxious to learn my name, Monsieur de Laisangy."

The two young people separated hastily. Carmen ran to the balustrade and looked over, but she could see nothing, and heard now only two angry voices disputing. Carmen went to the window, and opening it, said coldly:

"We will go in, if you please!"

As they entered the gallery, the Vicomte de Monte-Cristo hurried up to Goutran.

"Come with me," he said, "I must see you at once!"

CHAPTER XLVIII. [Pg 332]

A THUNDER CLAP.

Goutran was startled by the tone in which Esperance spoke. He hastened with Carmen to the music-room, and then returned to the Vicomte.

"I have been very negligent," the artist said, penitently, "and I have a thousand apologies to make. And now, what may I do for you?"

The Vicomte was very pale. He hesitated.

"My friend," he said at last, "you have entire confidence in me, have you not?"

"Most certainly. You have won both my esteem and affection."

"And you think me incapable of falsehood?"

"What a question!"

"Then listen to me. I was standing in this spot just now—I had been listening to that girl's divine voice. You passed me and spoke to me, but I hardly knew what you said, when suddenly from behind that hanging came these words, distinctly pronounced:

"Take care, son of Monte-Cristo, take care! You are walking into a snare laid for you. Take care!"

"A snare! Who was it that spoke?"

"I know not. I instantly drew aside the curtain, but there was no one there."

"No one!" Goutran smiled. "But this is sorcery, my dear fellow. You must have been dreaming. It was, of course, some illusion." [Pg 333]

"Illusion!" repeated Esperance, impatiently, "I tell you that I heard the words distinctly."

"Then it was some one who, seeing you buried in thought, played this wretched joke."

"That may be, but there was a tone of sincerity in the voice that struck me."

"But there is no sense in the words. A snare! Who could spread one for you in this house but myself? Now will you, in your turn, tell me if you have absolute faith in me? I have been anxious to coax you from your studies and your solitude, and I was glad when I saw you come in to-night. Now, my dear fellow, dismiss these fancies. Take my arm and make a plunge into the furnace!"

Goutran laughed as he led the way toward the room where Jane Zeld had been singing.

"Can the snare," continued Goutran, "be found in the delicious tones of that voice, which has moved you so deeply? Those eyes are wonderfully bright."

Esperance found himself near the piano. Jane had risen, and was receiving the many compliments of her admirers. She saw Esperance, and as her eyes fell upon him, Goutran felt his companion start.

"Suppose," he said, "that I present you to our star? Surely she will exorcise your dismal thoughts. Mademoiselle," he added, addressing Jane, "one of your most ardent admirers solicits the honor of being presented to you."

The two—Jane and Esperance—were now face to face. Esperance, pale and silent, looked at Jane, while she stood waiting possibly for some words of praise. [Pg 334]

The crowd swept on, leaving these two persons almost alone, and at this moment a candle fell from one of the chandeliers upon the train of Jane's black tulle, and shrieks from all the women rent the air. Flames threatened to envelop Jane. With a rapidity that was quicker than thought, Esperance tore down one of the heavy Eastern portières, and wrapped it around the girl. He did this so skilfully that in a minute the flames were stifled, and Jane stood, pale but smiling, as if she hardly knew the danger she had been in. She was magnificent, enveloped in this mantle that looked like a royal robe.

Having accomplished his work Esperance drew back, like a worshipper recoiling in terror after touching the goddess.

At this moment a man made his way through the crowd. He was dressed in an old-fashioned livery. His face was large-featured and solemn, but now contracted with terror.

"Are you hurt?" he cried, as he reached Jane. Two persons started on hearing this voice—one was Jane. She colored deeply, and in much agitation answered quickly:

"No, my friend, I am not hurt. It was a slight accident, and this gentleman saved me."

Esperance started, because he felt sure that this voice and the one that had addressed to him the strange words he had repeated to Goutran, was the same. The man turned and looked at the Count.

"Who is this man who seems so interested in his friend?" asked some one. [Pg 335]

"Oh! he is the intendant—Master Jacques—who goes everywhere with Jane Zeld," answered the ever-present reporter, delighted to have an opportunity of displaying his erudition. "He is called Maslenes at the hôtel."

Jane turned to Esperance:

"Will you kindly add to your kindness by giving me your arm to my carriage?"

While the crowd, who had by no means recovered from their agitation, complimented her on her courage, Jane moved slowly from the room. Goutran made no effort to detain her, though he knew very well that her departure would be the signal for a general move, as it was long after midnight.

Esperance tried to speak, but he found it impossible to say a word to Jane. The intendant preceded them. It was plain to the most casual observer that he had by no means gotten over his terror. His feet were unsteady, and his hands trembled to that degree that he could hardly open the carriage door.

"Once more let me thank you," said Jane, softly. "We shall meet again I trust."

Esperance, almost as if in a dream, bowed over her extended hand, and pressed a kiss upon it. The hand trembled, but it was not withdrawn too hastily.

Then Esperance saw nothing more—neither the intendant, who lingered as if to speak to him, nor the coachman as he gathered up the reins. He heard the rattle of wheels that bore Jane away, and laid his hand on his heart to quell the strange tumult there. He remained standing on the pavement, blind to the curious gaze of his servants. [Pg 336]

"Are you going home sir, now?" asked his own coachman.

"Ah! what did you say?" Esperance aroused himself and looked around. "Yes, I wish to go home." He took a step to the carriage.

"If you will wait a moment, sir, the footman will go for your hat."

His hat! Esperance did not know that his head was uncovered. He was amazed at himself, he felt a certain sense of shame.

"No," he replied, "I will go for it myself."

He went back to Goutran's apartment. As he passed through the vestibule he heard a sarcastic laugh. He was of course mistaken, for only Goutran, with Carmen, were coming down the stairs—Monsieur de Laisangy, Comte Velleni, and his Secretary Fagiano.

"You have behaved like a hero, Count!" cried Carmen, as soon as she saw him.

Her father at this moment had a violent attack of coughing. Through it all he said:

"You have done well, sir."

Signor Fagiano said in clear, distinct tones:

"The Vicomte is a worthy son of his father!"

I know not why, but these words sounded disagreeably to Esperance, who turned quickly. But Fagiano was in the shadow, and Esperance saw only his eyes, which were very bright. The Vicomte began to think his nerves were sadly out of order.

Goutran, when the door had closed on the last of his guests, turned to him and asked how he would like a little walk up the Champs-Elysées. [Pg 337]

"Very much," answered the Vicomte, "I need fresh air."

He took his hat from the hands of a lacquey, and the two young men walked off together. Neither knew that Fagiano had not driven away with Comte Velleni, but that, standing in a dark doorway, he followed the Vicomte with his eyes. Hissing through his close shut teeth, he said:

"Yes, worthy son of thy father, I swear that I will have my revenge!"

CHAPTER XLIX. [Pg 338]

HOW AND WHERE.

As the reporter had discovered, Jane Zeld occupied an apartment on the first floor of a small hôtel, or rather, in one of those boarding-houses frequented by respectable people who come from the four quarters of the globe to enjoy the attractions of Paris. It was a most respectable establishment, with its iron gate *à l'Anglaise*, its well scrubbed steps, its parlor on the *rez de chaussée*, and its three floors above all occupied.

The lady who managed this enterprise was the widow of a captain. She wore English curls, spoke a few words in various languages, and had a marvelous ability for making out long bills. Her prices were high, very high, but the situation of her house was at once elegant and retired. It was a wonder that these items were not entered on the bill. She had never admitted any artists into her sanctuary until the intendant Maslenes one day offered her five hundred francs for an apartment which she usually rented for three, and no single women. Now Jane Zeld seemed to be a single woman, but Madame closed her eyes to this, and now that she divined a star in the future, Madame Vollard redoubled her courtesy to her lodger. She felt that she was a mine of wealth in the future. That night Madame Vollard had insisted on dressing Jane herself, and she had excellent taste. She spent a number of hours dwelling on the undoubted success of "the dear child," and it was two o'clock when she heard the carriage. She ran down the stairs, and when she saw Jane and her remarkable costume, she raised her hands in astonishment. [Pg 339]

"You have had a pleasant time, I trust!" she exclaimed.

Maslenes gently pushed her back.

"Excuse me, Madame, but the young lady is fatigued, and somewhat ill, I fear."

"Ill! What can I do for her? I have camphor, lavender water—what shall I get?"

Maslenes led Jane hastily to her room, saying as he did so:

"No, no, it is nothing. To-morrow will do. She only needs rest now."

Jane sank into a chair on reaching her salon.

Maslenes closed the door, and stood motionless and silent until she should see fit to speak.

How old was this man? Sixty probably, and yet his face was unwrinkled although his hair was perfectly white. His eyes were gray. He inspired at first sight a certain repulsion. There were

indications of vices, but they were of vices that had burned themselves out, of passions that had crumbled to ashes. Now, as he stood with his arms folded on his breast, his face expressed something more than the interest of a servant in his mistress. In his faded eyes there was great compassion. His pale lips trembled. Jane did not speak. He said gently:

"You are suffering?" [Pg 340]

She started as if from sleep.

"No," she replied, "no. I did not know." Then she looked up. "Ah!" she said, "why did you drag me among these people? I will never go anywhere again. No, never!"

The man bit his lips. "And yet," he said, "you were received like a queen!"

"Why do you say that?" she asked, in a tone of great irritation. "Why do you try to awaken in me thoughts which should never be mine? A queen! I!"

"But your talent—your voice?"

"What of them? Ah! leave me. I wish to be alone!"

She spoke with some harshness.

He answered sadly enough.

"I am always willing to obey you, Jane. Do not speak in that tone."

"Yes, I know that. Forgive me if I am cruel. Alas! You know what agony I hide within my breast." She rose to her feet as she spoke. "Why," she cried, "why did not that fire burn me to death? I should have suffered less than from this flame which devours my heart!"

She leaned her head against the wall, and burst into passionate weeping.

Maslenes, too, had tears in his eyes. It was plain that he cherished a mysterious affection for this beautiful woman, who was tortured by some secret sorrow.

"Jane,—Miss Jane," he corrected himself quickly. "I have never seen you like this before. Some [Pg 341] one must have insulted you!"

His eyes flashed as he said this.

"No," murmured Jane. "No, nothing of the kind."

"Then you are over-excited by this accident. Pray, try and control yourself. I know that there are sad thoughts, which you cannot drive from your mind, but you are young; you have the future before you, you will forget the past. You must!"

Jane dried her tears with her lace handkerchief, and her face became suddenly calm.

"Yes, I will forget," she replied, firmly. "You are right, I must do so. Forgive me!"

She extended her hand.

He hesitated and, drawing back, replied:

"We will talk together to-morrow. You know that you may rely on me."

"Yes, and I am very weary."

The intendant left the room. When outside the room, he caught at the railing, and with almost a sob, exclaimed: "How miserable I am!"

"Well!" asked Madame, from the foot of the stairs, "is the poor child any better?"

"Yes, thank you. There was an accident; her dress took fire."

"What a pity! A new dress, too. But I can offer her another in its place—one that has just come into my hands."

"You can talk with her about it to-morrow. At present I am worn out."

He hurried to his room, which was in the attic under the eaves, furnished with the most excessive [Pg 342] simplicity: an iron bedstead, a table, and one chair. A trunk with a large lock upon it was also in the room.

Maslenes locked the door, and then dropped on the one chair the place contained. He sat for some minutes buried in thought.

"What am I to do? What am I to do?"

Then he rose, and opened the trunk of which we have spoken, with a key that he took from his pocket. He took out a bag, and a portfolio. He tried the weight of the bag and shrugged his shoulders. He then loosened the cord that held the bag together, and produced ten louis, at which he looked sadly. The portfolio contained three bank notes of one hundred francs each.

"And in two days I have five hundred francs to pay, and afterward what is to become of us?"

Then a long silence broken by the words once more, "Oh! how miserable I am!" He paced his room like a prisoner in his cell.

"What am I to do? I am afraid to try anything. I might, to be sure, earn a crust of bread for myself, but what is to become of her? Poor Jane! and yet I would give my very life to spare her one pang. If she pleased she might, with her talent, be as rich as a queen, but she cannot forget the past, and that is my work!"

He counted the louis over and over again. Suddenly he started. It seemed to him that he heard a sound without; he threw the bag and the portfolio into the trunk and locked it, then rushed to the door. On opening it there was no one to be seen. [Pg 343]

"Is there any one here?" he asked.

There was no reply.

"I was mistaken, of course."

He returned to his room and there found that the sounds were repeated, and came from the window. He went to it, and looking out saw the outlines of a human being. No robber would have attracted attention thus. Nevertheless Maslenes took down a revolver before he opened the window.

"Who is there?" he asked.

"Some one who wishes to speak to you!" And with these words the person jumped into the room.

Maslenes raised his revolver, but at this moment the light fell on the face of the unknown. He uttered a cry of horror.

"You here! Ah! leave me, leave me at once, or I swear that I will blow out your brains."

"No, sir, you will do nothing of the kind. It would be very inconvenient for you to find yourself with a dead body to get rid of. You would be obliged to give your name, and you certainly don't care for the police to put their nose into your affairs."

And as the intendant did not reply, the new comer continued:

"That is right! You are becoming reasonable, I see. It is really droll that we should meet again after all these years in this way!"

He seated himself, and drawing out a cigar, lighted it at the candle.

"Now listen to me," said Maslenes. "Why are you here? Go your way, and let me go mine. I am doing my best to repair the evil that I have committed in my life. I do not interfere with you, and I only ask that you shall leave me alone. You call yourself Fagiano, and my name is Maslenes. Now, go." [Pg 344]

The other sneered:

"You have become very haughty, convict Sanselme."

Sanselme, for he it was, uttered an angry exclamation:

"And you, Benedetto, are still the same scoundrel that you were!"

CHAPTER L. [Pg 345]

CATASTROPHES.

The two men started to their feet, looking at each other as they had looked when Fate and their crimes first brought them together. Yes, it was Sanselme, who had simply changed the letters in his name and become Maslenes, who now spoke to his former associate with such contempt.

And it was Benedetto who sneered and laughed in the face of the man whom at Toulon he had almost hated. They neither of them spoke, but in their faces a strange transformation took place. Sanselme, first so bold, almost arrogant, by degrees began to hang his head, while Benedetto looked more and more triumphant.

"Let us sit down and reason together," he said.

"And why?" answered Sanselme, drearily. "You and I have nothing in common."

"I don't know that!"

"Listen to me for one moment. Our respective positions must be distinctly defined. Fate brought us together—Fate separated us. Neither you nor I desire to awaken all these terrible memories. I now bid you forget my very existence—"

He stopped short. Benedetto had laid his hand on his shoulder.

"And suppose I do not wish to be forgotten by you?" he said, slowly. [Pg 346]

Sanselme started and looked at him with a terrified expression.

"I desire quite the contrary, in fact. I wish you to recall every circumstance of our former acquaintance, up to that night at Beausset—"

"For Heaven's sake, say no more!"

"I must, for I need a witness to authenticate certain facts. And that witness must be yourself."

"You forget, I fancy, that were I to reveal the truth the scaffold would be your end!"

"Ah! that is my affair, Sanselme. You have but to answer my questions truly. I rely on you, for really," sneered Benedetto, "you have quite the air of an honest man. You remember. Do you remember the night of the 24th of February, 1839?"

"Am I dreaming?" murmured Sanselme, hiding his face. "Can he really ask such a question?"

"Do you remember the little house behind the church?"

"Yes, yes, I remember."

"A certain person of my acquaintance had a little business to attend to in that house. He was successful, and he carried off a million."

"I know nothing about that!" cried Sanselme, eagerly. And then with a gesture of loathing, he added, "I never saw any of the money."

"I dare say. You were extremely disinterested! I took the money and meant to get away with it quietly, but accident defeated this plan."

"For God's sake, say no more! Have you a heart?" [Pg 347]

Benedetto shrugged his shoulders, and continued:

"You know I heard two persons come up the stairs. I hid behind the door with my knife, and when the door opened, I struck at the first person I saw—"

"And it was your mother!"

"Ah! I see your memory is returning. Yes, it was my mother; but how did you know it?"

"I had seen her in the gorge, and she had told me her story and implored me to save her son."

"And did she tell you her name?" asked Benedetto, with some uneasiness.

"She told me all, but I swore never to reveal it to any one."

"And she believed in the oath of a convict?"

"I have kept it, at all events."

"You are a hero! But you can, at least, tell me the name."

"No," answered Sanselme, with energy. "You are planning some new villainy. I shall not tell you!"

Benedetto laughed.

"You must think me very simple. I merely wished to test your memory. The name of this woman was Danglars."

Sanselme uttered an exclamation. He had hoped that his refusal would frustrate some nefarious design.

"Now go," he said, sadly. "You can have nothing more to say to me."

"You are mistaken! One would think that you did not care to see me."

"The truth is, Benedetto, that anything connected with the past is hideously painful to me. I wish to forget." [Pg 348]

"You wish to forget, too, that you once tried to kill me."

"Let us say no more about that. Tell me frankly what you want me to do, and if possible I will do it."

"You are becoming more reasonable, Sanselme. But what is that new life of which you speak so glibly and with a certain tenderness in your voice? Perhaps I can guess. She is pretty, that is a fact!"

Sanselme started and took hold of Benedetto's arm.

"Not another word like that, Benedetto! Not if you wish to live!"

"Indeed! What would you do?"

"My fate is in your hands," answered Sanselme. "You can at any moment denounce me as an

escaped convict. Do what you please, but you shall not say one word of her who is in this house."

"Upon my word, Sanselme, it seems to me that you carry matters with rather a high hand. Suppose I do not obey you?"

"Then I will denounce you, with the certainty that my arrest will follow yours. You may laugh when I say that in spite of my shameful past I am to-day an honest man, devoting my whole life to a creature who has no one but myself in the world. If she knew who I was she would despise me."

Benedetto listened with his maddening smile. Suddenly he said:

"Have you pen, ink and paper?" [Pg 349]

"Yes, I have them. Why?"

"Produce them. I will give my reasons later."

Sanselme produced what was required.

"Very good," said Benedetto. "And now take this pen and oblige me by writing a few lines."

"What shall I write?"

"I will dictate to you, that will be easier.

"On the 24th of February, 1839, Benedetto, an escaped convict from Toulon, assassinated Madame Danglars, his mother."

"But this is horrible! No, I will not write that!"

"You had better do it without further objections. You can sign any name you please."

Sanselme still hesitated.

"No," he said, finally, "I refuse. I of course do not know what use you intend to make of this paper, but I know you. Some infamous machination is on foot which I will not aid."

Benedetto smiled.

"You are far from rich," he said, "for I was at the window some little time before I knocked. I must tell you that Comte Velleni's hôtel is next this, and I had not the smallest difficulty in coming here."

Sanselme glanced at the trunk that contained his scanty means.

"Precisely," said Benedetto, "a few louis and two or three bits of paper."

"I ask nothing from you."

"But I offer these." And Benedetto took from an elegant portfolio ten bank notes of one thousand francs each, and spread them out on the bed. "Write what I bid you and this money is yours." [Pg 350]

Sanselme turned very pale. It seemed as if Benedetto was his evil genius—his tempter. He instantly realized what this sum would do for her whose welfare was his perpetual anxiety.

"Will you write?"

Sanselme dipped his pen into the ink and began. Some instinct warned him that he was doing wrong. He acted without volition of his own, and simply in obedience to another, it is true, and it seemed to him that he himself risked nothing, for he simply told the truth, and yet he was troubled. Had Sanselme been alone in the world with no one but himself to care for he might not have been so strict, for he had run many risks in his life. But he felt that this was something wrong, and that evil consequences would alight on not only himself, but her. The money fascinated him, however. He wrote a few words, and then, dashing down the pen, started up.

"No, I will not write. Take away your money, Benedetto, it will bring me misfortune."

Benedetto uttered a furious oath. Then seizing a pen he himself wrote a couple of lines. Laying the paper before Sanselme, he said, "You will write just what I say, or I will send this!"

The two lines commenced thus: "She who bears the name of Jane Zeld, is—"

Sanselme read no more. With a cry of rage he sprang at Benedetto, who thrust him back fiercely.

"No more of this nonsense!" he said. "Either you write, or I do, and my words shall appear in three of the most prominent Parisian journals." [Pg 351]

Sanselme, with haggard eyes, did not seem to hear. Then suddenly he seized the pen and wrote what Benedetto required.

"If I give you this paper," he said, hoarsely, "will you swear by—good heavens! He believes in nothing! What will he swear by?"

"My dear fellow, I have not the smallest interest in troubling your repose. This is better than any oath," said Benedetto.

Sanselme made no further resistance.

Benedetto looked at the paper. "The fool has signed his own name!" he said to himself. "But it may be better, after all!" And in another moment Benedetto vanished through the window.

