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THE EX-BEAU MEETS THE FEATHER-MAKERS

———

"What! you are going so soon! I thought—I hoped——"
The two girls were already in the omnibus.

NOVELS

BY

P a u l d e K o c k

VOLUME II

MONSIEUR CHERAMI

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I

AN OMNIBUS OFFICE

The office in question stood near Porte Saint-Martin, at the corner of the Boulevard and Rue de Bondy, in the same building as the Deffieux restaurant, which was one of the most popular establishments in Paris in respect of wedding banquets; so that one who passed that way during the evening, and often after midnight, was likely to find the windows brilliantly lighted on the first or second floor, on the boulevard or on the square, and sometimes on both floors and on both sides; for it happened not infrequently that Deffieux entertained four or five wedding parties the same evening. That caused him no embarrassment, for he had room enough for all; indeed, I believe that, at a pinch, he would have set tables on the boulevard.

And there was dancing everywhere, on all sides: in this room, a fashionable ball; in that, a bourgeois affair; on the floor above, something not far removed from the plebeian; but it is likely that the latter was not the least enjoyable of the three, to those who took part in it; certainly, there was more noise made, at any rate.

What a home of pleasure! It seems to me that those who live in such places ought to be always in high spirits, and to have one leg in the air, ready to dance. That would be tiresome perhaps, but how can one avoid a longing to be merry when one has constantly before one's eyes a crowd of merry folk, dancing, eating, drinking, singing, making soft eyes at one another, or shaking hands with all the warmth of the most sincere regard! Man is so expansive toward the end of a hearty meal! At such a time, we all attract and love one another.

You will tell me, perhaps, that these sentiments rarely outlast the time necessary for digestion; that even those joyous wedding feasts, during which the newly married pair look at and speak to each other with such a world of love in their eyes and of tender meaning in their voices, do not even wait till the end of the year before they become transformed into gloomy and depressing pictures. There are many people who have gone so far as to say that there are only two pleasant days in married life: that on which the husband and wife come together, and that on which they part; just as there are but two to the traveller: the day of departure, and the day of return.

But people say so many things that are not true! I have known many travellers who have enjoyed travelling; they were never in a hurry to return to their firesides.

I love to believe that it is the same with husbands and wives, and that there are some who enjoy the married state and have no desire to quit it.

But what, in heaven's name, am I chattering about, when we ought already to have entered the omnibus office, whence public conveyances started for Belleville, La Villette, Saint-Sulpice, Grenelle, and a multitude of other places, each farther from Paris than the last?

One could also purchase at the office in question small bottles of essence, flasks of perfumed vinegar, blacking, and pomade. Commerce slides in everywhere! There is no harm in that. Commerce is the life of

nations and of individuals. Everybody is engaged in commerce, even those who do not suspect it.

It was a beautiful day, in the middle of June, and a Saturday; three circumstances which could not fail to result in bringing a large crowd to the omnibus office, as well as to Deffieux's restaurant. That restaurant attracts me; I keep going back to it, in spite of myself. That is to say, that I go back to it, not in spite of myself, but with all my heart, for one is very comfortable there. Now, you know, or you do not know—but I should be very much surprised if you didn't,—I resume: you know that Saturday is the day on which more wedding feasts occur than on any other day in the week. Why? I fancy that I have already told you, somewhere or other; but, no matter! let us go on as if I had never told you. Saturday is the day before Sunday, and therein lies the whole secret; on Sunday, the government clerks do not go to their offices, and they are great fellows for marrying; on Sunday, the mechanics do not work, and the mechanic, too, is very fond of taking unto himself a housekeeper; lastly, Sunday is the day of rest, and people say that on the day after one's wedding one needs to rest.—Why so? Go to! do not ask me such questions! This much is certain—that the night between Saturday and Sunday is one of the finest nights in the week, even when there is no moon.