Sanselme sat motionless for some time, then his wandering eyes fell on the bank-notes. He snatched them up.

"We must fly!" he said aloud. "He knows all, and there is not a moment to lose. Jane—my Jane! Yes, she will consent, I am sure. We will take the seven o'clock train to Havre, and then will go to America. There she will lead a new life!" He looked around the room.

"My baggage," he said to himself, "will not be much of a hindrance; but Jane must be aroused at once. What shall I say to her? What reason shall I give? Pshaw! she will require none. Besides, there is nothing to keep us in Paris."

With infinite caution he opened the door and stole down the stairs, feeling his way along the corridor in the darkness, until he reached Jane's door, which he found open. [Pg 352]

Sanselme was aghast. The chamber was empty.

Sanselme, with a frightful imprecation, rushed down stairs; the street door was open. Half mad, Sanselme went out into the street.

CHAPTER LI. [Pg 353]

A SHOT FROM A REVOLVER.

Goutran and Esperance went out together from the little hôtel in the avenue Montaugne. Slowly and without talking they walked on side by side. The moon had gone down; it was one of those soft, starry nights which are so delicious. The Champs Elysées was deserted.

Suddenly Goutran exclaimed, "It is best to go on with it, I am sure!"

Esperance looked at his friend in surprise. "What are you saying?" he asked.

Goutran laughed. "I was only thinking aloud," he said. "The fact is, I am attempting to decide upon an important question. To marry, or not to marry. What do you say?"

"I know so little of life that I can give no advice," answered Esperance, "and yet," he continued, "it seems to me that no happiness can be so great as to spend your life in the companionship of one who will share your joys and your sorrows."

"Then you advise me to marry?"

"If the woman is worthy of you."

Goutran had begun this conversation in a gay, familiar tone, but the gravity of Esperance influenced him, and he continued more seriously, "I wished to consult you, because I knew you to be a man who weighed such matters seriously. You noticed a young lady, to-night—but what is the matter?" [Pg 354]

Esperance had started. "It is nothing, my foot slipped. And this young lady?"

"The pretty blonde is the one I mean."

"Oh!" answered Esperance, with a sigh of relief, "I congratulate you, most warmly. You love her?"

"I hardly know. I am attracted by her, I admire her beauty, the brilliancy of her eyes, her figure and her manner. Is this love?"

"I have no experience in such matters, you know."

"But you have instinct, which is worth ten times as much as experience. Carmen is an adorable creature, and when I am with her I can think of no one else. Twenty times this evening the decisive words were on my lips."

"And why did you not speak?"

"Ah! that is as much of a mystery to me as to you. A strange reluctance kept me back—almost a presentiment of evil. Do you know what I mean?"

"I understand that. I have felt the same thing at times."

"But to return to Carmen. Whenever I think of asking her to marry me, I feel as if I were deliberately inviting misfortune."

"You are not well, perhaps?"

"Bless my soul! How reasonable you are! No, I am well, I am greatly in love, and yet—"

"Upon my word!" said the Vicomte, "I can't see what you expect me to say."

"I have not told you all, and I have an admission to make that is not altogether agreeable. The truth is, I was so carried away by Carmen's beauty, that—" [Pg 355]

"You became engaged to her?"

"I kissed her, my friend, and I was not repulsed nor reproved. She considered the kiss given to her fiancé. And now, shall I marry her? I tell you, that even when my lips met hers, I felt more sharply than ever the presentiment of which I spoke. I know that after what has taken place I ought to apply to her father for her hand. Why do I hesitate? I cannot tell."

"Does Monsieur de Laisangy inspire you with absolute confidence?" asked Esperance, after a long pause.

The two friends had passed the Arc de Triomphe by this time, and entered the dark shadows of the Bois.

"Monsieur de Laisangy seems to have an excellent reputation. Bankers are measured by a standard of their own, and public opinion is never very strict in regard to them. Monsieur de Laisangy is rich, but no one says he has made his money dishonestly. I know nothing of his past, but have never heard a whisper against him, and yet sometimes he inspires me with absolute repulsion."

"My dear Goutran," said Esperance, in that grave, steady voice, which was so like his father's, "I am very young, I know nothing of life, I have never loved, but it seems to me that I could not speak as you have done, if I felt sincerely or deeply. I do not think I could analyze my ambitions so artistically." Esperance now began to speak more rapidly and with emotion. "To love is to give up one's entire being, to live in another. You say that you love, that your lips have touched those [Pg 356] of whom you have chosen, and that your heart sank at that same moment. No, you do not love Carmen de Laisangy!"

At this moment both men heard the report of a pistol.

"What is that?" cried Goutran.

"Some crime, I fear," answered his companion.

The two friends forced their way through the underbrush, Esperance a little in advance. Suddenly he beheld in an open space a prostrate form. It was that of a woman. Esperance rushed forward and lifted her from the ground. He uttered a hoarse cry. It was she whose life he had so recently saved—it was Jane Zeld. A small revolver lay at her side.

Esperance, bearing her in his vigorous arms, made his way into the road.

CHAPTER LII. [Pg 357]

"WILL JANE ZELD LIVE?"

Goutran had not seen the face of the burthen borne by Esperance, who had uttered no name, and whose movements had been so rapid that Goutran had some difficulty in overtaking him.

Where did Esperance propose to go? He had not asked himself this question. Goutran ran after him.

"Where are you carrying that dead body?" he shouted.

Esperance stopped short. "Was she dead?" he asked himself. "No, no," he cried, "she lives—she breathes! She must not die!"

"Do you know this woman?" asked Goutran. Suddenly he started back.

Jane was still wrapped in the oriental stuff. He remembered the material.

"Good heavens!" he cried, "what does this mean? It is Jane!"

They reached the avenue, and looked about for a carriage, but none was to be seen.

"Where are we to take this poor thing?" said Goutran.

"To my rooms," answered Esperance. "But I am afraid she will die in my arms!"

"I will hasten on and arouse the servants, and have everything prepared." [Pg 358]

"Yes, by all means. I am strong, and shall be there almost as soon as yourself."

In a very few minutes they reached the hôtel, which Goutran opened with a key given him by Esperance. They entered the corridor that led to the rooms formerly occupied by Haydée.

Esperance, with infinite precautions, laid Jane on the bed.

The girl's hair had fallen loose, and its darkness made an admirable background for her delicate features.

When Esperance saw this frail form thus inert, and the blue-veined lids closing the eyes, he yielded to his emotion and sobbed like a child. He was very unlike his father, and in these few moments he probably suffered more than his father had ever done.

Goutran, in the meantime, had lighted the room, then coming to the side of the bed, he leaned over the girl.

"Esperance!" he said, "rouse yourself, if you wish to save her!"

With a violent effort Esperance resumed his self-control.

"Ah! you are right, my friend. But if Jane is dead, I shall die also, for I love her—I love her!"

And he uttered these words in a tone of such sincerity that Goutran understood the whole.

"We must see the wound," continued Esperance, "for I am something of a physician."

Goutran gently removed the shawl, and on the left bosom there was a small, dark spot. [Pg 359] Esperance listened for the beating of her heart. There was a moment of terrible suspense. At last Esperance rose from his knees.

"She is living," he said, in a grave voice. "Goutran, go to my room and bring me a small sandal-wood case on the chimney-piece."

Esperance spoke now with absolute calmness. He was himself once more. When alone with Jane he took her head in his hands.

"Why," he said in his low, harmonious tone, "why did you wish to die? You shall live, Jane, and nothing shall ever separate us more!"

He pressed his lips to Jane's. This kiss was an oath. Would Esperance keep it?

Goutran returned with the case.

"Shall I not call some one?" asked the young man.

"No, not yet," Esperance replied.

He opened the box and took out an instrument.

"My hand does not tremble, does it?"

"No," said the painter, "it is perfectly firm."

Then, entirely master of himself though deadly pale, Esperance probed the wound.

Goutran watched every movement and studied his face. It was a strange scene. Jane, with her fair bosom all uncovered, seemed to sleep.

"Goutran," said Esperance in a whisper, "the ball has not gone far—I can touch it! Give me the case again," he said presently. He selected other instruments. "I have it!" exclaimed Esperance, [Pg 360] and the ball was in his hand.

As he spoke the kind face of Madame Caraman appeared at the door. For the last twenty minutes she had heard footsteps over her head in the room of the deceased Countess, which no one ever entered except the Count, and now she beheld a stranger on the bed in this sacred room.

"Madame Caraman," said Esperance, "here is a lady accidentally wounded. I beg of you to take care of her—do all that her condition requires."

"Poor soul!" cried the good woman. "What does it all mean?"

"I am just about to dress the wound. Do not be frightened. One word, however—I do not wish any one to know that she is here. You will treat her as if she were my sister."

"Of course, sir, of course, but am I to say nothing to the Count?"

"He is away, I know not where. I desire the secret to be kept punctiliously."

"Yes, sir, on one condition."

"A condition? And what may that be?"

"It is that, like your father, you will call me Mamma Caraman—not Madame!"

CHAPTER LIII. [Pg 361]

JANE ZELD'S SECRET.

Sanselme rushed from the Maison Vollard. He seemed half wild with grief and rage. Where was he going? He knew not. Jane had gone without a word of farewell, and this man, whom we have seen unmoved amid all the horrors of Toulon, now wept as he ran. Whom should he ask? Two

policemen passed, and, great as was Sanselme's terror of the police, he went up to them at once. Having by this time recovered his composure, he questioned them calmly. He was waiting for a lady, he was her intendant. As she was a foreigner, he was afraid she had gone astray.

One of the men replied, in a surly tone:

"If the lady has servants, how is it that she is out alone and on foot?"

To this natural remark Sanselme had no reply ready. He had been guilty of a great folly. He realized this now, and felt sure that he would be watched. Jane had no acquaintances in Paris. She had been out but twice, once to the charitable fête, when she sang and met with such success, and the second time was that same night.

Sanselme asked if Jane's mind could be affected. Could insanity come on thus suddenly? There was a secret in Jane's life, and he himself had seen her only a few hours before overcome with grief. [Pg 362]

Sanselme went up and down the Champs Elysées for an hour. Suddenly he remembered that the Seine was not far off. Why had he not thought of this before? He hastened to the river side, but saw nothing to confirm his suspicions.

We will now disclose the secret tie between this man and Jane Zeld. Fifteen years before, the convict Sanselme had witnessed a terrible scene in a cottage at Beausset, a village between Toulon and Marseilles. A son had killed his mother, and then departed, carrying with him a large sum of money. Bad as was Sanselme, he shuddered at this terrible crime. He had aided in Benedetto's escape with the hope of receiving part of the money, but he repulsed the blood-stained hand that offered it.

"Be off with you or I will kill you!" he cried, and Benedetto fled. Our readers will remember how he was finally thrown up by the sea on the island of Monte-Cristo.

Sanselme remained alone with the corpse. The sun rose, and finally a ray crept over the face of the dead woman. Sanselme started. Perhaps she is not dead after all. He stooped and lifted her from the floor. Should he call for assistance? To do so was to deliver himself up as an escaped convict. And this was not all. He would be suspected of the murder. He would be led not to the galleys but to the scaffold.

"It would be useless for me to make any denial."

Still his humanity was large enough to induce him to run the risk, and he would probably have called for assistance had he not at that moment heard the sound of wheels. It was the priest returning home. Sanselme breathed a sigh of relief. Now he would have the aid he required. He would wait until the priest came up. The outer door stood wide open. It was through this door that Benedetto had fled. Sanselme heard the priest utter an exclamation of surprise, and then he went to his servant's door, and knowing her deafness knocked and called loudly to her to awake. This was Sanselme's salvation. He leaned from the window and caught a branch from the tree by which Benedetto had clambered to the upper room. This done, it was easy for Sanselme then to drop to the ground. He ran around the house instantly. He was saved. He hastily decided that Benedetto had taken the shortest road to the sea, and that he himself would try to get out of France by the eastern frontier. [Pg 363]

We will not dwell on all he endured. But a month later, Sanselme, completely changed in appearance, entered Switzerland, going thence to Germany. Intelligent and active, he had no difficulty in obtaining employment. And Benedetto's crime seemed to have had a marvelous effect upon him. He seemed resolved upon repentance. For ten years, utilizing his acquaintance with foreign languages, Maslenes—he had taken this name—lived quietly in Munich. Not the smallest indiscretion on his part attracted the attention of the police. He was almost happy with these children about him, his pupils; but he was alone in his so-called home, and all at once a great longing came over him to see France once more. He was well aware that it would be a great imprudence on his part to return to his native land; he might be recognized, or some chance might reveal his past. [Pg 364]

Nevertheless, he went. Ten years had elapsed since he crossed the frontier. He went first to Lyons, not daring to attempt Paris, although he chose a large city, believing that there he would incur less risk of being recognized. He had saved some money, and thought he could teach again. He had not been six months in Lyons before he was known as the good Monsieur Maslenes, and was liked by every one. He led the most regular life that could be imagined, and no one would have suspected that this stout, placid-looking person could be an escaped convict. He fully intended to live and die thus in obscurity, and really enjoyed the torpor of this existence. In the evening he took long walks, and from motives of prudence went out but little by daylight. Alone in the darkness, he often felt intense remorse, and remorse is not a pleasing companion.

One winter's night—the snow had been falling all day—Sanselme stayed out later than usual. The cold was sharp and there was no moon. Suddenly he heard an angry discussion across the street. Coarse voices and then a woman's tone of appeal. Sanselme did not linger, he had made it a rule never to interfere in quarrels. He feared any complication which should compromise him. But as he hurried on, he heard a wild cry for help.

"Oh! leave my child!" the woman cried. "Help! Help!" [Pg 365]

Sanselme forgot all his prudence and ran in the direction of the cries. He found a woman struggling with three drunken men, trying to tear from them a young girl about thirteen, simply dressed. The girl was struggling, but oddly enough she did not utter a sound.

"Don't put on these airs, Zelda," said one of the ruffians, "let the little girl have a fling too. You have had yours."

In her struggle the girl dropped a box she carried. Tulles and laces were scattered over the ground. She saw Sanselme, and then for the first time she screamed for help. Then with one blow Sanselme felled the man who held the girl. He fell stunned to the ground. The child was free, and the two remaining scoundrels turned their attention to the defender. They were stout, strong fellows, with well-developed muscles, but they were no match for Sanselme. He hurled one against the wall and the other into the middle of the street.

"Be off with you!" said Sanselme.

"Oh! thank you, sir. But my mother, my poor mother!"

The woman had sunk upon the snow exhausted. The girl endeavored to lift her.

"Let me," said Sanselme. "Do you live far from here?"

This question, though so simple, seemed to agitate the girl. Sanselme now held her mother in his arms.

"Well! Where am I to go?" [Pg 366]

She answered slowly:

"Two steps from there. The Rue Travehefoin."

"I don't think I know the street."

"Very possibly," stammered the girl. "I will show you the way."

She had returned the laces to the box, and then with a determined step led the way. A few feet from the Quai, where this scene had taken place, there was at this time a network of narrow, dark and wretched streets. It was in fact regarded as the worst part of the town. Sanselme did not care for this. He was happy that he had done some good at last. The girl turned into a lane that was very dark, in spite of the street lamp burning at the further end. The girl finally stopped before a tall house, from which came shouts of laughter and singing. The door was not close shut and the girl pushed it open. A stout woman stood just within.

"Upon my word!" she cried. "Did Zelda need two hours to—"

"My mother is dying," said the child, as she held the door wide open.

Sanselme appeared, carrying the inanimate form.

"Drunk again!" cried the stout woman.

"This woman is ill," answered Sanselme, roughly, who now understood the kind of a place he was in. "Get out of my way!" he added.

"Ill! Oh! what stuff. Come on, though. I will see to this to-morrow!"

And she took down a lantern from the wall and led the way up the creaking stairs. Two or three men came out of the lower room at the same moment. [Pg 367]

"Is that Zelda?" they shouted. "Send her here to sing for us."

But the stout woman opened a door and Sanselme laid his burden on the bed. It was a sordid room in which he found himself. On the dirty walls hung some colored prints of doubtful propriety. On one was a dark stain, as if a glass of wine had been thrown upon it.

"Let me take off the quilt," said the woman, extending her hand to remove the ragged covering on the bed.

Sanselme, filled with disgust at her cupidity, answered:

"Let everything alone. I will pay whatever is necessary."

"Very good, sir; if you answer for it, that's all right."

"And now I want a physician," he added.

"A physician! Oh, that is nonsense. You must not be taken in in this way. She goes out every evening for her daughter, who is apprenticed to a milliner, and this time she took a drop too much, that is all!"

A bitter sob was heard from the girl, who sat with her hands covering her face.

Sanselme pitied the poor child. He took a twenty franc piece from his pocket.

"I want a doctor," he said, "and pray make haste."

"Very good, sir, since I see you are willing to pay him, and that it won't be left for me to do."

Sanselme was left alone with these two women. He was greatly annoyed that accident had brought him to such a house, and was half tempted to fly. He had done his duty and had defended the two women from their assailants. What more had he to do here? [Pg 368]

The merest trifle would compromise his position, for Lyons, though a large city, is but a village; every trifle becomes known, and is commented upon and exaggerated.

He stood twisting his hat in his hands. Presently, with an air of decision, he tossed it on a chair.

"It won't do to be cowardly!" he said, half aloud.

This man, who had been so vicious, was now eager to do good. He must see the physician. But could he do nothing while awaiting his arrival? Whatever were the errors of this poor creature, she was a woman, and suffering. He did not know what she required. He turned to the girl.

"Mademoiselle!" he said, making his voice as gentle and paternal as possible.

She looked up, and for the first time he saw her. She was absolutely adorable, with her glossy, dark hair carried back plainly from her fair brow. How old was she? Sixteen, perhaps, but so slender that she looked younger.

"You must unfasten your mother's dress," said Sanselme, "that she may have air."

The girl looked at him as if she did not understand him. Oh! what shame and humiliation were in that young heart!

Sanselme understood, for he said:

"She is your mother, I believe?" [Pg 369]

She rose quickly and went to the bed, and leaning over the woman, kissed her brow. This was her answer to Sanselme's question. She then loosened the sick woman's garments. Feeling her child's hands, and able to breathe better, the woman said:

"Do not touch me; I am in agony!"

That was the beginning of delirium.

"I am cold!" she cried. "Why do you put ice on my feet?" and she started up so suddenly that her daughter could not hold her.

"Help me, sir," the girl cried to Sanselme.

He ran to her assistance. He was astonished to see that the woman was not more than thirty-five, but her eyes were haggard, and she bore the marks of precocious old age.

She uttered a shriek so wild and despairing that it curdled the blood in Sanselme's veins, and as he looked her full in the face, he trembled from head to foot.

The doors opened; it was the physician, who looked utterly disgusted that he should have been called to such a place. He entered noisily, without removing his hat, and as he caught sight of the sick woman, looking like an inspired Pythoness, he said roughly:

"Come, now, lie down."

She looked at him with evident terror, and then, docile as a child, she lay down on the bed.

The physician made a rapid examination.

"There is nothing to be done," he said; "this woman is at the end of her rope."

"For Heaven's sake, sir, be quiet!" whispered Sanselme, angrily. "The woman hears you, and you will kill her!" [Pg 370]

The Doctor took off his spectacles and closed them with a snap; then looking at Sanselme from head to foot, he said:

"You are much interested in Madame. A relative, I presume?"

"That is none of your affairs, sir. I beg you to confine yourself to writing your prescriptions, and I will see that you are paid."

The physician was impressed by the tone in which these words were uttered. He wrote the prescription and went away. Then Sanselme said he would go for the medicine. He was absolutely livid and could hardly stand. He returned in twenty minutes, and met the mistress of the house on the street, where she was waiting.

"Look here!" she said; "I don't like all this in my house, and I am going to bundle Zelda off to the Hospital. I don't want her to die here."

Sanselme hardly heard her.

"Tell me," he said, hastily, "what this woman's name is."

"That is easy enough; I have her papers. It is something like Zeld, and we have got to calling her Zelda—it is more taking, you know."

"Yes, I see; but do you know anything of her past?"

"Not much."

"She has a daughter?"

"Yes, which is not at all pleasant for us. Of course, the child can't live here; she stays across the street. Zelda goes every night to the shop for her. It is nonsense, of course, for she will go the same way as her mother in the end." [Pg 371]

"Will you show me the papers?" asked Sanselme, "and I will do all I can for this woman."

"Help me to get rid of her! That is all I ask."

"Rely on me."

Sanselme presently had the papers in his hands. The sick woman's name was Jane Zeld. She came from a little village in Switzerland, near Zurich. There was also a paper dated many years since, signed by her father, authorizing her to reside in the Commune of Selzheim, in Alsace. Sanselme turned sick and dizzy; he caught at the wall for support.

"What on earth is the matter?" asked the old woman.

He stammered a few incoherent words. Then in a measure recovering himself, he said:

"I give you my word that I will take her away in the morning."

"But if she should die in the night! However, I am too kind-hearted for my own good. She may stay here to night. But who will take care of her?"

"I will," answered Sanselme; "but I must beg that you will take her daughter out of the room."

"I can give her a bed in the closet next her mother's room. But you know if it were known, I should get into trouble, because she's a minor."

They returned to the sick room. Zelda seemed calmer. The daughter was crouched upon the floor at the side of the bed. Sanselme spoke to her gently.

"My child," he said, "I will take care of your mother to-night. You are tired, and a room is ready for you." [Pg 372]

"No! no!" cried the child. "I cannot stay here to-night, unless I am in my mother's room."

And she looked so horrified that Sanselme was silent. He realized what this young creature must feel at the terrible life led by her mother. When the girl understood that the room she was to have could be reached only through that occupied by her mother, she said no more, but she seemed to shrink from the very air she breathed.

The unhappy Zelda had fallen into a state of prostration, that rendered her unconscious of all that was going on about her. Her daughter went to her side.

"Do not disturb her," said Sanselme, "she is asleep."

For the first time the girl looked him full in the face. "You are very kind," she said. "You knew my mother then?"

"Oh! no," answered Sanselme, eagerly, "but you are very tired, and some one must stay with her to-night."

He spoke with a certain hesitation, as if he were telling a falsehood. The girl was too innocent to notice this manner.

"If my mother wakes you will call me. Poor mamma! she is so kind."

"I will call you, I give you my word," Sanselme answered.

And the girl left the room, and in some ten minutes Sanselme heard her regular breathing; tired Nature asserted herself. [Pg 373]

Then he turned to the bed. From the rooms below came shrill laughter and the rattle of glasses. They cared little down there whether this poor creature lived or died. She was dying, of this Sanselme felt sure. He began to walk up and down the room, occasionally stopping at the side of the bed, as if seeking to discover in this pale, drawn face some forgotten image.

It was very cold, and the light was dim; by degrees the house became quiet. He sat in the one chair in the room buried in thought. Suddenly the sick woman began to toss on her bed. He went to her, and said, gently, "Are you in pain?"

"No."

"Then try to sleep."

"Sleep!" repeated the poor creature, and then, without any apparent reason, she said to herself,

over and over again, "Accursed! Accursed!"

Then she began to whisper. She raised herself in her bed, and was terrible to look upon. "I was a good girl," she said, "more than that, I was an innocent one. I used to go to confession. I was told to do so."

Sanselme listened with beads of sweat on his brow. He determined to drink the cup to the dregs. "Yes," he said, "go on. It was at Selzheim."

"Selzheim! yes. Oh! how sweet it was there. There was a mountain, and a lovely brook where I bathed my feet when I was a little thing."

"And a Square and a fountain," whispered Sanselme. [Pg 374]

"Yes, how gay it was there, when we all played together. And then he came, all in black. We thought him so kind and good. He was the curé, you know."

Sanselme started back.

"And when he said to me, 'Jane, why do you not come to confession?' I told him the truth, and said it was because I had nothing to confess."

"Go on! go on!" said Sanselme.

Further doubt was impossible, he was himself the infamous priest. He fell on his knees, and sobbed and wept.

The dying woman continued: "I went to confession as the curé bade me, and—"

But we will not dwell on this terrible story as told by these dying lips. The priest abused his trust. His superiors knew the truth, but with that *esprit de corps*, which is in fact complicity, simply removed him and avoided all open scandal. His victim remained in the village. And because of his crime, she was condemned and despised. She was driven away, and gave birth to her child. And then, to live and to give bread to this child, she had become what she was.

Sanselme took the hand of the dying woman.

"And the child?" he asked. "Where is she?"

The woman looked at him with her big dark eyes. For the first time she seemed conscious of his presence. And suddenly, in spite of the lapse of years, she recognized him. She shrank away with a frenzied shrink. [Pg 375]

"Yes, it is I! pardon me!" and Sanselme sank on his knees; "and tell me, I implore you, where the child is?"

She did not speak, she could not. She stretched out her hand, and pointed to the room where her daughter was.

"And she is my child?" cried Sanselme.

"Yes," answered the dying woman. And as if this simple word had snapped the mainspring of life, she fell dead on the floor.

He lifted her and laid her on the bed, and then the wretched man, crushed under the weight of his shame, dared to pray.

When morning broke he knocked on the door of the next room. The girl awoke with a start and ran out.

"Your mother is dead," he said, gently.

The next day Sanselme laid the poor woman in her grave. Then he said to the girl:

"I knew your mother. Before she died she made me promise never to desert you. Will you come to me?"

Jane Zeld was utterly crushed. She had no will of her own. Where else could she have gone? She felt herself surrounded by a circle of crime. As long as her mother lived, the affection she received from her made her forget sometimes the sinister truth. But when she was alone in the world, she felt absolutely crushed by this ignominy. Pure as she was it seemed to herself that her mind was smirched. [Pg 376]

Sanselme had come to a grave decision. He left Lyons and took Jane with him, she having no idea of the reason of his devotion. He called himself her intendant, and was anxious to perform the most menial offices, and in these felt as if he were in a measure making amends for the past. He had one aspiration, that of paternal martyrdom. Gently and with paternal affection Sanselme soothed the girl's shame and despair. He had preserved much of the persuasiveness of a priest, his language stirred and softened at one and the same time. But now every word that he uttered was sincere.

Jane remained excessively sad.

Sanselme had saved several thousand francs. What should he do with Jane? He had left Lyons, hoping that a change of scene would go far toward restoring cheerfulness to Jane. Vain hope. She

never forgot her mother, nor that mother's life. She learned with marvelous rapidity. Study was her best distraction. From this Sanselme hoped much. He taught her himself all that he had formerly learned, and wondered at the progress she made.

The merest accident revealed to him Jane's amazing talent for music. If Art should take hold of her and absorb her entirely, she would forget and enter a new life.

She studied music thoroughly, and Sanselme took care, living as they were, in Germany at that time, that she should constantly hear good music.

Her memory was prodigious, her voice exceptionally true, her taste perfect. Sanselme felt that here was safety for him. [Pg 377]

At the end of a few years Jane, now become a great artist, went with her benefactor to Paris.

Their position toward each other was in no degree modified. He was very respectful in his manner, and always kept a certain distance between them. He did not wish her to know anything more about herself than that she was the daughter of the wretched Zelda.

By degrees the recollection of Lyons seemed to fall from the mind of Jane. Never was there the most distant allusion ever made to her mother, and the girl never spoke of her.

This silence astonished Sanselme, and troubled him as well. He had studied Jane so closely that he thoroughly understood her character, her goodness, unselfishness and passionate gratitude. He knew that she had not forgotten her mother, and would never do so, and that the reason she never mentioned her was because her pain and shame were quite as acute as ever. Jane's character was a singular mixture of audacity and timidity. It was her own proposition that she should offer her services at the concert, and when Sanselme proposed that she should go to Sabrau's, the artist, she had not hesitated in doing so.

She sought to distract her mind, for she was haunted by a spectre. She had a ghastly fear that she might be tempted to lead the life her mother had led.

The theatre, so often calumniated, would be her safeguard, and in her pride as a great artist she would forget the past. It was her salvation, her glory, and the path to fortune. She would be respected, honored and happy. These were the dreams in which Sanselme indulged. Perhaps, too, some honest man would give her his name, and that of Jane Zeld would be merged in a happy matron. [Pg 378]

It was with great joy that he took Jane to the reception at the artist's, and here basked in the admiration and respect she received. If she would but consent to go on the stage her fortune was secured—but hitherto she had refused even to listen to this plan.

That evening Sanselme had been shocked to meet Benedetto. The spectre of his past again arose before him, but he thought it impossible that Benedetto should recognize him. He had been guilty of one imprudence. When he heard the name of the Vicomte of Monte-Cristo, he remembered the rage of Benedetto at Toulon, and how he had sworn to be avenged on him.

A secret instinct warned Sanselme that Benedetto would wreak his vengeance on the son of his enemy, and concealed behind the curtain he had given Esperance the warning that had so startled him. Then he hurried away, aghast at what he had done. What was the young Vicomte to him? What did he care for Benedetto's hates?

When the fire caught Jane's robe, he had been a witness of the energetic promptness shown by the young man, and then he said to himself that he was glad he gave the warning. And when they returned home that night, Sanselme had never been in better spirits; it seemed to him that a great Future was unfolding before him. To his surprise he found Jane weeping. For the first time she had spoken angrily, but Sanselme would have forgiven her if she had struck him. [Pg 379]

He saw that memory still haunted her, that there was no peace or rest for her. He wanted her to travel, but the money, where was he to get money? And it was while tortured by these thoughts that Benedetto appeared to him.

And this was not all. Benedetto knew his secret, and now, as if all this were not enough, Jane herself had vanished. It was more than human energy could support.

While Sanselme stood on the bridge absorbed in these wretched thoughts, he heard a quick, running step. His well-trained ear could not be deceived. It was a woman's step—if it were she? He started forward. It was dark, and he could see nothing, and the steps were dying away. He ran on toward the *Pont de Jena*, and presently he heard the steps again, and before him on the bridge was a dark shadow. Was it Jane?

He called, "Jane, my child!"

Then he saw the shadow spring to the parapet, and something black passed between him and the sky—the splash of water, and all was still.

"Too late!" cried Sanselme, "but I will save her." And he in his turn leaped into the water. He was a vigorous swimmer, as will be remembered by our readers.

When he rose to the surface after his plunge, he looked around, and at some distance beheld a dark spot. He swam toward it and seized the woman's arm. She was just sinking. And now this [Pg 380]

man was so overwhelmed with emotion, that the blood rushed to his brain and his limbs were almost paralyzed. Fortunately the shore was not far away, but the woman clung convulsively to him.

He called for aid, but all was silent and dark. He knew that he was sinking, and that the end was near. Suddenly a voice shouted:

"Courage! we are coming." And two men appeared swimming vigorously.

"I have one, Bobichel!"

"And I have another, Monsieur Fanfar."

With their burthens our old friends reached the shore.

"God grant that it is not too late!" said Fanfar, kneeling by the side of the two inanimate forms. "What had we best do?"

"Take them up on our shoulders, sir, and carry them along. Fortunately, the house is not far off."

And Bobichel threw Sanselme over his shoulder as easily as if he had been a bag of meal, while Fanfar took the woman. They stopped at a small house not far from the Quai; every blind was closed; Fanfar uttered a peculiar cry.

"Is that you?" asked a woman's voice.

"Myself," answered Fanfar.

The door opened, and presently the two bodies were laid on the floor.

Fanfar took a lamp and looked at them. [Pg 381]

"I saw this man at the door where we stood to-night," said Bobichel.

"Yes, I saw him, too," answered Fanfar. "But who can this woman be?"

She was an old woman, with white hair.

"We must all go to work. Madame Fanfar, we want your help; hot linen and flannels, if you please!"

CHAPTER LIV. [Pg 382]

CARMEN.

Very stately and magnificent were the offices of the *Banque de Credit Imperial*. The prospectus made one's mouth water. It was a magnificent conception of the Emperor's. To interest small capitalists would naturally result in great popularity.

Napoleon III. always felt a great interest in the money of other people, and also, to use a vulgar expression, liked to have his hand in everybody's pie.

The governor elected was Monsieur de Laisangy, who was looked upon as a marvelous financier. Although an old man, his activity was immense, both of mind and body.

It was about ten o'clock in the morning. In an exquisite room, where each detail was in the best of taste and very rich, Carmen, in a peignoir trimmed with lace, was half lying on a couch. Her beautiful hair was loosely tied, and fell over her shoulders in a golden cascade.

She was a beautiful creature, and yet there was a certain refinement lacking. Her hands, though white, were not delicately made, and her foot, in its rose-colored slipper, was not as slender as those of Parisian women. She seemed to be wrapped in thought. Finally, as if weary of arguing with herself, she extended her hand and rang the bell. [Pg 383]

A pretty maid servant entered.

"What o'clock is it?"

"Half-past ten."

"Send a footman to tell Monsieur de Laisangy that I am waiting for him to come to breakfast."

"But are you not going to dress?" asked the woman in surprise.

"What for? I am not going out until four o'clock."

"Yes, but you will not care to go to the dining-room in your peignoir?"

"No, I will breakfast here in my boudoir."

"With Monsieur de Laisangy?"

"Yes. You look astonished. I do not like such airs. Arrange that small table, and wait upon us yourself."

"Very good, Mademoiselle."

As the woman left the room, she said to herself:

"They are certainly very queer people, but it is none of my business if a young lady chooses to breakfast half dressed with her father!"

In less than fifteen minutes the banker knocked at the door of the boudoir. He took his daughter's hand and pressed a paternal kiss upon it. As they were alone, Carmen withdrew her hand, and said quickly:

"None of that, if you please!"

The old man looked strangely disturbed, and fearing that these words had been spoken in too audible a voice, he laid a warning finger on his lip.

They presently seated themselves at the table. The breakfast was served *à la Russe*—that is, with every thing on the table at once. [Pg 384]

"You can leave us," said Carmen to her maid.

Laisangy ate heartily, but Carmen merely nibbled. The banker did not speak until he had eaten so much he could eat no more. He drank only water.

Carmen began to be impatient.

"It seems to me that I was never so hungry in my life before!" said Laisangy.

"Ah!" answered Carmen, "and yet there were times in your life when you were starving!"

Laisangy was eating a bit of cheese. He stopped with his fork in the air.

"We will not talk of that!" he replied.

"And why not? Everybody is not born with a million in his cradle. I, too, have been near starvation!"

"Carmen!"

"It is true, but pray finish your breakfast. I want to talk to you."

If Goutran, assisted by some magician, had been able to see and hear this interview, he would have been thunderstruck. What a tone! What an expression! Not that she was less pretty, but there was a something in her manner and appearance which would have offended his taste.

Laisangy finally stopped eating. Any other person would have been crimson after such a meal, but he actually looked paler than ever.

Carmen rang the bell for coffee, and then they were again alone.

"My dear Carmen, I am ready to listen to you," said the banker. She had lighted a cigarette, and was smoking, with her eyes fixed on him. [Pg 385]

"You want money, I suppose?"

"No—I want information."

"Information!"

"Ah! that makes you uneasy, does it not? I am well aware that you are not fond of questions."

Laisangy, who was drinking his third cup of coffee, shivered a little at these words.

"I do not understand you," he said.

"You will, presently. But I never saw anybody with such an appetite. When I was sixteen and could hardly get a crust of bread, I could not eat like that."

"Why dwell on these memories, Carmen?"

"Because, if I remind you of what and who I am, I shall have a better chance, perhaps, to learn who you are."

"Carmen! Carmen!" said the old man imploringly, and becoming even paler than before.

"I tell you that I intend to know who you are. Now hold your tongue and let me speak. I have had a weight on my heart for a long time, and now I intend to make a clean breast of it."

No words can describe the terror on the face of the banker. He stammered and choked.

"But, Carmen, we are so comfortable and happy. What do you want more?"

"I wish to have my curiosity satisfied," answered Carmen, coldly. "Everything about you is a mystery and a fraud. In fact, you terrify me!"

"But——" [Pg 386]

"Yes—even your way of eating is not natural. There is something of the wild beast about you, and I tell you I am afraid!"

"But this is childish. You have known me a long time."

"Yes. I am twenty-two now, and I was fifteen when you took me, while Mamma Lousteau was your cook at Florence—"

"Hush! Carmen, you will be heard!"

"Who cares! Yes, the whole world may hear the story of a girl whose mother was cook in a banker's house. The banker entered the girl's room in the night, the mother discovered it. Her rage and distress brought on an attack of apoplexy. She died, and I remained with you! These are the bare facts."

"Carmen!"

"Oh! I am not complaining. You were rich, you gave me jewels and fine clothes. I was only sixteen, I forgot your brutality and I remained with you. When you came back to France you told me that a certain regard must be paid to appearances, that we must lie, in short, and I agreed to pass as your daughter. And now, I ask"—she folded her arms on her breast—"I ask why you did not marry me?"

"Good heavens! because—"

"Because what? You cannot give me a good reason. Not a word of truth can ever be torn from you. I am convinced that back of all these lies there is some horrible infamy which you dare not acknowledge even to me."

"Carmen! no more of this, I implore you! What has gone wrong with you?" [Pg 387]

"Everything. I simply wish to know, and am resolved to know, who you are—if not—"

"If not?"

"I have not quite decided. There are some things, bad as I am, which I will not stand, and I will make it the business of my life to discover what crimes you have committed, and I will denounce you!"

Laisangy started to his feet.

"Look at yourself in the mirror," cried Carmen, "and tell me if you do not look like a murderer!"

Laisangy bit his lips so fiercely that the blood started. Then suddenly, as if a thought had struck him, he cried:

"Come now, Carmen, don't say any more nasty things to me. I am an old man and have had many troubles."

"Indeed?"

"You have never questioned me like this before. Even my appetite offends you. Surely, there is no crime in that! You want to know something about me. One thing I will tell you—it may strike you as rather a joke. Once in Italy, going from one city to another, I had a large sum of money with me, and I was taken by brigands. These villains took it into their heads to sell me every mouthful I ate at its weight in gold. For some time I would not yield, and was nearly starved. Since that time I have had paroxysms of violent hunger. Do you see?"

Carmen did not see, and she said:

"But why did not the brigands take your money without subjecting you to this torture?" [Pg 388]

Laisangy looked troubled as he replied:

"I am sure I don't know."

"It looks to me as if these men whom you call brigands were inflicting a chastisement upon you, perhaps."

"Carmen!"

"Come, throw down your cards. I tell you I will no longer submit to this miserable farce we are playing here. I will no longer call myself your daughter, nor will I be dragged into the maze of intrigues which I divine."

"Carmen! once more I implore you—"

"I will not be your accomplice and be dragged by you into an abyss of infamy!"

"But why should you say such things? I am rich, and honored by the favor of the Emperor."

"A fine recommendation, that!" cried Carmen, disdainfully.

"I am respected and honored by every one."

Carmen rose from her chair and looked the banker full in the face.

"Then tell me why, when we were at the *soirée* last evening, at a name pronounced by a lacquey you became ghastly pale."

"You are mistaken—"

"It is true; you fled as if you had seen a ghost, and the name was Monte-Cristo."

Laisangy was terrible to look at.

"Hold your tongue! Hold your tongue!" and the banker rushed toward her with uplifted hand. [Pg 389]

But Carmen, with her arms folded upon her breast, looked at him with such disdain that his arm fell at his side.

"And this is not all," she continued. "You met many enemies last evening, it seems; for some one said in the garden, 'Take care that you do not learn my name too soon, Monsieur de Laisangy.' These may not be the precise words, but they are nearly so."

"Ah! you are a spy, then! Look out!"

"I am not in the least afraid of you; but let me tell you that your present conduct strengthens all my suspicions, and I, in my turn, bid you look out! I shall learn the truth, and then—"

"And then—"

"I shall leave you. But if, in self-defence, you raise a finger against one whom I esteem, I will denounce you!"

Laisangy, exasperated beyond all self-control, seized a knife from the table. The door opened and the maid entered.

"Here is a card which the gentleman wished me to hand you at once, sir."

Carmen took the card and read the name.

"Signor Fagiano!" she read aloud. "Ah! he has come to tell you his right name, I fancy!"

Laisangy took the card from Carmen's hand and dashed from the room. Carmen said, half aloud:

"Goutran is the friend of the Vicomte de Monte-Cristo. I will watch!"

CHAPTER LV. [Pg 390]

THE BANKER.

Signor Fagiano was standing, when Monsieur de Laisangy entered the room. He was a man of fifty, but extremely fine looking, with a little of the air of the Duc de Morny in his best days. He had, however, a scar across one cheek that disfigured him. No one would have recognized him as the convict Benedetto. Laisangy entered with a pale face of disdain.

We must not omit to mention what took place in the garden the previous evening. When the banker, overcome by the heat of the rooms, took refuge in the fresh air, he had been followed by Fagiano, who said to him, when out of hearing of every one:

"Monsieur de Laisangy, I know your past."

Laisangy started, and even uttered an exclamation of surprise. The other continued—a threat in every word. He asked for money—much money. Laisangy knew that in his long career he had left many creditors in the lurch, and finally he said:

"Who are you? Why should I give you money? What is your name?"

To these questions the mysterious stranger replied:

"Take care—you will know my name only too soon!"

Since then Laisangy had been very uneasy. Possibly his conscience was not quite clear. He now came to see this Fagiano in a state of rage, exasperated by the scene with Carmen, and the favorite of the Emperor now came to measure weapons with this stranger. [Pg 391]

"Well, sir," said the banker, "this is the second time that you have seen fit to throw yourself in my path. Yesterday you addressed me in a fashion that savored of blackmail. What do you want? I do not know you, nor you me. I am a patient man, but even my patience has limits; and it may happen that I give my servants orders to throw you out of doors, neck and heels!"