But, sapristi! here I am still at the restaurant!—You will end by thinking that I am much addicted to such places. Well, frankly, you are not mistaken. I frequent them not a little. I often hear people say: "Don't talk to me of restaurant cooking; it's execrable!"—And those people think that nothing is good but beef stew, a leg of mutton, and roast beef. True classics those, in the matter of dishes. O Robert! O Brillat-Savarin! O Berchoux! Not for such as these did ye write and compound such delicious things! But be comforted, ye men of refined taste to whom we owe so much! there are still palates which relish your merit, which appreciate your skill, and which do not make faces at your succulent conceptions.

Again, Saturday, in summer, is the day which many people select for a trip to the country, to remain until Monday. On the day of which we write, therefore, the omnibuses were largely patronized; for everyone was in a great hurry to get to some railroad station, or to the point where they could take stages for some more or less distant destination.

So that there was a great crowd at the office by Porte Saint-Martin, and the clerk whose duty it was to distribute tickets did not know which way to turn; he had to be constantly on the alert, in order to avoid mistakes, especially as the travellers did not always confine themselves to asking for an exchange check or a number, but added irrelevant reflections, questions, and, in many cases, complaints.

"An exchange check for La Villette."

"Here you are, monsieur."

"When do we start?"

"When the 'bus comes, monsieur."

"Will it be long before it comes?"

"I don't think so, monsieur."

"A ticket for Belleville, please."

"Here it is, madame."

"Ah! mon Dieu! number seventy-five! Are there seventy-four ahead of me?"

"No, madame; we begin at fifty."

"Then there are twenty-five ahead of me?"

"Some of them haven't waited; they won't answer the call, and that puts the others ahead."

"A check for Saint-Sulpice."

"Here you are."

"Where's the 'bus?"

"It will come along."

"Oh! I've got to wait; that isn't very pleasant."

"*Dame*! monsieur, we can't have 'buses ready to start every minute."

"Why not? It would be much pleasanter for the passengers; but nothing is ever done to please the passengers; I must complain to the management."

"Complain, if you choose, monsieur; that's none of our business."

"Why, yes, it is your business, too; it ought to be your business, as you're the one we deal with. What sort of a way is that to answer? Is that the way you treat passengers here? It seems to me that you ought to show more respect."

The man who is going to La Villette approaches the clerk once more.

"Tell me, have I got time to go to the pastry-cook's to buy a cake?"

"Why, monsieur, no one interferes with your going.—Here's the Grenelle 'bus—passengers for Grenelle—take your places!"

"I ask you if I have got time to go to get a cake before my 'bus comes?"

"Place des Victoires! All aboard for Place des Victoires!"

"Tell me about getting my cake!"

"Yes, monsieur; yes, yes, go to the pastry-cook's!"

And the clerk turns to his comrade, muttering:

"What a nuisance the fellow is with his cake!—Where should we be if everybody asked questions like that?"

A woman, of forty years or thereabout, who could not easily have found a compartment large enough to hold her, entered the office, leading two small boys, one of eight and one of four years, who were dressed like the little trained dogs that do tricks on the boulevards, and whose noses had evidently been overlooked because of their hurried departure from home.

A servant, laden with an enormous basket, from which protruded divers fishes' tails and bunches of leeks, and with an insecurely tied pasteboard box, bulging as to the sides and split in several places, sulkily followed her mistress, hitting everybody with her basket and box, without a word of apology, but apparently rather inclined to make wry faces at her victims.

"I want two seats for Romainville, monsieur—for me and my maid; my boys don't pay, because we hold them in our laps."

"Madame, this boy is certainly more than five; he must pay."

"But, monsieur, I tell you, I hold him in my lap; so we only fill one seat."

"That must annoy your neighbors."

"I don't suppose people ride in omnibuses to be comfortable!—Aristoloche, where are you going? Stay with your nurse, sir! Adelaide, do look out for the child; you know how fretful he is!"