The other, leaning with one elbow on the mantel, laughed aloud as he said:

"Ring, if you choose, my good fellow. There will then be a nice scandal!"

The banker's hand, even then on the bell, dropped at his side.

"Ah! I see you do not care for witnesses!"

Laisangy opened his lips to speak.

"And you are right, perhaps. Napoleon, who knew the world, said, 'It is always best to wash your dirty linen at home!' and we have—you and I—a tremendous wash on hand!"

Laisangy did not move; his eyes were fixed on the face of this man, to whom he could not give a name. He finally managed to say:

"I am not fond of mysteries. Who are you?"

"You do not know me, then?"

Fagiano laughed, and in this laugh was a certain ferocity.

"Give me two hundred thousand francs and you will never see me again!" [Pg 392]

Laisangy answered with a certain dignity:

"I never give alms to strangers."

"Bless my soul!" cried Fagiano, "your manners are improving. You do not know my name, but I know yours, Monsieur Danglars!"

At this name the banker started back.

"You are mad!" he cried.

"Very well; but what would you say if at the Tuileries you heard yourself announced by your real name, Monsieur Danglars?"

Danglars, for it was he, drew a pistol from his pocket and presented it to Fagiano's breast. He with a quick blow struck it from the banker's hand. It fell on the floor and fortunately did not go off. Fagiano picked it up and drew the charge.

"Dangerous playthings and sad interruptions in a conversation," he said. "We can understand each other without this. And now, having gotten through with this melodramatic scene, I tell you that I shall not be content with less than five hundred thousand francs."

Danglars was utterly confounded. But presently, gathering himself together, he said:

"I am not intimidated by your threats. You can make what use you please of your knowledge, you share it with many others. No one cares."

"But I have more to say. I propose to reveal my own name to you. Can I so change that you do not recognize me?"

"I never saw you before."

"How does it happen, Monsieur Danglars, that you have a daughter of twenty when your wife was living fifteen years since? She had a daughter by you, and her name was not Carmen." [Pg 393]

Danglars was disconcerted. He threw himself upon a chair.

"Go on," he said.

"Ah! you are beginning to understand me, are you? I know what I say, and will prove it to you. You, as a banker, enriched yourself in speculations, each more dishonorable than the other, and you encountered a man who crushed you like a worm under his heel. You fell, but you are of the kind that bounds, and to-day you are once more upon a pinnacle. You vegetated for years, until the moment came when you could once more seize fortune in your grasp. You are no longer Danglars the bankrupt and thief—you are Laisangy, respected and trusted. Know then that I have it in my power to throw you back into the mire from which you have struggled. I am ready to be your enemy or your accomplice, the choice is in your hands."

"Ah! I know you!" cried Danglars, throwing up his hands. "You are Andrea Cavalcanti. Yes, it is all coming back to me. You called yourself by a title to which you had no claim; you professed to have a fortune that had no existence, and you introduced yourself into my family. But the day came when the law interfered!"

"Ah! your memory is an excellent one!" Then relinquishing his sneer and his smile, he leaned toward Danglars. "I am Benedetto, the assassin; Benedetto, the convict. But that is not all. Are you acquainted with my father's name?" [Pg 394]

"I heard of a scandalous suit, but I was not in France."

"No, you had fled. You were not here when, in the court-room, I flung my hatred and my loathing at the head of the Procureur du Roi—at the head of my father, Monsieur de Villefort. And do you know the name of my mother?"

"It was never given."

"I will tell it to you, nevertheless. She was Madame Danglars."

The banker started to his feet, his whole frame twitching nervously.

"It is not true! It is not true!" he cried.

"She was my mother, I tell you, and I punished her as she deserved, for I killed her!"

"Horrible! Horrible!" And the wretched man who listened to these words wrung his hands.

"Yes, and here is the proof."

Benedetto drew from his pocketbook the paper on which Sanselme had written the lines he had dictated.

"Read this," he said. "I was not alone; the witness is still living, and I can produce him if necessary."

Danglars had fallen back in his chair.

"Now then," continued Benedetto, "you know who I am, and you know, too, that I hesitate at nothing. Once more, will you obey me?"

"But what do you wish me to do?"

"In the first place, I want money. I am tired of poverty, and of the incessant perils which it forces me to run. You are rich. Make me rich." [Pg 395]

"You shall have money."

"And much money. But this is not all."

Benedetto laid his hand on the shoulder of his companion.

"Have you forgotten," he said, in a stern voice, "the man who humiliated and tortured you? Do you feel no thirst for revenge?"

Danglars looked up quickly.

"That man," continued Benedetto, "was and is your evil genius, as well as mine. He tempted me. He launched me into a world where all my appetite for luxury was developed, then suddenly he sent me to a prison. You remember all the tortures he inflicted on you. Now it is in our power to heap on this man a vengeance so terrible that he will writhe at our feet. This vengeance I mean to have. Danglars, do you wish to see this man suffer? Then give me your hand, and we will work together."

Danglars murmured:

"It is impossible. Vengeance is sweet, but it can not be."

"Impossible!" sneered Benedetto. "We two will succeed, I swear to you."

"No, no, I am afraid of him!"

"Are you a child? Once more, Danglars, do you wish to be revenged on Monte-Cristo, if I can prove to you that you personally run no risk? I too am afraid of him. I too have thought for a long time that he was all-powerful and not to be reached. To-day I have discovered a fault in his armor, and intend that this man shall weep tears of blood. Once more, will you assist me?" [Pg 396]

"Ah! if it were possible!" sighed Danglars.

"Listen to me a moment. This man has one immense passion, his love for his son, and it is through this love that we shall reach him. The Count of Monte-Cristo is invincible, you say. You forget that he has a son."

"The Vicomte Esperance!"

"To strike the son is to kill the father!"

"You are right—and I, like you, hate him!"

"Then join me, and we shall have a terrible revenge. I must have money, though, and you must swear to obey me blindly."

"And you say that we will crush Monte-Cristo?"

"I swear it!"

"Then," said Danglars, "I join you, for I hate him!"

And the two men shook hands in ratification of their oath.

CHAPTER LVI. [Pg 397]

ESPERANCE, MONTE-CRISTO'S SON.

Now let us go back to Esperance. Three days have elapsed since Jane was borne into the hôtel on the Champs-Elysées.

We find Madame Caraman deep in a conference with the person on whom she has more reliance than on any one else in the world, none other than herself! The good woman was lying on a sofa, listening to every sound which came from the room where Jane lay utterly prostrated.

"I don't know," said the old lady half aloud, "whether I am doing right or not. The Count begged me to look out for his son, and I have tried to do this. I have now accepted a new duty from the Vicomte, and for three days and nights I have been watching over this poor young girl. This is all very well. The Vicomte has requested me to keep the affair secret, even from his father, and I have consented. Here I am not sure that I have done wisely. The Count said: 'If you have any especial communication to make to me, you may go to Monsieur Fanfar.' That is clear enough. But if I obey the father I disobey the son!"

All these arguments failed to satisfy the good woman of the excellence of her cause, for she shook her head several times. She heard a long sigh, and ran to Jane's bed. The girl's face looked like [Pg 398] wax, her eyelids had a brownish tinge. Her lips were parted with the sigh that her nurse had heard.

Poor Jane! Was she on the road to recovery? Alas! the physicians did not yet answer for her life. Goutran had, at the request of Esperance, brought two men of great science, but they agreed that the girl was in great danger.

When Madame leaned over her to give her the medicine, Jane seemed to be terribly frightened. The color rushed to her cheeks, and she panted for breath.

Suddenly her eyes opened wide, and she cried aloud:

"Ah! let me die—let me die!"

"My poor, dear child!" said Madame Caraman, kissing her tenderly on her brow, "you must not say that! Try to be calm and good."

But Jane did not listen to her. She seemed to be haunted by some terrible spectre. Delirium has some astonishing resurrections. She struggled so fiercely in the arms of her nurse that Madame, who had been told to summon Esperance at any moment, leaned forward and touched a bell.

In a moment the Vicomte appeared. Oh! how pale and hollow-eyed he was! As he entered, Jane fell back among her pillows, covering her face with her hands.

"What is it?" asked Esperance.

"Only a little more fever, sir, but I feared an accident, and called you."

"You did right, and I thank you."

He took the girl's hands gently in his. At his touch tears sprang to Jane's closed eyes, and a little [Pg 399] shiver passed over her whole body.

"She is calmer now," said Madame, "and I am almost sorry that I have disturbed you."

"No—I am very glad you did. You must be very weary. Lie down, and I will stay here until dawn."

"No—I am old, I do not require much sleep, while you——"

Esperance sat on the foot of the bed, holding Jane's slender hands.

"Do you think," he said gently, "that I can sleep while she is suffering? Go, I beg of you—I will call you soon."

Madame still resisted a little, perhaps for form's sake, but finally obeyed his wishes. The young man then sank on his knees, still holding Jane's hands.

They remained thus, silent and motionless. From the touch of the Vicomte's hand Jane seemed to experience profound relief. Is it not certain that between two persons a certain magnetic communication may take place—an electric fluid may pass from one to the other, making the two momentarily one?

Esperance bowed his head and pressed his lips on Jane's hand. Then the young girl opened her eyes. The fever was gone. Her glorious eyes had regained all their softness, and her pulse beat more regularly.

"Jane! Jane!" whispered the young man. It seemed to him that he felt a gentle pressure of her fingers. "You hear me?" he said. "Will you allow me to remain near you? If you only knew how much I suffer in seeing your sufferings, and how gladly I would spare you a pang!" Again the little [Pg 400] quivering pressure.

"When I saw you the other night it did not seem to me that it was the first time. I felt as if I had seen you in my dreams. Jane, why did you wish to die?"

Was she listening? Did she hear him? A delicious torpor had taken possession of the girl. She thought she was dreaming, and was afraid to move lest she should awaken. The past seemed far away.

He continued:

"Jane, before I saw you I did not live. I was always sad. What did it matter to me the luxury with which I was surrounded? I have always felt singularly alone, my life was incomplete. But now I feel as if it were well rounded. You have suffered, but now all that is over. You will tell me all, because we are to have no secrets from each other. We will leave Paris, and find some quiet retreat together."

She did not speak, but from under her half-closed eyes a tear stole down her cheek. Esperance kissed the tear away. She smiled faintly, and then fell into a sweet sleep. Seeing this, Esperance rose and softly left the room.

In the ante-room Madame Caraman lay asleep on the sofa. Esperance smiled, but as he knew that Jane was safe, he did not arouse her nurse.

He went to his room. Hardly had the sound of his footsteps died away than the portière is lifted in yonder corner, and a dark form appears. It was a man. His face was hidden by a black vail. In his hand was a white handkerchief and a glass bottle. He stole to the bed so softly that not a sound was heard. [Pg 401]

Who is this man? It was thus that Monte-Cristo once entered the room of Valentine de Villefort. But this was not Monte-Cristo. As he reached the bed he extended his arm and held to the girl's face the handkerchief, from which exhaled a blue vapor.

Jane was breathing naturally. Suddenly her whole form quivered, then came immobility. Her limbs straighten, the rose fades from her cheek, her brow becomes like marble. The man lifted the inert form in his arms, and slowly, with infinite precautions, he moved toward the portière, which he pushes aside and disappears.

Ah! Madame Caraman, ah! Esperance, you little know what is going on!

This man is Benedetto. His revenge has begun!

And in that empty room there is now no other sound than the ticking of the clock.

CHAPTER LVII. [Pg 402]

THEY MUST BE SAVED!

My readers have not forgotten the romantic episode that followed Jane's suicide. How happened it that our old friends Fanfar and Bobichel were near and able to save the life of Sanselme?

It is a very simple matter. Monte-Cristo had said to Fanfar, "I trust my son to you. You love me, love him, also. Be to him what you have been to me."

"Rely on me," Fanfar said, and Monte-Cristo went away, confiding in himself, in everything, and still more in the strange fatality which had always served him.

Fanfar kept his word. He watched everything that Esperance did. He had been told, also, not to permit this surveillance to be suspected unless some real danger made it necessary to disclose it.

The evening that Esperance went to Goutran's, Fanfar, accompanied by the inseparable Bobichel, had seen the young man enter his friend's house, he had seen him place Jane in the carriage, and finally had watched him walk away with Goutran.

Could there be anything more reassuring? Fanfar thought not, and in a state of perfect satisfaction they walked along the left shore of the Seine, where Fanfar had a little house in the Rue Bellechasse.

They were talking earnestly, when they heard loud cries for aid. They instantly plunged into the river and swam in the direction of the cries. [Pg 403]

They were successful in their efforts, and saved the lives of both the man and the woman. Sanselme, however, had a brain fever, and the woman, Fanfar discovered, was insane. With her it was a passing delirium. Fanfar was greatly puzzled to know what to do with her. Who was she? Whence came she? There was nothing about her person which would elucidate the mystery. It was possible that she had escaped from some hospital, and Fanfar went to the Prefecture to make inquiries, but no such disappearance was registered there.

Fanfar naturally felt that there must be some connection between these two persons. Some frightful tragedy had been enacted. But he also felt that absolute secrecy was due the two unfortunates, till at last it was plain that there was no danger in revealing the adventure.

Days elapsed. Sanselme had terrible attacks of frenzy, and the woman, when she was able to move, had risen from her bed and gone to the door of her room, where she stood with terror and anguish imprinted on every feature, and if any one entered the room she would press both hands on her breast and utter a terrible shriek.

Finally Fanfar's wife had called him to see a scar on the breast of the unfortunate creature. She had certainly received a terrible wound, but when and where? The scar was not a new one.

Fanfar had sent Bobichel to the Vicomte's, for he had reproached himself that he had neglected Esperance in his interest for these two strangers. He sat near Sanselme's bed, and in the next room the mad woman was asleep, crouching on the floor near the door. [Pg 404]

Fanfar looked at the man before him, and his unerring instinct told him that this livid, worn face had known not only great sorrow, but terrible remorse.

Sanselme said something. Fanfar leaned over him to hear more distinctly.

"My daughter; dead! dead!"

And these words were repeated over and over again. What did this mean? The woman Sanselme had saved was older than he; she could not be his daughter.

Fanfar said in distinct but soothing tones, "You have a daughter? You have lost her?"

"Yes, my Jane!"

Sanselme flung himself from one side of the bed to the other in intense agony, and Fanfar asked question after question. He could not tear from the man the smallest information.

Having taken a sedative the sick man fell asleep, but it was plain that his dreams were troubled. Fanfar took up a book, when he heard the door-bell, and Bobichel suddenly appeared all out of breath. He dropped on a chair, and seemed to be in great trouble.

"What is the matter?" asked Fanfar.

"Oh! such a dreadful thing has happened to Monte-Cristo's son!"

"To the Vicomte!" cried Fanfar, leaping from his chair. He seized Bobichel's arm rather roughly, and shaking it, cried, "Will you speak?" [Pg 405]

"Yes, master, but I don't know how to tell you that the Vicomte has gone away."

"Gone away, and what of that?"

"But he has disappeared!"

"Who says so?"

"Old Madame Caraman and Coucon."

Fanfar passed his hand over his troubled brow. "My dear old friend," he said, "take pity on me, and tell me all you know; do not compel me to ask so many questions."

"Well, then, listen. You as well as I, became a little anxious because we had heard nothing of Monsieur Esperance for so long. I have found out that the night of the *soirée*, while we were saving those two old people in there, he was also doing something of the same kind."

"Did he not go home then, as we supposed?"

"Not he! He did not go home for over two hours, then he and Monsieur Goutran had a person with them who had been wounded—a young girl—she had been shot!"

"What preposterous tale is this?"

"It is true, sir. I did not believe it myself, at first, and as I felt sure you would doubt the story, I took the liberty of bringing the witnesses with me. Caraman and Coucon are here, sir."

"Oh! Bobichel, why could you not have said this before? Let me see them at once, and I swear that I will get at the truth!"

Fanfar, in addition to his impatience, felt a certain remorse. If any accident happened to Esperance he felt in a measure responsible. [Pg 406]

Caraman and Coucon came in. They were in great trouble.

"My good friends," said Fanfar, taking Madame's hand. She was sobbing fit to break her heart, while Coucon was gnawing the ends of his moustache, in order not to imitate her example. "My good friends, I do not yet believe that what Bobichel tells me is true. He says that the Vicomte has disappeared."

"Yes, sir," growled Coucon.

"Then, Madame Caraman, this is no time for tears. Tears remedy nothing, and we must have all our wits about us."

Madame held out her arms to Fanfar, as she fell on her knees before him.

"I am the one in fault, and I shall never forgive myself."

"Pray tell me the whole."

"I have broken all my promises in not sending to you before, and yet all the time I had a

presentiment of evil."

She wept and sobbed to such a degree that Fanfar could scarcely understand her, but he finally managed to soothe her. She had little to explain, however. She told how Esperance and Goutran had come in late at night, and brought with them a young girl who had been wounded by a pistol shot, and who seemed to be dying. How she herself had watched over this girl night and day. She told how, in obedience to the Vicomte, she had gone to lie down, being very weary and sleepy. [Pg 407]

"I can't say how it happened," she sighed. "I had been greatly fatigued. I only meant to rest, not to sleep, but when I opened my eyes it was broad daylight. I jumped up, and ran to the door and listened, but all was silent; then I stole to the bed, I thought she was asleep, of course. Suddenly it occurred to me that the silence was too profound. I tore open the curtain, the bed was empty. At first I thought the girl might have been carried to some other room, she was too weak to walk, you understand, and perhaps Coucon had helped, so I went to him and he rubbed his eyes and yawned."

"Madame Caraman!" exclaimed Coucon.

"Yes, you did, and were as stupid as possible. At all events, he had heard nothing, seen nothing. Then I took it into my head that the Vicomte had taken her away. And—and—I can't tell you what I thought, but did not like to go to the Vicomte. I knew if she was in his room, that he would not like any one to know it. This was an infamous thought on my part, for she is a good girl, I am sure."

"Pray, go on with your story, my dear lady," said Fanfar, with a shade of impatience. "We are losing a great deal of precious time."

"You are right! Well, I finally decided to go to the Vicomte's door. He was sitting at the table studying some books on medicine, and I told him. Oh! how sorry I was for him. I had no idea that he would care, but he became deadly pale, and thrusting me aside, a little rudely I must confess, [Pg 408] he ran to the room I had just left, and when he found I had told him the simple truth he went nearly crazy. Even if, as I first thought might be the case, the girl had an attack of delirium, she could not have opened the window, besides it was fastened inside. The doors were all bolted too. I did not know what to think. Monsieur Esperance was in such a rage that I don't like to think of him. But after all he was right, I had no business to sleep in that way."

"Go on; tell me about Esperance. When did he go away?"

"We have not seen him since last evening. He put his hat on his head, and went out without saying a word to us."

Fanfar reflected.

"You have no idea where he went?"

"Not the slightest. Oh! what will the Count say to us!"

"You have been very imprudent, but there is no use in recriminations. We must look for Esperance at once. Do you know how the girl was wounded?"

"No, but Monsieur Goutran does."

"I will go to him immediately."

"Oh! we have been there, and he has gone away for the day. Here is a little bag which we found in the young lady's room, and it may tell you something."

And Madame, as she spoke, handed Fanfar one of those little morocco bags so much in vogue to be hung at the belt. Fanfar opened the bag, and found a letter without address.

"We must look at this," he said. [Pg 409]

The letter was only a few lines of thanks written to the young girl by Goutran, when she consented to sing at his *soirée*. The note began with the words "Miss Jane!"

"Miss Jane!" cried Fanfar, a sudden recollection flashing over him.

To this cry there was a response. The door opened, and Sanselme tottered in.

"Jane! Jane! Did you say Jane?"

Fanfar ran to his assistance.

"Don't trouble yourself about me," cried Sanselme. "Tell me, did I hear you speak the name of Jane?"

"That is certainly the name on this note," answered Fanfar, extending the paper in his hand, which Sanselme snatched from him.

"Yes, it is hers. It is my dau—" He stopped even in his delirium he had strength to conceal his secret. "It is Jane's," he added.

"Then you know this girl?" Fanfar asked, excitedly.

"Do I know her? Was it not she who wished to die? Was it not she whom I rescued?"

"No, calm yourself. You are mistaken. You must try and tell me what I wish to know. Terrible dangers threaten those whom perhaps we both love."

"Is Jane in danger?" asked Sanselme, frantically. "Let me go! I must leave this place at once."

He started from his chair, but his strength failed him, and if Fanfar had not caught him he would have fallen.