Mademoiselle Adelaide, who looked more like a cook than a lady's maid, had gone with her packages and planted herself on a bench, between an old gentleman and an old woman, causing them to jump into the air as if they were elastic. The shock was so violent that the old woman shrieked, thinking that she had been electrified. The man, irritated beyond words by the manner in which the servant had plumped down beside him, and perceiving that the fishes' tails which protruded from her basket were caressing the sleeves of his coat, pushed the basket away with his elbow, exclaiming:

"What sort of way is that to sit down, throwing yourself onto people? Pay attention to what you are doing, mademoiselle, and be good enough to move your basket; I have no desire to have your fish rub against my sleeves and make them smell like poison."

"What! what do you say? What's the matter with the old fellow?"

"I tell you to move your basket; I don't want it under my nose."

"Where do you want me to put my basket, eh? On the floor perhaps, so that someone can steal it! Oh, yes! we should have a nice time in the country, where there's never anything to eat. What harm does the basket do you?"

"It smells like the devil!"

"Nonsense, it's yourself!"

"I pity the passengers in the 'bus with you; they'll have a fine time!"

"Shut up, you old cucumber! you'd like to be as fresh as my fish!"

The epithet old cucumber touched the old man to the quick; he got up and walked away, muttering:

"If you weren't a woman, I'd stuff your words down your throat!"

"Oh, indeed! you'd have plenty to do then, for I feel like saying a good deal more to you."

"But, Adelaide, I beg you, look out for Aristoloche; he's going out of the office."

"Well, I can't help it, madame; I can't attend to everything; I have quite enough to do with your box and your basket—and with talking back to this veteran."

"Veteran! I believe that you had the face to call me *veteran!*"

"La Villette—all aboard!—Monsieur, you're for La Villette; hurry up!"

These words were addressed to the old man who was disputing with Adelaide, and who, as he left, bestowed a crushing glance on the servant, who laughed in his face and administered a cuff to young Aristoloche, the child of four, who, despite his mamma's orders, persisted in trying to leave the office.

II

A BLONDE AND A BRUNETTE

"Well, monsieur," said the corpulent dame, pulling over her eldest son's eyes a small gray felt hat, with a Henri IV crown, and surrounded on all sides by feathers which drooped like palm-leaves; "we can get tickets for Romainville, I hope?"

"We don't sell tickets for Romainville, madame, but for Belleville; there you'll find the Romainville stage."

"Oh! you don't sell tickets for Romainville here; that's very unpleasant. Shall we have to pay again when we change?"

"Yes, madame; but if you take checks, it will be only four sous twenty centimes."

"For each?"

"To be sure."

"That's very dear. Narcisse, do pull your hat down, or you'll lose it; you know it fell off just now on the boulevard, and somebody almost stepped on it; your fine Henri IV hat is very pretty, you know."

"I hate it; the feathers make me squint."

"Hold your tongue, bad boy; your aunt bought that hat for you; you won't get another for two years!"

"Take off the feathers, then!"

"Hush! you don't deserve to be so fine!"

"Fine! oh, yes! all the boys make fun of me and say I look like a *chienlit*."[A]

"They're little villains! They say that from envy, for they'd like right well to have a hat like yours.—Say, monsieur, can you promise me a seat in the other 'bus?"

"Oh! I can't promise you; but if there's no room in that, there's sure to be in the next one."

"Do they start often?"

"Every twenty minutes."

"Wait twenty minutes! why, that's horrible! Oh! how sorry I am I promised my aunt to dine with her to-day!"

"Especially," muttered the servant, "as we have to carry our own dinner when we dine with her.—A pretty kind of invitation! She don't ruin herself giving dinner parties!"

"Here, give me two tickets for Belleville."

"Here they are, madame."

"Come here, Aristoloche; come here this minute! Oh! how these children do torment me! They're like little snakes!"

"All aboard for Belleville!"

"Belleville, why that's ours! Take Aristoloche's hand, Adelaide."

"That's very convenient, when I have a basket and a box already!"

But before the stout woman, with her servant and the two children, had left the office, the Belleville omnibus had started off; there was but one vacant seat, and twenty people were waiting for it. You should have seen the disappointment depicted on all those faces then. Several persons, tired of waiting, decided to walk. Others remained in the square; but the majority returned to the office, where all the benches were already filled. These public carriages are surely an excellent invention; but let us admit that they are not equal to the most modest of char-à-bancs, which is entirely at your service, even when you only hire it.

Finding no place to sit inside the office, the dame with the little boys seated herself and them on a bench outside. As for the servant, she succeeded in finding room inside; the fish in her basket was of much assistance to her in inducing others to make room; there was a general rush to get as far away from her as possible.

The party with the cake returned, and ran up to the clerk.

"Well! isn't it about time for us to start?"

"Where are you going, monsieur?"

"You know perfectly well—to La Villette."

"The 'bus started three minutes ago."

"What! it didn't wait for me! I asked you if I had time to go to buy a cake, and you said *yes*. You ought to have said *no*, if I hadn't."

"You shouldn't have been so long about it, monsieur."

"I thought there was a pastry-cook on Carré Saint-Martin, but I couldn't find anything but pork-shops."

"You can take the next 'bus."

"How soon does it start?"

"In seven minutes."

"Then I've got time to go to drink a glass of beer to wash down my cake. Cafés aren't like pastry-cooks—you can find them anywhere."

"Be careful, monsieur; seven minutes at the outside."

"You can keep it waiting a minute if I'm not here."

"They never wait, monsieur."

Two rather attractive young women entered the office; they were modestly dressed, and their hats were so small, and set so far back on their heads, that they looked to be nothing more than caps. Their general appearance was that of grisettes. Some writers who study present-day manners in their studies, or at table in a café, claim that there are no grisettes now; but I assure you that that is not true; if you do not find any, it is because you have not made a thorough search. There will always be grisettes in Paris, where the more or less flighty young work-girl of the Latin quarter does not pass at one bound from her modest chamber to the boudoir of a kept mistress.

One of the young women who entered the omnibus office was a brunette, with a retroussé nose, defiant eye, smiling mouth, teeth a little too far apart—but that is better than having false teeth; the other was a blonde, one of those blondes who have received a light touch of fire; but that color never yet prevented a woman from being pretty. If you doubt what I say, go to England or Scotland; auburn-haired women are in the majority there, and, as a general rule, they are very fascinating. The blonde grisette was pretty; but she had a sort of stupid expression which might at first sight pass for modesty; but on talking with her, you soon discovered that it was really stupidity; therein she formed a striking contrast to her companion, who had a bright, wide-awake manner.

"Monsieur," said the brunette, addressing the clerk, "have you any seats for Belleville?"

"You must take your turn, mademoiselle."

"But will our turn be long in coming?"

"Not very; a good many people have gone."

In truth, the odor exhaled by the whiting stuffed into Mademoiselle Adelaide's basket, and the fear of having to travel with her, had led many persons to start for their destinations on foot.

"Here, mesdemoiselles, take these two tickets; your turn will come."

"Say, Laurette, suppose we walk?" said the pretty blonde.

"Thanks, and tire ourselves out, and arrive all drenched—what fun! For my part, I don't like to sweat; it uncurls my hair. Mon Dieu! what a crowd! It's all the rage now; no one is willing to go on foot, and there aren't enough 'buses."

"Belleville! Faubourg du Temple!"

"Ah! here it is! here it is!"

Further evolutions performed by the stout woman, the two boys, and the servant, but with no greater success; there were four vacant seats, but there were other numbers before theirs. The two girls also came forward.

"There's no more room, except on top," said the conductor.

"All right! we don't care; we'll go on top."