"Ah!" he half sobbed, "I might have known it! That wretch Benedetto is always a signal of misfortune to me." [Pg 410]

"Who speaks of Benedetto!" said a hoarse voice.

Every one started. Before them stood the mad woman in torn and shabby garments, with her white hair in disorder. And as Sanselme looked up he saw her. A terrible cry escaped from his lips, and he recoiled with staring eyes riveted on the spectre before him.

"It is she!" he murmured. "The dead, it seems, are permitted to revisit the earth!"

The woman slowly approached Sanselme, and looked at him closely. She came so near that she could touch him, and then with a wild laugh, she screamed:

"The convict! Yes, it is he!"

And then, shuddering from head to foot, she repeated, "Benedetto! Who speaks of Benedetto?"

"What does all this mean?" asked Fanfar.

"I will tell you," said Sanselme, averting his eyes. "Yes, it is true, I am an escaped convict. This woman is right, but I never did her any harm. Look at me, woman! Tell me, was it I who struck you?"

The mad woman tore away the rags that covered the terrible scar on her breast.

"Oh! how it hurts," she said, moaning, "and how hot my head is."

"But who did it?"

The woman in a frightened whisper, answered:

"It was Benedetto—my son!"

A cry of horror escaped from every heart.

"Yes," exclaimed Sanselme, "and the wretch still lives. He assassinated his mother, and by what miracle she escaped, I know not. He—this Benedetto—is to-day in Paris. He has come to avenge himself on Monte-Cristo." [Pg 411]

Fanfar questioned Sanselme, who avowed everything except that Jane was his daughter. He would not have admitted this had he been threatened with the guillotine. Fanfar listened attentively.

"It is as clear as day to me," he said, at last, "that all this is Benedetto's work. Therefore we will first find him, and of him we will demand an account of this new crime. Sanselme, you have been a great criminal. Are you ready to prove your repentance?"

"I will obey you in whatsoever you order. Save Jane, no matter what becomes of me."

"Then all of you will make ready for the fray. I will summon the Count of Monte-Cristo, as it was agreed I should do in case of danger. He will be here in three days, and we must be able to say to him that we have saved his son."

"Yes, we must say that," cried the Zouave, "or Coucon will be dead."

"To work then," said Fanfar, rising. "Sanselme, come into my cabinet, there are several questions I wish to ask. But first, who is this woman?"

"Benedetto never told me," answered Sanselme.

Fanfar went to the mad woman, who was crouching near the door.

"Who are you?" he said. "What is your name?"

She laughed in a stupid way.

"I have no name, I am dead!"

CHAPTER LVIII. [Pg 412]

GOUTRAN AND CARMEN.

Goutran was really in love, although for a time his attention had been distracted by the strange affair of Jane Zeld. But now that calm was in a measure restored, Goutran thought of Carmen with quickened pulse. He no longer hesitated. He resolved to write to a millionaire uncle of his who spent his last days hunting wolves in the Ardennes, and beg him to come up and lay his proposal before the banker. He told Esperance what he meant to do, and the Vicomte encouraged the plan.

When he had come to this conclusion, he was astonished to find that the same indecision again attacked him. Why did he hesitate? He would have been at a loss to say. He determined, however, on one of two things, either to ask Carmen's hand or never see her again. He had been with Esperance for forty-eight hours, encouraging him and ministering to Jane, and now he felt the need of fresh air. He walked toward Saint Cloud, softly saying to himself among the green trees:

"I love her! I love her!"

On his return the decision was made. He would write to his uncle the next day. As he entered the hôtel, the concierge said to him mysteriously:

"There was a lady here, sir." [Pg 413]

"A lady! What lady?"

"Ah! sir, that I can't say. My discretion was too great to permit me to ask her name. I think she is young and pretty, though she was heavily vailed. She asked for you, and when I told her you were out she looked embarrassed, and finally drew from her pocket a little note which she had prepared. She gave it to me, saying it was very urgent."

"A note! Where is it? You should have given it to me at once."

"Oh! it is safe, sir, in my davenport."

A concierge with a davenport! What is the world coming to, thought Goutran.

Finally the good man produced the paper in question, rose colored and perfumed. Goutran tore it open, but did not read it until he reached his own room. The address was in delicate, long letters, the result of lessons from an English master. Who could have sent it? He did not know the writing. But when he glanced at the signature he with difficulty refrained from a cry of surprise. The note was signed, "Carmen de L——." These were its contents:

> "Monsieur Goutran—or will you allow me to call you my friend—I must see you at once on matters of vast importance. To-night, at eleven o'clock, I shall expect you. Ring at the side door of the hôtel; my maid will be in attendance. Do not fail, for you and those you love are in danger."

Goutran was amazed. What did these mysterious lines mean? And of whom did Carmen speak when she said "those you love"? He was greatly disturbed, but he was not the man to hesitate. [Pg 414]

At ten o'clock he was already walking up and down a street which commanded a view of the Hôtel Laisangy, but he felt none of the emotion natural to a lover going to a rendezvous. He had a feeling of strange oppression. Finally the clock struck eleven. The side door was on the Rue Saint Honoré. Goutran was about to ring the bell, when the door was opened and a hand was laid on his.

"Come this way," said a woman's voice.

It was the curious maid whom we have already seen. She was enchanted, feeling sure that it was a lover she admitted. The stairs were carpeted and dimly lighted. Presently he entered Carmen's boudoir, but she was not there.

"I will notify the young lady," said the maid, with one of those knowing smiles that tell so much.

Goutran was standing with his hat in his hand when Carmen entered. She was very simply dressed in black. Her beautiful face was very pale. Her blonde hair looked like burnished gold. She extended her hand as he advanced with a profound bow.

"Many thanks," she said, "for having come. I hardly dared expect you."

"Why did you doubt me? Did you suppose that I could be deaf to such a mark of confidence?"

Carmen smiled sadly.

"Yes," she said, "I do feel entire confidence in you, a confidence that is most real." [Pg 415]

She seated herself and motioned him to a chair, and with her large eyes fixed on her companion, was silent for a minute. At last she said, abruptly:

"Monsieur Goutran, do you love me?"

At this most unexpected question, Goutran started.

"Yes," he answered, gravely. "I love you, and I feel a devotion for you which is, perhaps, better than love."

Carmen's long lashes rested on her burning cheeks.

"Your words are sweeter to me than you can well imagine. By and by you will understand me better. I need your affection, and I need your assistance, but I am about to put your interest in me to a very severe test."

"You have but to express your wishes," said Goutran.

Carmen waited. Evidently she had not strength to go on with her explanation.

"Listen to me," she resumed. "I owe you a declaration which will remove every possibility of a misunderstanding between us. A few days ago, when on the terrace of your house my hands rested in yours, I fully realized that, so far as you were concerned, a tacit engagement from that moment existed between us."

"From that moment," interrupted Goutran, "I felt that if you would accept my hand and name——"

"And yet you did not apply to Monsieur Laisangy?" said Carmen, gently.

"Did you doubt me? I did not dare." [Pg 416]

"And you were right, for, Monsieur Goutran, I can never be your wife!"

Goutran rose quickly.

"Was it to break my heart that you summoned me here to-night?" he cried.

"I can never be your wife," repeated Carmen, "because only an unstained woman should bear your name!"

Goutran turned deadly pale.

"And I," she continued, "am not such a woman!"

"Ah! Mademoiselle, I cannot understand you."

"Listen to me. Every word I speak I have thoroughly weighed, and I understand my duty. I hope my frankness will at least win your esteem, and possibly your pity."

"My pity! Ah! Carmen, for God's sake do not say such things!"

"I have not finished. Goutran, I love you, deeply and sincerely. Your character, your talents, all inspire me, for the first time in my life, with those sentiments which tend to elevate us. Before knowing you I passed through life knowing little, and caring little, of what was right or what was wrong."

Tears were now pouring down her cheeks.

"I am not the daughter," she sobbed, "I am not the daughter, I am the friend, of Monsieur de Laisangy!"

A pained exclamation broke from Goutran's breast, and he hid his face in his hands. He felt as if a dagger had struck him in the heart.

"Yes," continued Carmen, with a smile of contempt, "this old man, for reasons of his own, insisted on my bearing his name. Do not condemn me too greatly," she continued, "I was not sixteen when I fell into the trap that this man laid for me. Think of it!" [Pg 417]

"The miserable scoundrel!"

"Yes, he ruined me, body and soul! All the finer instincts of my nature he sneered at. He taught me to despise everything—himself, myself! For five long years I endured this martyrdom. When we reached Paris, he added another wrong to those he had already inflicted on me. He compelled me to profane the sacred name of father, and yet I did not realize my shame until the day I met you. I sat to you for my portrait, and as you talked I felt a whole new world opening before me. I knew then, for the first time, that I was unworthy of the love of an honest man. Ah! Goutran, how I have suffered in loving you!"

And the poor girl sank on her knees, a very Magdalen.

Goutran laid his hand on her head.

"Carmen, these avowals prove to me that I was not wrong in thinking you the best and the most adorable woman in the world!"

"You do not loathe me, then?"

"Have I any right to be your judge? I have certainly received a sad shock."

He lifted her to a chair.

"If you have made me this terrible confidence it is because you wish to give me a proof of your great confidence in me. I shall be worthy of it, be sure of that. And now, tell me what you wish." [Pg 418]

Carmen lifted her sad eyes to his.

"How good you are!" she said, quietly. "But you are right. Now you will not doubt my motives nor me?"

"I swear that I will believe every syllable you utter!"

Carmen, after a few moments' consideration, said:

"You are very fond of this young Monte-Cristo?"

"Certainly I am. He is one of the noblest fellows I ever met. But why do you speak of him?"

"Because it was to speak of him that I summoned you here to-night. Your friend, Goutran, is in great danger, as are you—and myself, too."

"Danger!"

"We must find some means of avoiding it, but your enemies——"

"I have no enemies!"

"Yes, and Monsieur de Laisangy is one of them."

"That scoundrel!"

"Yes, and he is worse than I supposed, and the other foe is—but did you notice an Italian here, the secretary of the Italian Count?"

"Yes—his name was Fagiano."

"He calls himself Fagiano, but that is not his real name."

"Who is he, then?"

"I cannot say. But listen. For some time I have hated and loathed Laisangy. I felt that he was a greater criminal towards others than myself, and as my conscience began to stir, I felt my [Pg 419] suspicions daily increase. At your *soirée* I noticed that this man whom I called father started and turned pale when he heard the name of Monte-Cristo, and then he invented some pretext to leave the room."

"I remember," said Goutran.

"Then, when we were on the terrace—" Carmen hesitated. There were memories connected with that terrace which she did not care to approach.

Goutran said, kindly:

"Go on, dear child."

"I do not know if you remember as well as myself a dispute which we, in a measure, overheard. I recognized Laisangy's voice, and the disconnected words confirmed my suspicions. Early the next morning I sent for him and questioned him very closely, and in a most peremptory manner. In the midst of our animated discussion a card was brought in. This Signor Fagiano had called to see Monsieur de Laisangy.

"I heard no more of him, saw no more of him, until yesterday, when, as I entered the hôtel, I saw Fagiano coming in. I at once ran into Laisangy's private office, and reached it first, where I hid in a closet, ready to listen to every word. Do not reprove me. All means are lawful when dangers threaten those you love, and some instinct taught me that I should learn something of you and the Vicomte."

Goutran kissed Carmen's hand as his sole reply.

"The two men came in a moment or two, and I at once learned from the first words they uttered that they were associates in some crime. What it is I know not, but Fagiano said: [Pg 420]

"'I have done it, and now our vengeance is certain. But I need money.'

"'I have already told you that I would give it to you. Here is what you want. And now, what do you mean to do?'

"'She is in my power now, and I shall soon have him, too.'

"'No imprudence! We must not be compromised.'

"'I am hardly foolish enough for that. I will torture Monte-Cristo's son, but not in a way that the law can reach!'

"'Let him be tortured! Let him pay for all the agony his father has inflicted on me!'

"'You shall be satisfied!'

"The two men then walked away still talking, but in such low voices that I could not hear. I rushed from my hiding-place and hastened to my room. I had learned little, it is true; but what I heard had opened wide and fearful possibilities. I knew Monsieur de Laisangy, and knew that he would stop at nothing. It would be useless for me to interfere openly, and then I thought of you."

"And you we're right in sending for me. In your recital, however, there are many points that are obscure. Thank you for warning me. You asked me, a few moments since, if I loved Esperance. I look upon him as my brother, and I would give my life to spare him a pang."

"But of whom did the man speak when he said, '*she* is in my power'?" [Pg 421]

"I do not venture to say; but in an hour we shall know."

The young man turned toward the door. Carmen came to his side and gave him her hand. He drew her to his breast.

"You have hurt me, Carmen, but I respect you more than ever, and I love you!"

"Ah!" she said, passionately, "those words from your lips have made me your slave. I belong to you from this moment! I will mount guard over the enemy, and we will work together!"

CHAPTER LIX. [Pg 422]

UPON THE TRACK.

Goutran left Carmen's room, his brain all in a whirl. It was late, but the young man knew not too late to go to the Vicomte's. Throwing himself into a carriage, he drove to the hôtel in the Champs Elysées. He was amazed to find it in total darkness, and when he asked for the Vicomte, was surprised at the embarrassed manner of the Swiss, as well as to hear that Esperance was out, without leaving word when he would return.

"And Madame Caraman and Coucon?"

"They are out too, sir."

While Goutran was thus impatiently questioning the man, a carriage stopped, from which descended Fanfar, Sanselme, Coucon and Madame Caraman.

"Ah! Monsieur Goutran!" exclaimed Fanfar, "I have just been to your rooms, and am thankful to meet you here. I am anxious to consult with you."

"You know, then, what is going on?" cried Goutran.

"I think I do; but let us go up-stairs; before we begin the fray, it is well to understand the battlefield, and to become familiar with it."

As he said this, Fanfar entered the vestibule, but the Swiss hurried after him.

"But, sir," he said, in some confusion, "in the absence of the Count and his son, I really cannot—" [Pg 423]

"Shut yourself up in your room, and pay no heed to what is going on here," Fanfar replied, sternly, showing, as he spoke, a ring that he wore on his finger.

It belonged to Monte-Cristo, and had been entrusted to Fanfar by the Count when he went away. This ring was well known to every one of the Count's people. The man bowed low.

"I beg your pardon, sir. Shall I call the footman?"

"No; and on your life do not admit a living creature. You understand me?"

"Yes, sir."

They ascended the stairs and entered the large rooms one after the other. When the Vicomte's cabinet was entered, it was found all in disorder.

"The Vicomte, you see, has taken his pistols," said Coucon.

"What time did the Vicomte go?" asked Fanfar.

"I know not," answered Coucon, "and Madame was weeping so bitterly that she was of little use."

Fanfar was annoyed that he could elicit so little, knowing well that if Monte-Cristo were there his eagle eye would have discovered something.

"Send me the porter," he said.

And when the man appeared, he asked at what hour the Vicomte went out last. The man, in some confusion, replied that he did not see him go out.

"You were absent from your post, then?"

"No, sir, I was not. I was not away for one moment yesterday."

"And you saw every one who came in and went out?" [Pg 424]

"Yes, sir. The Vicomte did go out, but he came in again."

"Came in!" cried Madame and Coucon, together.

"Yes; it was about an hour after that, when you came and told me he had disappeared. I thought that he might have gone out, and I not heeded it."

"And may not this have been so?" asked Fanfar. "If the Vicomte is not in the hôtel, he must have gone out, you know."

"I beg to observe, sir, that the Vicomte might have gone out by the small door which communicates directly with his apartment; but every night when I shut up the house I bolt that door, and it is still bolted; so that my young master did not go that way. It is possible, of course, that he could have passed my door without my seeing him. I can't always answer for myself; but I have proof that he did not do this."

"What is your proof?"

"Every night I fasten the great door with a chain and padlock and take the key. If any one wishes to go out in the night he must call me. As soon as the Vicomte came in I put up this chain. I assure you, sir, that I am speaking the truth. At first I was troubled and afraid I had been careless, but since I have collected my ideas, I am sure that I have nothing to reproach myself with."

"Do you mean to say, then," cried Coucon, "that the Vicomte walked through the wall?"

"It is very strange," said Fanfar, thoughtfully. "And now, my friends," he added, turning to Coucon and Madame, "you may leave me here with Monsieur Goutran." [Pg 425]

"And with me?" added Bobichel.

"You can stay, if you will. I may need you."

"But, Monsieur Fanfar," said poor Madame, "I think we, too, are good for something. You ought not to send us away."

The poor woman was greatly distressed.

"Oh! I have something for you to do. Examine the garden carefully, and if you see the smallest thing that is unusual, come to me instantly."

"There won't be a corner in which I shall not put my nose, be sure of that!" cried Coucon.

"Oh! if the Count were only here!" sighed Madame.

Fanfar was alone with Bobichel and Goutran.

"Have you anything to suggest?" he said, suddenly turning to Goutran. "Do you know of any secret egress from this hôtel?"

"None whatever," answered the artist.

"And yet you will observe that the girl was not carried away by either of the doors that are known, and she is gone!"

"I did not think of that! There is unquestionably some issue known only to the Count."

"Alas! the Count's enemies know it, also," answered Fanfar.

"Let us go to the room that the girl was in—"

"I was about to make that proposal. Now is the time, Bobichel," said Fanfar, turning to the former clown, "to see if we cannot regain a little of our cleverness."

"I am ready, even to go through the eye of a needle, if it be necessary!" answered Bobichel. [Pg 426]

Goutran took a candle and led the way. When they reached Jane's room Fanfar took up a position in the centre of it, examined the ceiling, the floor and the walls. Then Bobichel explored every inch of the floor, which was covered with a thick carpet. But nothing could be found.

"This is most extraordinary," murmured Fanfar, "and yet I am convinced that I am on the track."

Suddenly Bobichel uttered an exclamation. "Here is something, master!"

Fanfar and Goutran hastened to him. In one of the silk folds of the hanging on the wall there was a bit of white lace, evidently torn from something.

"I recognize that," said Goutran. "I ordered the peignoirs she required, for we did not wish to admit any one into our secrets; and that lace trimmed one of the peignoirs."

"And now we have it!" shouted Bobichel, inserting the blade of his knife in one of the plaits of the silk.

Fanfar said hastily, "It is an iron door, and there must be a spring. Let us try, each of us, and feel over the whole wall, if it is necessary."

They went to work, and presently Bobichel was lucky enough to press a little knob. A panel slowly opened, and a puff of warm air came full in the eager faces of the anxious men. With the light of

their candles they saw a well-finished passage and two or three stairs; it was too dark to see more.

"This is the way that Jane was abducted, and this is the way that Esperance went. Let us see where it goes." And Fanfar started first. [Pg 427]

Hardly had they reached the stairs than they heard the iron door close behind them. In spite of all their courage, they shuddered. Had the door shut of itself, or had it been closed by some invisible enemy? They turned back hastily, but there was not the smallest sign to be seen of door or spring.

"What had we best do?" asked Goutran, uneasily.

Fanfar reflected a moment. "As we cannot go back, let us hasten forward with all possible speed. We will find the way out."

"Or we will make one!" cried Bobichel.

The three friends started once more, Bobichel in front, holding a heavy bronze candelabra.

CHAPTER LX. [Pg 428]

ESPERANCE IN DESPAIR.

It was indeed by this mysterious path that Esperance had gone. When he heard that Jane was not to be found, he at first could hardly comprehend what was said. He ran to Jane's room and looked about, then scarce knowing what he did, he left the house and then returned to it, after having wandered over Paris for two or three hours. No one noticed his pallor when he entered the hôtel. He went to Jane's room again, and there, lying back in a low chair, he looked about with sad eyes.

Suddenly he saw a panel slowly open in the wall. He was not afraid. Esperance did not know the sensation, and now he simply expected some revelation. He instantly knew that this was the path by which Jane had been taken away. He rose and entered the dark corridor. He had no light, and the door at once closed behind him; but he had inherited his father's singular power of seeing in the dark.

He discovered the stairs, and began to descend them. He went on and on, and then another corridor, and then more stairs. Finally he reached a door, which he opened, and entered a large room hung with silk. It was one of the houses which had been so useful to Monte-Cristo years before. The path by which Esperance had come crossed the Champs Elysées under ground, and communicated with this house. [Pg 429]

All was magnificent, but Esperance saw nothing. Nothing but a lacquer table on which lay a letter. This letter contained the words, "If the son of Monte-Cristo be not a coward, if he wishes to find her whom he has lost, he will go from here to a certain Malvernet, who lives at Courberrie. There he will learn what he wishes to know, and will act as he deems best."