"Pardon! ladies are not allowed there."—And the conductor added, with a wink: "It isn't my fault, you know; nothing would suit me better."

"I believe you," said a man in a blouse; "if women were allowed to climb up there, there's lots of men who would pay to be conductors."

"Why do they say that?" the blonde asked her companion; "what good would it do the conductors to have women ride in the three-sou seats?"

"Oh! what a fool you are, Lucie! What! don't you understand?"

"Why, no."

"Oh! you make me weary."

"Never mind; tell me why?"

"My dear girl, it's a matter of the point of view; that's all."

III

THE YOUNG MAN FROM PLACE CADET

An awkward, loutish youth entered the office.

"Place Cadet, monsieur?"

"This isn't the office; it's out on the boulevard, at the left, just at the corner."

"Exceedingly obliged; will there be a seat?"

"How do you expect us to know, when this isn't the office?"

"Oh! of course; and that is where I must go for a number? Suppose you give me one, wouldn't that amount to the same thing?"

"Why, no, monsieur; the 'bus doesn't stop here."

"The 'bus is what I want to go on."

"You can go on it or under it; it's none of our affair."

"Do you mean that one can ride underneath?"

The clerk concluded to turn his back on the stupid idiot who asked such questions. Mademoiselle Laurette, having overheard the dialogue, burst out laughing, as she said:

"I'd have sent that fellow to the deuce in short measure. What a booby! You must need a good stock of patience to answer all those questions!"

"Ah! mademoiselle, if you were employed in an omnibus office, you'd hear many things like that!"

"Really! do you mean to say that there are others like him in Paris?"

"There are everywhere, mademoiselle."

Meanwhile, the individual who wished to go to Place Cadet had left the office; then he halted on the square, looking about him with a confused air. He spied the stout woman sitting on a bench, between Messieurs Narcisse and Aristoloche, one of whom was trying all the time to push away the feathers that adorned the front of his hat, while the other confined his energies to persistently stuffing one of his fingers into his nose. Our friend went up to the dame and said, touching his hat:

"A ticket for Place Cadet, madame, if you please."

"Do you take me for an omnibus clerk, monsieur?" replied the dame, sourly; "can't you go to the office?"

"Pardon me, madame; I just went there, and they told me to apply on the left, in a corner."

"Well, monsieur, am I a corner, I should like to know?"

"*Dame!* I don't know; they told me to go to the left; I don't see the office; I don't see the 'bus."

And the youth returned to the office he had just left, crying:

"Where is that place where you get tickets for Place Cadet? I can't find it; can't you come and show me the way?"

"Well, this caps the climax! If we had to act as guides for everybody who goes astray, then there would have to be a corps of messengers attached to the office.—Over yonder, I told you, monsieur; on the other side of Boulevard Saint-Denis."

"What! have I got to go all the way to Saint-Denis to get to Place Cadet?"

"La Villette! all aboard for La Villette!"

All those who were bound for that destination hurried from the office, and in the confusion jostled the youth who wished to go to Place Cadet, and who persisted in remaining in the office where he had no business, looking at everybody as if he were disposed to weep.

"Why do you stay here, monsieur," inquired Mademoiselle Laurette, "when they told you to go to the office on Boulevard Saint-Denis?"

"I don't know Boulevard Saint-Denis, mademoiselle; and I am afraid of losing my way."

"The trouble is that you ought not to have been let go out alone; some parents are very imprudent! I'll tell you what you ought to do: go to one of the messengers over by Porte Saint-Martin; take his arm and give him

ten sous, and he'll take you to Place Cadet; he'll carry you even, if you're tired."

"Ten sous! oh! that's too much. You're not going to Place Cadet, are you, mademoiselle?"

"Oh! no, monsieur; we're going to the country."

"Ah! do the omnibuses take people to the country too?"

"They take you everywhere, monsieur."

"Really! I have such a longing to see the sea; do the omnibuses give transfer checks for the seashore?"