Esperance was delighted. He did not stop to think of the singularity of finding this note in this place. What did he care for this mystery that surrounded him? He had found Jane Zeld, or rather he had found traces of her. He went to the chimney to look at the clock, for he had lost all idea of time, and happening to see his own face in the mirror, he could not repress a start. He looked to himself at least ten years older than when he last stood before a mirror. He wondered at himself, when he remembered his father, whose youth seemed eternal, in spite of the trials through which he had passed. When he went out from the hôtel the first time he had mechanically put in his pocket a pair of revolvers—he had them now.

CHAPTER LXI. [Pg 430]

ESPERANCE GOES TO COURBERRIE.

Twenty years since Courberrie was very far from what it is to-day. The houses were scattered and much fewer. Along the Seine extended deserted fields, against which the sullen tide rose and fell. In one of these fields stood an old wooden house which was not inhabited, for both wind and rain penetrated its roof and walls. On this especial night, however, any one familiar with the locality would have been astonished to see a light gleam through the worm-eaten shutters. In one room was a chair and a table. On the table was a lamp, but there was no other furniture.

Pacing the room, and occasionally stopping to listen to the storm that shook the old house like the bones of a skeleton, was a man—a reddish beard covered half his face. He was dressed in black, and had thrown a cloak and broad-brimmed hat on the table.

"Will he come?" he muttered, "will the long-expected hour ever strike?"

A slight sound was heard without. The dry branches crackled; the man started, then snatched his hat and pulled it well down over his forehead. The hand that was hidden in the folds of the cloak which he threw over his shoulders, held a dagger.

"I won't use it, though!" he said aloud, "his sufferings would be too brief!" [Pg 431]

There came a knock at the door.

"Does a man named Malvernet live here?" asked a voice.

"Yes, come in," and the door was thrown wide open.

Esperance entered.

"What do you want of me? I am Malvernet," said a gruff voice.

Esperance looked about the room. The man was alone, and Esperance knew that he could defend himself.

"Do you know who I am?" he asked.

"No. I was told to wait for a man here, who would come. I have done as I was bidden, that is all."

"I will tell you then. I am Esperance, the son of the Count of Monte-Cristo. I am rich, so rich that I do not myself know how much I have. Now if you obey me faithfully, I will make you so rich that every wish you have will be realized."

A sneer was on Malvernet's lips.

"You offer me money, do you, and why? Tell me what you want of me?"

"Scoundrels entered my house in the night—"

"And robbed you?"

"Yes, they robbed me of a treasure—a treasure for which I would give all else I have in the world. They carried away a young girl whom I love."

"And the girl's name?"

"Jane. And now I wish you to take me to her."

"And if I refuse?"

"I will kill you!" answered Esperance, coldly. [Pg 432]

The other began to laugh noisily.

"No," he said, "you will not kill me! You know that if you did that, with me would disappear every trace of her whom you love, and you would say to yourself, if he refuses to-day he may yield to-morrow. You see, son of Monte-Cristo, that your threats are preposterous and can't frighten me."

"Then you refuse to do as I ask?"

"By no means. Only I wish to prove to you that these grand airs are simply foolish. You need me, but I do not need you. The game is not equal!"

"You are right," said Esperance, "and I ask your pardon."

The eyes of Benedetto—for it was Benedetto—flashed with triumph to see the son of his enemy thus humble. He had him in his power now and could kill him if he pleased, but death would not have assuaged his thirst for vengeance.

"All right," he said, "I was a little provoked with you, but I will help you now."

Esperance uttered an exclamation of thankfulness.

"Then let us hasten. When I have found Jane, ask me for my life if you choose."

Benedetto opened the door.

"Go on, sir, I will follow you."

And as they went out, Benedetto muttered:

"You little know what you say. Your life is indeed mine, and I mean to have it."

The night was excessively dark, but Esperance felt neither rain nor wind; his fever was so great that he was not cold. [Pg 433]

Ah! Monte-Cristo, where are you? Here is your son rushing into the most terrible danger, and you far away!

Through the darkness Esperance followed Benedetto the assassin. Suddenly it seemed to him that the obscurity was rent away like a vail.

"Where are we?" he said to his guide.

"On the bank of the Seine. We have not far to go. Are you afraid?"

Esperance did not reply to this insulting question.

"Go on!" he said.

Presently they stopped before a dark building. Not a light was to be seen. Benedetto turned to the son of Monte-Cristo.

"This is the place to which I agreed to bring you."

"Do you mean that my beloved Jane is in this house?"

"She is here."

"I cannot believe it. The whole thing is a plot!"

"Will you kindly tell me, sir," said Benedetto, "why I should take the trouble to come all this way? A half hour since we were together where no human eye could see us, nor human ear hear us. What would have prevented my attacking you then, had my intentions been sinister?"

"That is true; but tell me that you are mistaken—that my poor Jane is not here!"

At this moment shrill laughter and ribald songs came from the house near which Esperance stood.

"Let us go in!" cried the Vicomte. "Jane must not stay here one other minute." [Pg 434]

"Come, then," answered Benedetto, "you shall be satisfied."

He opened the door, but it was as dark within as without. Esperance heard the door close; he spoke, but there was no answer. He stretched out his arms and felt the wall, and instantly his eyes regained their peculiar facility of sight. He was alone in a small, square room without door or window. He uttered a cry of rage.

"I have been deceived! The scoundrel!"

But at the same moment the wall opened before him like two sliding panels, but in the place of the wall were iron bars. And through these bars Esperance beheld Jane, but what he saw was so terrible that he recoiled and uttered a cry of terror, which was drowned in shrieks of laughter, wild songs and the clatter of glasses.

CHAPTER LXII. [Pg 435]

COUCON.

Goutran had entire faith in Carmen, and he was now anxious to communicate with her. He called the former Zouave.

"Coucon," he said, "do you know where Monsieur Laisangy lives?"

"The great banker? Oh! yes, sir, everybody knows that."

"Then without losing one minute, I want you to go to his hôtel. This note must be given to his daughter at once."

"To Miss Carmen, sir?"

"Precisely; but understand me—no one else must see it. This note must be given into her hands."

"I understand, sir; it shall be done. There is nothing I would not do, sir, to repair my own stupidity."

Coucon started off. To go to the hôtel and ask for Miss Carmen was simple enough, but he took it into his head that it would be better if no one knew that he was there. He thought he would examine the premises before he decided on his course of action.

When he reached the hôtel, to his great surprise he found the doors wide open and the courtyard blazing with lights. Carriage after carriage was driving up, and stopping at the vestibule.

"Upon my life," said Coucon, "this is bad enough." [Pg 436]

He stepped into a wine-shop, and asked for a bottle of wine; as he drank it he said to himself: "How the deuce am I to see Miss Carmen? She is in the salon receiving her guests. Of course, she won't come into the anteroom to get a *billet doux*, but if the mountain won't come to Mohammed, Mohammed must go to the mountain, which means, that if Miss Carmen won't come to me in the anteroom, I must go to her!"

At this moment a Chasseur d'Afrique entered the wine-shop.

"Will you have the kindness to tell me," he asked, of the shop-keeper, "where I shall find the hôtel

of a rich banker about here? Laisangy, I think, is the name."

"Almost opposite—where all those carriages stand."

"Ah! thanks!" And as the soldier turned round he saw Coucon.

The recognition was mutual, and the two former companions fell into each other's arms.

"Galaret!" cried Coucon.

"Yes. And now let us have a glass."

"Can't stop, have a commission to perform!"

Nevertheless, Coucon did stop to drink a little, and to gossip. "When did you come to Paris?" he asked.

"This very day, in the escort of Mohammed-Ben-Omar, a sort of Pasha, you know, and to-night he slipped on the stairs and wrenched his ankle. Take another glass, friend. Well, as I was saying, he was asked to this *soirée* at the banker's and had to write a refusal. As he lies on his sofa, and is likely to lie there for some little time, this note I must deliver." [Pg 437]

Coucon did not seem to hear what his friend was saying, but suddenly exclaimed to an innocent looking bourgeois, at another table:

"What are you staring at?"

In vain did the man stammer that he was not even looking at them. One word led to another until a hot quarrel was in progress, the police were called in, and Galaret was arrested.

"Give me your note," said Coucon, in the most obliging manner, "I will see that it is delivered."

And he dashed out of the shop with suspicious alacrity. "You are a fool, Coucon," he said to himself, "if you don't manage to deliver your own note at the same time!"

Our readers must not suppose that Coucon was so simple as to think of penetrating the Laisangy salons, even with the note he had obtained in so abominable a manner from his friend. The plan he had devised was more audacious and more sure. Ten minutes later the former Zouave entered the shop of a costumer in the Rue de Pélétere. And in five minutes more he sallied forth a magnificent Bedouin, draped in white and wearing an enormous turban. He called out to the astonished coachman:

"Rue de Rivoli! and drive fast!"

CHAPTER LXIII. [Pg 438]

CARMEN KEEPS HER WORD.

"I will watch the enemy," Carmen had said to Goutran, when they parted. The enemy was the man who had taken advantage of her inexperience, and induced her to call him father. Why had she not realized what she was doing sooner? She had, however, shown her womanly courage by the confession she had made to Goutran, and now she found herself without shield or buckler in opposition to the man under whose roof she lived. She resolved to defend Goutran and all those he loved. Woe to whomsoever should attack them.

That same morning, Laisangy asked to be received by her. She was quite ready for another quarrel, but Laisangy was amiable and smiling, for he had at that moment heard from Benedetto that his vengeance was near being accomplished.

Strangely enough this man Laisangy was in deadly terror of Monte-Cristo, and fully estimated the almost superhuman power of this wonderful man. But when Benedetto appeared before him and he found that there was one villain greater than himself, he was encouraged and comforted. What joy it would be to torture, without danger to himself, the soul of him whom he had so feared.

Danglars had given himself, soul and body, to Benedetto, as in legends a man abandons himself to a demon. He smiled as he entered Carmen's room. [Pg 439]

"What do you want of me?" she said, coldly.

"You have not forgotten that we give a grand reception this evening."

"This evening! Surely you mistake—"

"No. This is your own list of invitations that I hold in my hand."

Carmen had forgotten entirely that these invitations had been sent out a week before.

Laisangy looked at her closely.

"I fancied," he said, "that this entertainment had escaped your memory."

"I certainly shall not appear!" answered Carmen.

The banker bit his lips, this was precisely what he feared. He began to argue the matter gently. And she, in her turn, began to reflect. She saw on the list the name of Goutran, which she had written with a breaking heart. After all, had she the right to desert her post?

"Very well," she said, "I will be present."

Laisangy was astonished at his prompt success.

"Yes," she repeated, "on condition that you do not once call me your daughter."

"What shall I call you?" stammered Laisangy.

"Whatever you choose, only take care that you do not disobey me!"

In fact, the banker cared little upon this point. He had obtained what he wanted. His fête would be made brilliant by Carmen's presence. He did not retire, however, and the girl saw that he had [Pg 440] something else to say.

"What more do you want?" she asked, impatiently.

"My dear child," began Laisangy, with some pomposity, "you have, doubtless, ere this discovered that matters of finance are composed of a thousand details more important than those of diplomacy."

"I have certainly learned that swindling is a troublesome business," she said through her teeth, and with intense disdain.

Laisangy pretended not to hear this.

"To-night," he said, with perfect *sang froid*, "we leave the Tuileries."

He had counted on the effect of these words. Carmen shrugged her shoulders, which certainly was not respectful to the Emperor.

"And I am greatly disturbed," continued the banker. "It may be necessary for me to leave for an hour. I shall pretend indisposition, which may be attributed to the heat, and while I am supposed to be recovering in my own room, I can go out and attend to my affairs."

"You may be obliged to go out, then?"

"Certainly; did you not understand?"

"Why do you not tell me that you wish to go to the Bourse?"

Laisangy was annoyed. He saw that Carmen was on the *qui vive*, and Carmen said to herself: "What does this mean? He is lying, and some infernal machination is on foot. I must learn what it is."

She replied more gently:

"But I care little about these matters; the Bourse does not interest me. At what hour did you say [Pg 441] you might be called away?"

"About midnight."

"Very good. Then you would like me, I suppose, to be very anxious about you, and urge you to withdraw?"

"Precisely!" answered the banker, much pleased. "Ah, Carmen, how well you understand me. Had you chosen, we two would have governed France!"

"Not I!" answered Carmen, abruptly. "We are companions, not accomplices. I do not understand you, and I do not propose to aid you in your infamy."

At this word Laisangy started, and thus confirmed the suspicions of Carmen, who was watching him.

He took her hand, and she withdrew it quickly. He had obtained what he desired, and was now ready to depart.

"What is he planning?" said Carmen to herself. "Is it really some financial operation, which, of course, I care nothing about, or is it——?"

Goutran's name rose to her lips. All day she watched him, but saw nothing to justify her in her belief, and yet she knew that her woman's instinct had not played her false. Over and over again she was tempted to retract her promise, for the idea of this fête was intolerable to her. She thought of Goutran, and remembered that she might save him.

The evening came, and Carmen's maid could hardly believe it was she who replied:

"What dress, did you say? I don't care in the least!"

Nevertheless, when Carmen appeared in the salons there was an audible murmur of admiration. [Pg 442] In her white dress, with a few flowers in her beautiful hair, Carmen had never been more

beautiful. She moved slowly through the rooms, looking for Goutran, who was not there, as we know.

Little did Carmen care for these men and women, who were the tools and slaves of the man of December. Laisangy was radiant, however. Carmen shivered whenever she looked at him. It seemed to her that he was in a state of unusual excitement.

The orchestra was playing delightfully, and lacqueys were announcing the first names of the empire—counts, and barons, and princes. Suddenly a new name was heard:

"Mohammed-Ben-Omar!"

And a magnificent personage, wearing the Legion of Honor on his white bournous, entered the room. Every one turned to look at him. He was a magnificent looking Arab. With a gravity that was truly oriental, and with his face half concealed in the folds of his mantle, his brown hands folded on his breast, Mohammed-Ben-Omar advanced.

Laisangy went forward to meet him. In fact, he could hardly believe in his good fortune. Mohammed-Ben-Omar belonged to that class of Algerians who, listening to the counsel of French financiers, always cherished the project of making Algeria into a veritable El Dorado, and had now come to France to lend the support of his name and authority to some one of the [Pg 443] speculations built on the sands of the desert, of which the Tuileries people were so fond.

Laisangy, learning of his arrival in Paris, had hastened to send him an invitation, but had hardly hoped to see him. He was, therefore, more than usually civil.

Ben-Omar replied to his courtesies only by carrying his hand to his heart and then to his forehead, in the recognized Mussulman manner. He did not speak one word of French, and yet, when Carmen passed, he said "Beautiful!" with a guttural intonation.

"My daughter, sir!" answered the banker, with pride.

"Beautiful! beautiful!" repeated the Mohammedan.

Laisangy signed to Omar to accompany him to the group where Carmen was talking. There he went through the ceremony of introduction. Then, leaning toward her, Omar said, under his breath:

"I come from Goutran. Allah il Allah!" he added, aloud.

Carmen started. Never was she so astonished. The name of Goutran from these lips was like lightning from a clear sky. She looked at the Arab's bronze face and his huge moustache.

"Take His Excellency's arm," said Laisangy, "and show him the gallery and statuary."

Carmen hesitated, but Omar at once threw his bournous aside and offered the young lady his arm.

Laisangy whispered in Carmen's ear:

"Do not delay too long. I have received the signal and must do what was agreed upon between us."

Carmen paid little heed to these words, but moved through the crowd on Omar's arm, slowly and [Pg 444] thoughtfully. Omar was very solemn, but under his moustache he whispered:

"I come from Monsieur Goutran."

"Who are you?" she asked, raising her fan to hide her lips as she spoke.

Whenever the crowd came too near he raised his arm, and with a grand sweep of bournous, hand and arm, he said:

"Allah il Allah! Rassoul il Allah!"

Everybody drew back much impressed, for the incomprehensible has always great power.

At last, Omar and Carmen were alone in a small salon.

"Will you tell me who you are?" asked Carmen once again.

"I am Coucon—devoted to Monsieur Goutran and to Esperance, the son of Monte-Cristo."

"And you disguised yourself to see me?"

"Yes, for I had a note to bring from Monsieur Goutran."

"Give it to me!" Carmen cried.

When at last Coucon succeeded in finding it among the folds of his bournous, she snatched it from him.

This is what she read:

> "Carmen, my friend and my ally, you have promised your assistance. Gladly do I claim it. My friends are in great peril. Jane Zeld has vanished in the most mysterious manner,

as has Esperance. There must be in the Hôtel de Monte-Cristo some secret issue which our enemies do not know. The infamous L—— must possess this secret. Do your best to discover it. You see that I place my reliance on you, for I love you. [Pg 445]

"GOUTRAN."

Carmen uttered a joyous exclamation. Goutran loved her! Coucon turned toward her.

"Well," he asked, "what am I to tell him?"

"Return to Monsieur Goutran and tell him that if it costs me my life I will discover what he wishes to know. And remember that you must open the door of the hôtel to me at whatever time I may come. Of course, you and Monsieur Goutran will be there all night. Now, go!"

At this moment a terrified looking servant entered the room.

"Mademoiselle," he said, "your father has just been taken ill."

Omar respectfully saluted the young girl, and was lost in the crowd. No one noticed him, for there was much excitement over the illness of the great financier. Carmen followed the lacquey with rather too slow a step for the occasion. She was intensely irritated at this new comedy, and she was tempted to cry out to the crowd:

"He lies! He has always lied!"

Laisangy was lying back in his chair. There was no physician in the room, and yet the people about him talked knowingly of bleeding him. Fortunately for him, Carmen arrived.

"I know what it is," she said; "he has had similar attacks before. He will be better after a little rest." [Pg 446]

And Carmen gave orders that the banker should be carried to his chamber. Then excusing herself to her guests, she followed.

Laisangy, who was becoming greatly bored by the part he was playing, supposed that Carmen would dismiss the servants and remain with him herself; but she had quite other plans. She bade the men undress their master and put him in his bed. Laisangy was ready to swear at her, but, of course, he was too ill to dispute. If he suddenly revived and made a row, then the story would get about of the ridiculous comedy he had played. His patience was not long tried, however. Carmen only wanted to gain a little time, in which she might hope to discover the contents of a letter which she saw the banker receive and put in his pocket early in the evening. She found the letter and retired into the next room to read it.

"Vengeance is assured. Fanfar and Goutran are prisoners in the house of Monte-Cristo. As to the girl, she is at the house at Courberrie, where Esperance will arrive too late."

Hardly had Carmen grasped the sense of these words than she ran to her room, and wrapping herself in her long black cloak, left the hôtel by the private door.

CHAPTER LXIV. [Pg 447]

THE PLOT.

We left Esperance in the house at Courberrie just when the panels had been thrown open. He uttered a cry of horror. What did he see? Around a table covered with glasses sat a number of women singing drunken songs, and among these women sat one pale as a ghost, and this one was Jane!

Ah! poor child! Of what terrible machination was she the victim?

Benedetto, who required her as a tool for his vengeance, had carried her through the subterranean passage, she all the time entirely unconscious. He laid her on a sofa, and stood with folded arms looking down upon her. Did he feel the smallest emotion of pity? No, not he! He was only asking himself if the girl was so attractive that Esperance would really feel her loss as much as his enemies wished. Suddenly she sighed—a long, strange, fluttering sigh. Benedetto leaned over her anxiously. What if she were to die now! He must hasten. Everything had been arranged. He opened her teeth with the blade of a knife, and poured down her throat a few drops of a clear white liquor. It was an anesthetic whose terrible properties he well understood. Jane would see, Jane would hear, and Jane would suffer, but as she could neither speak nor move—all resistance would be impossible. And, that night she was carried to the house at Courberrie, what terrible agony she suffered! She knew that she was in the power of an enemy, that she had been torn from him whom she loved better than life, and from whose lips she had just heard oaths of eternal fidelity. With a heart swelling with agony she could not utter a sound. Her soul was alive, but her body was motionless. Suddenly the room in which she lay was brilliantly illuminated. A crowd of women came pouring in—and such women! My readers who remember Jane's past can readily imagine that the girl regarded this scene as a hideous dream. She even fancied that she saw her mother. [Pg 448]

Esperance beheld all this. He rushed forward, only to be stopped by iron bars.

This terrible scene had been most adroitly managed. The house at Courberrie belonged to Danglars, and had been the scene of many ignoble orgies. The opening through which Esperance looked was not more than thirty feet from Jane. He called, but she could not hear him. Then all was suddenly dark. The lights returned in a few minutes, and Jane was seen alone.

"Jane! Jane!" cried Esperance. Suddenly a door opened. Esperance saw an old man enter the room. He went up to Jane with a hideous smile on his face. It was Laisangy.

Of all the crimes that Benedetto had committed, this was the most infamous!