"You have only to ask, and you'll find out."

The tall clown was on the point of returning to the clerks, but he was pushed aside by the man who had gone to get a glass of beer, and who returned to the office with a joyous air, saying:

"Ah! this time I think I haven't been long; is my La Villette 'bus coming?"

"La Villette!—it's just started, monsieur."

"Oh! that is too much. Why couldn't you make it wait?"

"They never wait, monsieur."

"When will there be another one now?"

"In about ten minutes."

"Oh! then I have time enough to get a cup of coffee—and a glass of liqueur to wash down the beer."

With that, he returned to the café, followed by the tall youth, who shouted to him from afar:

"Monsieur, a ticket for Place Cadet?"

IV

ONLOOKERS AND LOITERERS

A line of carriages, with white-gloved coachmen, semi-bourgeois equipages, had halted on the square in front of the restaurant; still another wedding party intending to banquet at Deffieux's.

A number of people had gathered in front of the door, to watch the bridal couple enter. Inquisitive folk abound in Paris; perhaps it would be more accurate to say that they abound everywhere. Why this general desire to see a bride, when she has not as yet performed all the duties which that title devolves upon her? Is it simply to see whether she is pretty, and to read upon her features whether or not she is looking forward joyfully to becoming a wife? This is a simple question that we ask, but we will not undertake to answer it.

Among the persons who had halted there, some in passing, others coming from the omnibus office, others on the way there, was a tall man, in the neighborhood of forty-five years, standing very straight, even bending back a little from the hips, with head erect, nose in air, and his hat on one side, in true roistering style.

This person, whose chestnut hair was beginning to be sprinkled with gray, had very irregular features. His eyes were small and deep-set, of a pale green shade, but full of fire and animation. His nose was crooked, slightly turned up, and might almost have been called flat. His mouth was large, but his teeth were fine, and not one was missing; so that his smile was not unattractive, especially as he was not over lavish of it. His chin retreated slightly, his cheek-bones, as a contrast, were exceedingly prominent; his complexion was high-colored and blotched, although he was thin both in body and face. With this unpromising exterior, my gentleman seemed none the less to consider himself an Apollo. He wore bushy mutton-chop whiskers, which almost met in the middle of his chin, leaving between them only a very narrow space, cleanly shaven, which he often caressed with affection, and which he called his dimple. His manners denoted no less self-assurance than familiarity with the world; and they would even have borne some traces of refinement, had he not adopted a sort of mincing gait not unlike that of a drum-major; but, instead of a great baton, this gentleman had a slender switch, curved at the top, which seemed to have been painted and gilded long before, but had lost a large part of its decoration. It was a very pliable switch, with which he constantly tapped his trousers-legs.

His costume did not indicate the dandy, although its wearer affected the manners of one. His linen trousers, of a very large check, seemed to have been cut from the skirt of some concierge. His waistcoat was also of a check pattern, but its colors did not harmonize at all with those of the trousers; nothing was wanting except the plaid to give him altogether the aspect of a Scotch Highlander; but, instead of the plaid, he wore a nut-brown frock-coat, with ample skirts, which he often left unbuttoned the better to display his slender figure, and in which he sometimes encased himself hermetically, as if it were a cloak. It is needless to say that this costume was entirely lacking in freshness.

This personage, who had a habit of speaking always in a very loud tone, so that everybody could hear what he said and presumably be struck with admiration by his wit,—a method of attracting attention which enables you to divine instantly the sort of man with whom you have to do—this personage pushed and jostled some of the loiterers, exclaiming:

"What's all this? what's all this? a wedding party, eh? Mon Dieu! is a wedding party such a very strange thing that everybody must stop and push and crowd, to see the couple? Triple idiots of Parisians! On my word, one would think they had never seen such a thing before!"

"What's that! what makes you push me so hard to get my place, if there's nothing to look at?" said a youngster in a blouse, whom the other had pushed away with some violence.