Esperance caught the iron bars and shook them violently, and with such enormous strength that one of them was loosened. Esperance passed through them and stood in a corridor, but there was [Pg 449] a sheet of plate glass still between him and Jane. This glass he broke with his clenched hands, and Esperance sprang at the throat of Danglars and threw him to the other end of the room. Then, taking Jane in his arms, he cried:

"Jane! my beloved—do you not hear me? I am Monte-Cristo."

"Monte-Cristo!" repeated a hoarse voice.

Esperance half turned.

Danglars had staggered up from the floor, and was gazing at Esperance with eyes fairly starting from his head. With his deadly pallor and a gash on his cheek from the glass through which he had passed, Esperance bore a striking resemblance to his father. He looked as Dantès looked the day his infamous companion betrayed him at Marseilles. Danglars was appalled.

"Edmond Dantès!" he cried in agony, raising his arms high above his head, and wildly clutching the air for support. Then he fell forward on his face in an attack of apoplexy.

Esperance laid Jane again on the sofa, and ran to his assistance. He lifted him from the floor. The banker was dead.

Esperance was as if stunned. The strange events, coming one after the other, affected his reason. He believed himself the victim of a hideous nightmare. He heard a sigh and turned back to Jane, who seemed to be trying to throw off the stupor that had weighed her down. The effect of the narcotic was probably passing off. She raised her hands and pressed them to her forehead. [Pg 450] Esperance forgot everything else, and falling at Jane's feet he cried, in an agony of entreaty.

"Oh! Jane, awake! I must take you from this terrible place. Jane, awake!"

The girl's eyes moved.

"Who speaks my name?" she whispered.

"It is I—I, who loves—Esperance!"

Jane opened her eyes quickly.

"Esperance! Oh! not here—it must not be!"

She began to sob convulsively.

"I know all, my beloved!" he answered, soothingly, "I know the snare that was laid for you. But why do you repel me, dearest?"

"Ah! you do not know," she said, amid her sobs. "Those women—those songs. Ah! let me die!"

"No, do not say that! We are surrounded by enemies, but I fear them not. Come, we must leave this place."

But, with her brain still excited by opium, she continued to resist.

"Jane, you know me?—I am Esperance. Let us fly, and find our happiness together. Jane—dear Jane!"

His voice was so tender and so persuasive that suddenly the terror-stricken expression left the girl's face. She placed her hands on his shoulder, and contemplated him in a sort of ecstasy.

"Yes, I remember. Esperance, how I love you!"

At this instant, like a chorus behind the scenes, there came the shouts of ribald laughter. She fell on the floor, crying: "Alas! alas! I am accursed!"

The door of the room was thrown open, and a man entered. This man was Benedetto.

CHAPTER LXV. [Pg 451]

THE MYSTERIOUS SIGNALS.

Having played his little comedy with consummate skill, Coucon hastened to the carriage he had kept waiting, and drove to the Hôtel de Monte-Cristo. He was in such haste to inform Goutran that he had successfully fulfilled his mission, that he forgot to disembarrass himself of his fancy costume, so that when he appeared before Madame Caraman, the good woman uttered a cry of terror.

"It is only I—Coucon."

Madame protested against his selecting a time like this to indulge in a masquerade.

"It is nothing of the kind," answered Coucon, impatiently. "Where is Monsieur Goutran?"

"I have not seen the gentlemen since you went out."

"Then they must be in Miss Jane's room still?"

"I suppose so."

"We will go there at once, then."

But the Zouave was interrupted by a strange sound like that made by a heavy hammer at some distance.

Madame turned pale.

"You know, Coucon, that I am not a coward, but I tell you I can't make out that sound. I have heard it now for some time."

"It seems to come from the cellar."

"Yes, that is what I think. But let us tell the friends." [Pg 452]

They by this time had reached Jane's door, on which they knocked. No reply. Then, after knocking and listening, Madame said:

"We must go in!"

She opened the door, and both uttered a cry on finding the chamber empty. The iron panel had closed, and no one would have suspected its existence.

Coucon could not believe his eyes. He ran through every room, but those they sought had vanished. They had not gone out of the hôtel, for Madame had guarded it.

"Well!" cried Coucon, "vanished like Miss Jane, like the Vicomte Esperance!"

Hark! Again they heard the strange noise.

Coucon, born and bred in Paris, had read many novels and seen many plays. He at once announced that the house they were in had subterranean passages.

"But there are no doors."

"What of that!"

He dashed from the room, and came back with hammer and chisel!

"What are you going to do?"

"Demolish the house, if necessary."

Madame wrung her hands.

"We shall be forgiven if we make mistakes," said Coucon. "We can do only our best."

And Coucon began to tear up the carpet, and then to sound the boards.

"Above," he said, looking up, "are the bath rooms, and I think we had best begin by pulling down the hangings on the wall." [Pg 453]

"Oh! that is wicked!"

It was of no use to argue, the Zouave had made up his mind, and he ripped off the silk as if it had been old cotton. Madame, fired by his example, went to work also. While they were thus frantically busy, the door-bell rang.

"It is Miss Carmen," cried Coucon. "She may be able to tell us something."

He hastened to the door. It was Carmen, as he had supposed.

"My friends," she said, "where is Goutran?"

"I do not know," was the reply.

"I will tell you, then. He, with Monsieur Fanfar are prisoners in this house."

"What did I tell you!" shouted Coucon. "And now, listen—the noise has begun again."

Seizing the hammer, Coucon struck three hard blows on the walls at regular intervals. He waited

and listened. Three blows answered him. He struck again, varying the number, which were immediately repeated.

"Yes, it is plain. Our friends hear us, and wish to communicate with us. But hark! they have begun." Twenty-five blows were struck, one after the other, in quick succession. The three looked at each other, greatly troubled.

"The twenty-five letters of the alphabet!" cried Madame.

"Yes," said Carmen, "repeat, to prove that you understand." [Pg 454]

After repeated experiments it was found that communication was easy, and Carmen spelled out:

"There is an iron door under the silk."

"I knew it!" Coucon exclaimed, "I had began to tear it off when you came."

They pulled off the silk, and suddenly Coucon exclaimed:

"Here is the door!" Without well knowing what he was doing, Coucon pressed the knob, and the panel flew open so quickly that Coucon was nearly knocked over. "Take the light and come!" he shouted.

Carmen snatched the candelabra, and they passed through the door.

It will be remembered what happened when Goutran and his friends entered the passage. When their feet touched the stairs the panel closed. In fact, a secret mechanism connected the first stair with the iron door. Those who did not know it became prisoners at once, while others simply stepped over this stair, and so left the iron panel open. But neither Coucon nor the others knew this. Down went Coucon's foot in the wrong place, and the panel swung to. At the same moment Fanfar, Goutran and Bobichel appeared. They had been guided by the light.

"Goutran!" cried Carmen, running toward him.

"What! is it you who has delivered us?"

They went back all together, to find themselves prisoners? No, for Coucon had dropped the hammer, which accidentally fell in the aperture, thus preventing the door from closing entirely when the spring on the stair was touched. They were saved! [Pg 455]

In Jane's room they held a consultation. Carmen communicated what she had heard, and showed the note she had taken from Laisangy.

"But where is the place he speaks of?" asked Fanfar.

"I can show you," she said, quietly.

Coucon ran to the stables, and in ten minutes the carriage stood at the door.

"Heaven grant that we arrive in time!" said Fanfar.

Alas! it was a vain hope. Much time had been lost while the three men had been shut up. Their candles had burned out. Fanfar tore a rail from the stairs and began to sound the wall, and suddenly they heard themselves answered, but all the time they were at a loss to understand how they had been able to establish such prompt communication. But this was no time for explanation. All they now thought of was Esperance. The carriage was driven at full speed toward Courberrie.

CHAPTER LXVI. [Pg 456]

UNITED IN DEATH.

Benedetto entered. He was now the escaped convict, neither more nor less. On his lips was a hideous smile. He had attained his aim at last—he had in his power the son of the man whom he hated, and revenge was sweet.

Esperance held Jane in his arms, and merely turned his head toward Benedetto.

"Who are you?" he cried. "I know you not, but if you are not the basest of the base, you will aid me to make my escape from this terrible place, and enable me to take this poor child with me."

"No, sir!" answered Benedetto, slowly. "I will not aid you to escape, and you will not save this woman."

"Ah! I understand you. You are the accomplice of these scoundrels. Very well; I will make a way for myself."

He drew his revolvers from his pocket, and pointed one at Benedetto.

"Move!" he cried, "or I will kill you as I would a dog!"

"You would commit murder then, would you?"

"No—it would be simple self-protection. I am not your prisoner, and this woman ought to be sacred to you." [Pg 457]

"This woman," said Benedetto, "tells you she comes here not of her own free will. Do you believe her?"

"Jane! answer him, my beloved! Tell him he lies!"

Benedetto started back.

"Jane Zeld," he said, "tell the absolute truth. Tell the Vicomte if you consider yourself worthy of him." Jane turned her weary eyes upon the Vicomte. "Tell him if the daughter of the Lyons outcast has any right to lean on the arm of the Vicomte de Monte-Cristo. Jane Zeld, think of the past. Tell this gentleman who your mother was. Tell him where she died."

"No, no!" cried Jane. "Enough! enough!"

"No, it is not enough. Lead the Vicomte to your mother's tomb and there place your hand in his, if you dare!"

"Be silent!" cried Esperance, who felt himself growing mad.

"But this is not all," continued Benedetto. "Jane Zeld, shall I tell the Vicomte the name of your father?"

"I know it not!"

"Have you forgotten the man who took you from a wretched house at the time of your mother's death? This man was Sanselme, the former priest—Sanselme, the former convict, and your father! And now, Vicomte, will you kill me? Do so, if you dare!"

Jane fell back, fainting.

"She is dead!" cried Esperance. "Ah! coward and assassin, I will have your life for this. Have you arms? I wish you to have some chance." [Pg 458]

Benedetto threw aside the mantle he wore and showed two swords, one of which he threw at the feet of Esperance.

Yes, he had long craved this duel, and, sure of his ability, felt that he had to do with a mere boy.

Esperance seized the sword, and went up to Benedetto.

"You have insulted me," he said, gravely, "in insulting this woman who is dearer to me than life itself; it matters little who you are, prepare to die."

This room was a singular duelling ground, but Esperance cared little for that. His pulse beat no more quickly than usual. He had greatly changed in the last few hours. He felt himself elevated to the dignity of chastisement.

The two antagonists stood on guard. There was a moment of profound silence. In a mural painting on the walls of a German cathedral, two men stand like this, and a little distance off, half hidden behind a tree, is the figure of Death.

Esperance was perfectly cool, but Benedetto saw after two or three passes that he had no boy antagonist. Calling together all his resources he made a lunge. His antagonist returned it, and grazed Benedetto's breast.

At this moment Jane revived. "Courage, Esperance, courage!" she murmured.

The young man heard her voice, and the contest was renewed. Ten times did the sword of Esperance menace the heart of Benedetto, ten times did the scoundrel escape death. But he began to feel afraid. The sword of the son of Monte-Cristo flashed and gleamed before his eyes like the fiery sword of the Bible. Esperance was gaining the advantage, and a cry of rage escaped the panting breast of Benedetto. Was it possible that after all, his vengeance was about to slip through his fingers? And was he to die instead of Monte-Cristo's son! He recoiled further and further, feeling that the sword of his opponent would pin him to the wall. [Pg 459]

Monte-Cristo's son said to him, "Scoundrel! your life is in my power. Repent of the evil you have done, and I will show you mercy."

"Mercy!" sneered Benedetto. "You talk of mercy. Take care, I hate you! I hate your father. Hasten to take my life or I swear that I will take yours!"

"Die then!" cried Esperance.

And with a rapid movement of his sword he disarmed his adversary; his blade was about to enter Benedetto's breast when the report of a pistol was heard, and Esperance, shot through the heart, fell by Jane's side. She threw herself on his body with cries of despair. Benedetto, with an infernal smile, turned away with a pistol in his hand.

It will be remembered that Esperance in his righteous anger had aimed his pistols at Benedetto, but the thought of a murder in this upright soul was but a passing one, and when he drew his [Pg 460]

sword he laid down his pistols upon a chair near him.

At the moment when Benedetto felt that all was lost his eyes fell an the arms, and an infernal thought struck him. He gradually approached the chair, and finally, with a sudden movement, snatched one of the revolvers. The scoundrel had murdered his adversary. Esperance fell and Jane encircled him with her arms.

Benedetto frowningly looked on. He had at last achieved his object. Unable to injure the man he hated, he had wounded him through his son, his only child!

"Farewell," sighed Esperance, "I love thee, Jane, but I am dying!"

"And I die with you!" answered Jane, with paling lips.

And as if the angel of death touched them both at the same time, they slept in eternal night.

Benedetto did not move. Suddenly he started. Loud noises were heard at the door of the deserted house.

"We are here, Esperance! We bring you aid!" voices called in cheering tones.

Benedetto looked about like a wild boar at bay. Every issue was cut off. He knew that he had no pity to expect, for when these men beheld him here with his two victims they would take his life without the smallest hesitation. He rushed to the window and opened it; the Seine ran dark at his feet.

Benedetto waited until Fanfar and his friends entered the room, and then crying out to them, [Pg 461] "You are too late! I have killed the son of Monte-Cristo!" leaped into the river.

Goutran rushed to Esperance, and lifting him in his arms, said despairingly: "Dead! murdered!"

And in the presence of these two young creatures so beautiful in death, the men uncovered their bowed heads and Carmen knelt in passionate weeping.

CHAPTER LXVII. [Pg 462]

THE SPECTRE.

Just as Benedetto leaped into the Seine, another man entered the room where the victims lay. This man was Sanselme.

It will be remembered that the former convict had been present at the conversation in which Fanfar and his companions resolved to rescue Esperance. The sick man, unable to move, still down with fever, saw them go.

The mad woman also remained in the room, saying over and over again: "Benedetto is my son, my son, and he killed me!" While Sanselme repeated Jane's name without cessation. By degrees his strength returned to him, his nerves were all in a quiver.

Jane in danger and he lying there idle! No, no, that could not be! He rose from the bed, and supporting himself by the wall, got out of the house. Where was he going? He knew not. He endeavored to collect his thoughts, and suddenly a name stood out clear in his brain. Monte-Cristo, yes it was to the hôtel of Monte-Cristo that he must go. There, at all events, he should find Fanfar, and together they would look for Jane. At first Sanselme could hardly walk, but his tread became gradually firmer. Just as he reached the Hôtel de Monte-Cristo, he saw the carriage drive out of the court-yard.

A strange phenomenon now took place. Sanselme drew a long breath and began to run after the [Pg 463] carriage—he felt no more lassitude nor weakness. His entire vital strength was concentrated in his superhuman effort. And this man who just now could not hold himself erect, ran on swiftly without hesitation. With his eyes on the carriage lamps he followed them unerringly. Somnambulists and madmen alone do such things. And Sanselme ran as if he were in a dream. He saw the carriage stop at last, and he heard violent blows upon a door. And then he entered as well as the others, and appeared on the scene just as Benedetto leaped from the window.

Sanselme beheld Jane, and in that moment of agony his broken, bleeding heart loosed its grasp upon his secret, for he cried out:

"Jane! my daughter! My beloved daughter!"

Fanfar instantly understood the truth and laid his hand compassionately on his shoulder.

"Courage!" he said, gently.

But Sanselme shook off the hand, and before any one knew what he meant to do, he climbed upon the window, crying:

"Benedetto! You shall not escape!"

And he, too, leaped into the water. Benedetto was scarce a minute in advance.

Benedetto had made a mistake. He knew of a secret egress from this house, but he forgot it, so great was his fear.

Fear? Yes. For the first time in his life he had made an attack on Monte-Cristo, and in spite of his audacity, knew perfectly well that the mere presence of the Count would cause him to tremble [Pg 464] with fear. He did not wish to die, and therefore fled by the first path that presented itself. And after all, to swim the Seine was a trifle to the former *forçat*. He was strong and a good swimmer, but the height from which he sprang was so great that at first he was almost stunned. The water was icy cold. He first thought of climbing again to the same shore, but his adversaries might be watching and he might fall into their hands; while on the other bank the forest of Neuilly offered him a sure refuge. He therefore swam across. The current was strong, but he and Sanselme had known a worse and heavier sea when they escaped from Toulon. It was strange, the persistency with which this name returned to him. At this same moment he heard a dull noise behind him as if some one leaped into the water. Could it be that one of his enemies had started in pursuit? He found that he was making little progress and that his strength was going. He allowed himself to float for a few minutes, and in the silence felt convinced that some one was pursuing him. But what nonsense it was in such darkness to make such an attempt. Benedetto now allowed himself to be carried on by the current, crossing the river obliquely, and managed to make no noise whatever as he swam. And yet as he listened he heard the same sound behind him at about the same distance. And now Benedetto beheld the shore. In a few minutes he would be safe, and when on firm ground he could look out for himself. He sneered to himself. What nonsense all this talk was of punishment for crime. He had managed to escape so far! Finally he stood on the [Pg 465] shore. He heard a cry from the water. He understood it. It came from his pursuer, who was now near enough to see that his prey had escaped him. He was right.

Sanselme had not lost sight of Benedetto, and had felt sure of catching him; but he had been struck on the shoulder by a piece of floating wood. The pain was excessive, and he lost his power of swimming. In this moment Benedetto escaped him. He could dimly see his form on the shore, and then the man's shadow was lost in the shadow of the woods. Sanselme uttered a groan. This man had killed Jane, and would now go unpunished. Up to this moment the former convict had been sustained by unnatural strength, but now this strength was gone. He could do no more and believed himself to be dying. Suddenly he felt something within reach of the hands with which he was beating the water like a drowning dog. It was a rope. A schooner had been wrecked here and a rope was hanging from its broken hull. Sanselme clung to it with the energy of despair, and by it raised himself on board the schooner and fell on the deck utterly exhausted, morally and physically.

Suddenly he uttered a wild cry. He had been looking intently at the spot where he had seen Benedetto disappear. He saw the man's shadow again, but it was not alone. With it was something white, that looked like a spectre. And the spectre was gliding over the ground in the direction of the wreck on which Sanselme was crouching.

What was it? One form was certainly Benedetto's; but the spectre—was it anything more than the [Pg 466] fog that rises at dawn along the riverside? Not so—it was a phantom; the terrible resurrection of the Past.

Benedetto had run toward the wood, believing that there he would be safe. Suddenly his heart stood still, for before him rose a tall form draped in white, like a winding-sheet. This man was a coward at heart, and had been all his life afraid of ghosts. But he encouraged himself now, saying that it was mist from the river, which a breath of wind would dissipate. Summoning all his courage, he stopped and went toward this strange form. It was a form and not mist; but its height looked unnatural as it stood leaning against a tree. Why did not Benedetto turn aside, either to the right or the left? He could not; something stronger than his will drew him toward the nameless Thing. Finally Benedetto laid his hand on the shoulder of the Thing. It turned and lifted its head. Then an appalling shriek, which was like nothing human, came from Benedetto's lips. This spectre was that of his mother, whom he had stabbed in the breast at Beausset so many years before. And the ghost stood gazing at him with her large eyes, while her gray tresses floated in the wind.

Benedetto did not seek to understand. He believed that the dead had risen from the tomb. She looked at him for a full minute. Then she said:

"Come, Benedetto; come, my son."

And the long, skeleton-like hand was laid on the parricide's wrist with such an icy pressure that Benedetto felt as if a steel ring were being riveted on his arm.

"Come, my son," said the mad woman; "you will never leave me again, will you?" [Pg 467]

She drew him gently along as he walked. He did not attempt to disengage himself; he obeyed the summons as if it were from Death.

The phantom—that is to say, Madame Danglars, the poor, insane creature—had escaped from Fanfar's house by the door which Sanselme left open, and having found her son thus strangely, lavished on him tender words, which in the ear of the dastard were like curses. Thus they reached the shore, and it was not until Benedetto saw the Seine once more before him that he realized what he was doing. He shook off the hand on his wrist and began to run. He saw the

wreck a foot or two from the shore, and with one leap he reached it, having little idea of the danger that awaited him there. The mad woman followed him and tried to put her arms around him. "You shall never leave me again, Benedetto!" she murmured.

Sanselme saw and heard it all. It seemed to him that it was some frightful nightmare. She advancing and Benedetto retreating, the two reached the other end of the wreck; their feet slipped, there was a dull sound as they fell, and the water opened to receive them. Sanselme leaned over. He could see nothing, and heard not another sound.

In the morning a corpse was found leaning over the gunwale, with eyes open. One sailor said to another:

"A drunken man the less in the world!"

That was the only funeral sermon preached over Sanselme.

CHAPTER LXVIII.

[Pg 468]

MONTE-CRISTO, THE MARTYR.

In the Hôtel de Monte-Cristo all is sad and silent. The very walls and the furniture had a funereal air. In the large chamber lie the bodies of Jane and Esperance, the son of Monte-Cristo. How much beauty, youth and tenderness were to be swallowed up in Mother Earth! Jane, vailed in lace, had a tender smile upon her lips. Esperance, in his serene repose, was the image of Monte-Cristo in his early days.

Near the bed were two men watching—Fanfar, the faithful friend of the Count, who had saved him and his son at Ouargla; Goutran, the companion of Esperance, who knew the greatness of that young soul. The two sat in silence, and hardly dared look at each other. They were both oppressed with remorse.

Monte-Cristo had gone away, obeying a sentiment of delicacy, wishing to leave his son in entire liberty to develop in such direction as his nature demanded. But when he went he said to these men, "I confide to you the one treasure that I have in the world—watch over him."

And they had made answer that they would protect him from harm with their lives. They were living and Esperance was dead. They heard in their ears like the tolling of a funeral bell, the [Pg 469] words, "Too late! Too late!" If they had arrived in time they would certainly have prevented the catastrophe, but this was the result—this motionless form with hands crossed on his breast.

Coucon and Madame Caraman, down stairs, were weeping and watching.

Fanfar and Goutran were silent, as we have said, for the same question was upon the lips of both men, and both knew that there was no answer. Had not the Count said, "If any peril demands my presence summon me, and within three days I will be with you." And it would be precisely three days at midnight since Fanfar sent the summons.

Would he come? The clock struck half-past eleven, and no Monte-Cristo. Must they then lay in the grave the mortal remains of the son of Monte-Cristo without a farewell kiss on the pale brow from his father? They felt as if it were another wrong of which they would be guilty toward this unhappy father.

Fanfar was buried in thought. He saw Esperance, when almost a child he defied the Arabs. He saw him borne in his father's arms from Maldar's Tower. And Goutran, too, thought of the last words that the Vicomte had said to him: "To love is to give one's self entirely, in life and in death!"

The lamps burned dimly. The clock struck twelve. The two men started, for the door opened noiselessly and a man of tall stature entered. It was the Count of Monte-Cristo. His eyes were dim, his shoulders bowed, and his steps awakened no echo. He was dressed in black. [Pg 470]

The two men did not move nor speak. They seemed to feel that no human voice should break this awful stillness.

Monte-Cristo walked to the side of the bed and looked at his son, long and steadily. What thoughts were hidden in that active brain?

And now Fanfar beheld a terrible, unheard-of thing. When Monte-Cristo entered, his hair was black as night, and as he stood there his hair began to whiten. What terrible torture that man must have undergone in those minutes. Age, which had made no mark on this organization of iron, suddenly took possession of it. First, his temples looked as if light snow was thrown upon it, and then by degrees the whole head became white. Those who saw this sight will never forget it.

Monte-Cristo bent low over the bier on which Esperance lay. He took his son in his arms as a mother lifts her child from the cradle, and bearing the body Monte-Cristo left the room.

Suddenly shaking off the torpor which had held them motionless, Fanfar and Goutran started in pursuit. But in vain did they search the hôtel, Monte-Cristo had vanished with the body of his son.

CHAPTER LXIX.

[Pg 471]

EPILOGUE.

A man stood on a solitary rock. Suddenly he uttered a shout of triumph.

He had discovered the secret of immense wealth. And this man threw down the pickaxe in his hand and standing erect, cried aloud:

"Oh! you whose infamy condemned me to fourteen years of imprisonment, and whose name I do not yet know, beware! Dantès is free."

Young and with confidence in the future, Edmond Dantès, the lover of Mercédès, returned to Marseilles, with the promise of a captaincy. He was to marry Mercédès. It was at supper on the evening of the betrothal when soldiers came to arrest him. He was accused of having carried letters to Napoleon, at Elba. In vain did he assert and even prove his innocence before de Villefort, a magistrate. Edmond Dantès was torn from his betrothed, and imprisoned for fourteen years in the Château d'If.

Another prisoner was there, the Abbé Faria. This prisoner was supposed to be mad, because he had offered to buy his liberty with millions. The Abbé imparted to Dantès the secret of the treasure concealed by the Spadas in the caverns of the island of Monte-Cristo, a desolate rock in the Mediterranean. And this was not all, the old man had also imparted other secrets to his young companion.

[Pg 472]

And now Dantès was master of the treasure of the Spadas, and he started to find his old father and his fiancée. He swore to avenge himself on those who had betrayed him. He left the rock. He went to his father's house. His father had died of hunger. Mercédès, his fiancée, was married to another—to one of the three men who had woven the plot that had cost Dantès fourteen years of his youth. One was named Danglars, a rival claimant to the title of captain. The second was a drunken man, more weak than wicked. The third was Fernando Mondego, a fisherman, who loved Mercédès. And it was this Fernando who had married Mercédès, and was now known by the title of the Comte de Morcerf. Caderousse, still poor, kept a wine shop, and Danglars was one of the first bankers in Paris.

Another enemy, and perhaps the most infamous of them all, was the magistrate, de Villefort, who, knowing the innocence of Dantès, had nevertheless sentenced him to prison. Because Dantès in his explanation used the name of Noirtier, who was the father of Villefort, and said that the letters he brought from the island of Elba were given to him by this man, de Villefort, lest his own position should be compromised, got rid of this person as soon as possible, and sent him to the Château d'If for fourteen years.

These were the crimes that Dantès swore to punish. He did so. Danglars the banker he ruined. Fernando the fisherman, known when Dantès returned as the Comte de Morcerf, was accused in the Chamber of Peers of having betrayed Ali-Pacha of Jamna, and of selling his daughter Haydée to a Turkish merchant. His infamy was proved by Haydée herself, and Fernando Mondego was for ever dishonored. The wretched man, knowing that the blow came from Monte-Cristo, went to him to provoke a quarrel. Then Monte-Cristo said to him:

[Pg 473]

"Look me full in the face, Fernando, and you will understand the whole. I am Edmond Dantès." And the man fled. Within an hour he blew out his brains.

Then came the turn of de Villefort. His wife, a perverse creature, to ensure an inheritance to her son, committed several murders with poisons. De Villefort himself had buried a child alive, the child of Madame Danglars and himself. But the child was saved by a Corsican, Bertuccio. The child, born of crime, had the most criminal instincts. And one day Monte-Cristo found him in the prison at Toulon. He named him Benedetto. He assisted him to escape, and Benedetto assassinated Caderousse. And then Benedetto, tried for this murder, found himself face to face with his father Villefort, the Procureur de Roi. Benedetto loudly flung his father's crimes in his face, and Villefort fled from the court-room. When he reached home Villefort found that his wife had poisoned herself and his son, the only being he loved. And then Monte-Cristo appeared before him and told him his real name, Edmond Dantès! Villefort became insane.

And the work of vengeance was complete. Monte-Cristo was so rich that he was all-powerful. And yet he was terribly sad, for he was alone. Then it was that the gentle Haydée consoled him. To their son they gave the name of Esperance. And Haydée was dead! Esperance was dead!

[Pg 474]

Ten years had elapsed since that awful night when Monte-Cristo, with blanched hair, carried away the body of his only son.

A man stood alone on a rock on the island of Monte-Cristo. And this man was Edmond Dantès. For ten years he had lived on this rock. In all that time he had not seen a human face nor heard a human voice, except at rare intervals when some ship, driven from her course by contrary winds, sent her boats to this island for water. Then Monte-Cristo, concealing himself, watched these

men and heard their joyous laughter.

Once, when Monte-Cristo had been on the rock eight years, he saw a ship coming toward it at full sail. It was not driven there by contrary winds or by a storm, and Monte-Cristo saw a man on deck surveying the island through a glass. Concealing himself he saw several men, whom he did not know, land, and search the island.

It will be remembered that long before, Ali and Bertuccio had, by their master's orders, blown up the grottos, the last vestiges of the Spada treasures.

He saw these men sound the rocks and try them with pickaxes. They were adventurers, who knew something of what the island had contained, but yet they found nothing. Monte-Cristo contrived to get near them without their knowledge. They were disputing, one insisting that the [Pg 475] treasure was "there," and he laid his finger on a plan he had drawn.

"Have you not heard," said the other, "that the island was inhabited?"

"Sailors say that they often see at sunset a tall form on these rocks."

"An optical delusion."

"No—these sailors know what they say, but Italians are inclined to carry their religion into everything, so they call this form the Abbé of Monte-Cristo."

"We have not found him, and yet we have searched every corner."

"He may be dead."

"That may be, but surely this is a proof that no such treasures ever existed here, for if they had, he would not remain here to die of hunger!"

"At all events we will make a sacrifice to the unknown God, as the ancients did."

And they put together all the provisions they had—bread, fruit and wine—and with the point of a dagger they traced on the rock the words:

"For the Abbé of Monte-Cristo!"

Then they departed.

"Poor fools!" said the Count, as he watched the fast lessening sails. "No, there is no treasure on this island save one, and that would be valueless to you!"

Monte-Cristo had lived all these years on roots and bark, for he had sworn never to touch money again while he lived.

On the night when we again find Monte-Cristo, he came down from the high rock by a narrow path which led to a platform. Here he stooped and turned over a flat stone, which left a dark [Pg 476] cavity exposed. Into this place Monte-Cristo descended by steps cut in the rock. He reached a square room cut out of the granite. In the centre stood a marble sarcophagus, and there lay Esperance. The living was paler than the dead. Monte-Cristo laid his hand on that of his son.

"Esperance," he said, solemnly, "has not the day arrived?"

There was a long silence. Then—was it a reality? It seemed as if the lips moved and pronounced the word:

"Come!"

Monte-Cristo smiled.

"I knew it!" he murmured.

His face was transfigured, his white hair was like a halo about his head.

"I am coming, my son!" he said. "I must first finish my task."

He drew from his pocket a roll of parchment, and read it aloud:

> "My Last Will and Testament.
>
> "Let those who find this paper read it with coolness. Let them be on their guard against the surprises of their imagination. The man who is about to die, and whose name is signed to these lines, has been more powerful than the most powerful on earth. He has suffered as never man suffered. He has loved as never man loved! He has hated as well.
>
> "Suffering, love and hatred have all passed away—all is forgotten, all is dead within him [Pg 477] except the memory of the child he adored and lost.
>
> "This man possessed wealth greater than any sovereign. And this man dies in poverty. He so willed it that he might punish himself. He chose the wrong. He wished to bend all wills to his. He elected himself judge and meted out punishment. The wrongs he avenged were not social evils, they were private and his own. He bows low in penitence, that he did not employ his great fortune in doing good. He dies in poverty, though possessed of untold millions. He designates no heir, for he cannot feel that the

most upright man may not become guilty when he knows himself to be all-powerful. He has, however, no right to destroy this wealth. It exists, though concealed. He bequeaths it to that power which men call Providence. It will bear this paper, and place in the hands of man these mysterious signs.

"Will the treasure be discovered?

"Whoever reads this paper will, if he be wise, destroy it. And yet it may be that this colossal fortune will fall into the hands of a man who will finish the work that I have begun better than I could have done.

"May whoever finds this paper heed the last words of a dying man.

"THE ABBÉ DANTÈS.

"*February 25th, 1865.*"

Below this signature was a singular design. Monte-Cristo studied it.

"Yes, it is right," he said. "Ah! Faria, may your treasure fall into worthier hands than mine!"

He felt strangely faint. He laid his hand on his heart. "Yes, Esperance," he said, softly, "I come!" [Pg 478]

He took up a crystal cube, which was solid enough to resist a shock of any kind. He folded the paper, and placed it in the cube, sealing it carefully. Then once more he ascended the stairs, and stood under the starlit sky.

Monte-Cristo went down to the shore. He raised the crystal cube above his head, and threw it with all his strength. He heard it drop into the water. Monte-Cristo's secret was given to the waves. Then he turned, and slowly retraced his steps.

As he went down the stairs his strength seemed to leave him. He lay down next to Esperance. He crossed his arms on his breast. Upon his lips was a smile of ineffable peace. His eyes closed. He was at rest.

Those who loved him often utter his name, and wipe away a tear as they speak of him. But they never knew where he, who was known as Edmond Dantès, Count of Monte-Cristo, died.

THE END

1.E.6. You may convert to and distribute this work in any binary, compressed, marked up, nonproprietary or proprietary form, including any word processing or hypertext form. However, if you provide access to or distribute copies of a Project Gutenberg™ work in a format other than “Plain Vanilla ASCII” or other format used in the official version posted on the official Project Gutenberg™ website (www.gutenberg.org), you must, at no additional cost, fee or expense to the user, provide a copy, a means of exporting a copy, or a means of obtaining a copy upon request, of the work in its original “Plain Vanilla ASCII” or other form. Any alternate format must include the full Project Gutenberg™ License as specified in paragraph 1.E.1.

1.E.7. Do not charge a fee for access to, viewing, displaying, performing, copying or distributing any Project Gutenberg™ works unless you comply with paragraph 1.E.8 or 1.E.9.

1.E.8. You may charge a reasonable fee for copies of or providing access to or distributing Project Gutenberg™ electronic works provided that:

- You pay a royalty fee of 20% of the gross profits you derive from the use of Project Gutenberg™ works calculated using the method you already use to calculate your applicable taxes. The fee is owed to the owner of the Project Gutenberg™ trademark, but he has agreed to donate royalties under this paragraph to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation. Royalty payments must be paid within 60 days following each date on which you prepare (or are legally required to prepare) your periodic tax returns. Royalty payments should be clearly marked as such and sent to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation at the address specified in Section 4, “Information about donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation.”

- You provide a full refund of any money paid by a user who notifies you in writing (or by e-mail) within 30 days of receipt that s/he does not agree to the terms of the full Project Gutenberg™ License. You must require such a user to return or destroy all copies of the works possessed in a physical medium and discontinue all use of and all access to other copies of Project Gutenberg™ works.

- You provide, in accordance with paragraph 1.F.3, a full refund of any money paid for a work or a replacement copy, if a defect in the electronic work is discovered and reported to you within 90 days of receipt of the work.

- You comply with all other terms of this agreement for free distribution of Project Gutenberg™ works.

1.E.9. If you wish to charge a fee or distribute a Project Gutenberg™ electronic work or group of works on different terms than are set forth in this agreement, you must obtain permission in writing from the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, the manager of the Project Gutenberg™ trademark. Contact the Foundation as set forth in Section 3 below.

1.F.

1.F.1. Project Gutenberg volunteers and employees expend considerable effort to identify, do copyright research on, transcribe and proofread works not protected by U.S. copyright law in creating the Project Gutenberg™ collection. Despite these efforts, Project Gutenberg™ electronic works, and the medium on which they may be stored, may contain “Defects,” such as, but not limited to, incomplete, inaccurate or corrupt data, transcription errors, a copyright or other intellectual property infringement, a defective or damaged disk or other medium, a computer virus, or computer codes that damage or cannot be read by your equipment.

1.F.2. LIMITED WARRANTY, DISCLAIMER OF DAMAGES - Except for the “Right of Replacement or Refund” described in paragraph 1.F.3, the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, the owner of the Project Gutenberg™ trademark, and any other party distributing a Project Gutenberg™ electronic work under this agreement, disclaim all liability to you for damages, costs and expenses, including legal fees. YOU AGREE THAT YOU HAVE NO REMEDIES FOR NEGLIGENCE, STRICT LIABILITY, BREACH OF WARRANTY OR BREACH OF CONTRACT EXCEPT THOSE PROVIDED IN PARAGRAPH 1.F.3. YOU AGREE THAT THE FOUNDATION, THE TRADEMARK OWNER, AND ANY DISTRIBUTOR UNDER THIS AGREEMENT WILL NOT BE LIABLE TO YOU FOR ACTUAL, DIRECT, INDIRECT, CONSEQUENTIAL, PUNITIVE OR INCIDENTAL DAMAGES EVEN IF YOU GIVE NOTICE OF THE POSSIBILITY OF SUCH DAMAGE.

1.F.3. LIMITED RIGHT OF REPLACEMENT OR REFUND - If you discover a defect in this electronic work within 90 days of receiving it, you can receive a refund of the money (if any) you paid for it by sending a written explanation to the person you received the work from. If you received the work on a physical medium, you must return the medium with your written explanation. The person or entity that provided you with the defective work may elect to provide a replacement copy in lieu of a refund. If you received the work electronically, the person or entity providing it to you may choose to give you a second opportunity to receive the work electronically in lieu of a refund. If the second copy is also defective, you may

demand a refund in writing without further opportunities to fix the problem.

1.F.4. Except for the limited right of replacement or refund set forth in paragraph 1.F.3, this work is provided to you 'AS-IS', WITH NO OTHER WARRANTIES OF ANY KIND, EXPRESS OR IMPLIED, INCLUDING BUT NOT LIMITED TO WARRANTIES OF MERCHANTABILITY OR FITNESS FOR ANY PURPOSE.

1.F.5. Some states do not allow disclaimers of certain implied warranties or the exclusion or limitation of certain types of damages. If any disclaimer or limitation set forth in this agreement violates the law of the state applicable to this agreement, the agreement shall be interpreted to make the maximum disclaimer or limitation permitted by the applicable state law. The invalidity or unenforceability of any provision of this agreement shall not void the remaining provisions.

1.F.6. INDEMNITY - You agree to indemnify and hold the Foundation, the trademark owner, any agent or employee of the Foundation, anyone providing copies of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works in accordance with this agreement, and any volunteers associated with the production, promotion and distribution of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works, harmless from all liability, costs and expenses, including legal fees, that arise directly or indirectly from any of the following which you do or cause to occur: (a) distribution of this or any Project Gutenberg™ work, (b) alteration, modification, or additions or deletions to any Project Gutenberg™ work, and (c) any Defect you cause.

Section 2. Information about the Mission of Project Gutenberg™

Project Gutenberg™ is synonymous with the free distribution of electronic works in formats readable by the widest variety of computers including obsolete, old, middle-aged and new computers. It exists because of the efforts of hundreds of volunteers and donations from people in all walks of life.

Volunteers and financial support to provide volunteers with the assistance they need are critical to reaching Project Gutenberg™'s goals and ensuring that the Project Gutenberg™ collection will remain freely available for generations to come. In 2001, the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation was created to provide a secure and permanent future for Project Gutenberg™ and future generations. To learn more about the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation and how your efforts and donations can help, see Sections 3 and 4 and the Foundation information page at www.gutenberg.org.

Section 3. Information about the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation

The Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation is a non-profit 501(c)(3) educational corporation organized under the laws of the state of Mississippi and granted tax exempt status by the Internal Revenue Service. The Foundation's EIN or federal tax identification number is 64-6221541. Contributions to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation are tax deductible to the full extent permitted by U.S. federal laws and your state's laws.

The Foundation's business office is located at 809 North 1500 West, Salt Lake City, UT 84116, (801) 596-1887. Email contact links and up to date contact information can be found at the Foundation's website and official page at www.gutenberg.org/contact

Section 4. Information about Donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation

Project Gutenberg™ depends upon and cannot survive without widespread public support and donations to carry out its mission of increasing the number of public domain and licensed works that can be freely distributed in machine-readable form accessible by the widest array of equipment including outdated equipment. Many small donations ($1 to $5,000) are particularly important to maintaining tax exempt status with the IRS.

The Foundation is committed to complying with the laws regulating charities and charitable donations in all 50 states of the United States. Compliance requirements are not uniform and it takes a considerable effort, much paperwork and many fees to meet and keep up with these requirements. We do not solicit donations in locations where we have not received written confirmation of compliance. To SEND DONATIONS or determine the status of compliance for any particular state visit www.gutenberg.org/donate.

While we cannot and do not solicit contributions from states where we have not met the solicitation requirements, we know of no prohibition against accepting unsolicited donations from donors in such states who approach us with offers to donate.

International donations are gratefully accepted, but we cannot make any statements concerning tax treatment of donations received from outside the United States. U.S. laws alone swamp our small staff.

Please check the Project Gutenberg web pages for current donation methods and addresses.

Donations are accepted in a number of other ways including checks, online payments and credit card donations. To donate, please visit: www.gutenberg.org/donate

Section 5. General Information About Project Gutenberg™ electronic works

Professor Michael S. Hart was the originator of the Project Gutenberg™ concept of a library of electronic works that could be freely shared with anyone. For forty years, he produced and distributed Project Gutenberg™ eBooks with only a loose network of volunteer support.

Project Gutenberg™ eBooks are often created from several printed editions, all of which are confirmed as not protected by copyright in the U.S. unless a copyright notice is included. Thus, we do not necessarily keep eBooks in compliance with any particular paper edition.

Most people start at our website which has the main PG search facility: www.gutenberg.org.

This website includes information about Project Gutenberg™, including how to make donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, how to help produce our new eBooks, and how to subscribe to our email newsletter to hear about new eBooks.