"Who is it that presumes to speak to me? God forgive me! I believe that this little turnspit dares to complain! Look out that I don't teach you whom you are talking to!"

"In the first place, I ain't a turnspit; do you hear, you long flag-pole?"

That epithet caused the gentleman in the Scotch nether garments to quiver with rage; he threw himself back and raised his cane, and, in the course of that evolution, trod on the feet of an old woman who stood

behind him leading a small dog, which was doing its best to avoid being present at the arrival of the wedding party.

"Ah! monsieur, take care, for heaven's sake! you're treading on me. A little more, and you'd have crushed Abdallah!"

"Very sorry, madame; but I have no eyes in my back. Ah! the rascal who had the effrontery to reply to me has fled. I will not chase him, because he's only a child; if he had been a man, he'd have felt my switch on his shoulders before this."

"Monsieur, do take care; Abdallah is under your feet!"

"What's that! what, in God's name, is this Abdallah of yours, madame?"

"My dear little King Charles.—Come here, come, you runaway!"

"That beast a King Charles? He's a very ugly water-spaniel, and I wouldn't give two sous for him. How stupid some people are with their dogs! Ah! there's the bride, no doubt.—Peste! how lightly we jump down! Very good! I have my cue. She'll wear the breeches; I can see that at a glance."

A young woman, in the traditional bridal costume, had, in fact, alighted from one of the carriages; she did not wait for the arm which a stout, chubby-faced papa, already perspiring profusely, who, however, was not one of the groomsmen, was preparing to offer her.

The bride was apparently about twenty years of age; she was short and plump, with light hair, a white skin, and a rosy complexion; she was not a beauty, but her face was piquant and attractive, with a pleasant smile of the sort that almost always denotes a quick wit; but smiles do not invariably fulfil their promises.

The stout papa, who had come forward too late to assist the bride to alight from her carriage, was also too late for another lady who followed her; and he missed a third likewise, because he was very busily occupied in wiping the perspiration from his brow.

The gentleman with the check trousers, having turned his eyes upon the stout man, rushed toward the carriage, exclaiming:

"Pardieu! I am not mistaken, it's my good Blanquette! Dear Monsieur Blanquette! Holà, there! I say, Père Blanquette! Holà! is it possible that you don't know your friends? Just turn your eyes this way!"

The stout papa, being thus noisily addressed, ceased to wipe his brow, and, looking in the direction of the crowd, speedily distinguished the person who had hailed him. Thereupon his face assumed an expression which denoted annoyance rather than pleasure, and he answered his interlocutor's greetings with cold and constrained courtesy.

"Oh! good-day, Monsieur Cherami—glad to see you."

"So you're of the wedding party, Papa Blanquette?—All in full dress, eh? You were in the same carriage with the bride."

"Well, it would be a strange thing if I wasn't of the party, when it's my nephew who's being married!"

"Your nephew? Oho! then I understand; I have my cue. What! that dear little Adolphe—who never wanted to do anything—who didn't take to anything, as I remember."

"But he has taken to marriage very readily.—Besides, Adolphe is a big fellow now."

"What! it is your nephew whose wedding you are celebrating, and I did not know it? Such an old friend as I am, too—for you know, Papa Blanquette, how devoted I am to you! You have seen me in an emergency; and you let me know nothing about it, and I am not invited to the wedding! Do you know, Monsieur Blanquette, that I might justly be offended by such actions, if I were sensitive? But I am not—I leave that foible to idiots."

For some moments, the stout man had been listening with but one ear to the individual whose name we now know. The bridegroom's uncle was watching the carriages, and, another one having taken the place of that from which the bride had alighted, he was determined not to be behindhand again in offering his hand to the ladies; so he hurried to the door, leaving Monsieur Cherami still talking, and confined himself to an inclination of the head as he muttered:

"Excuse me, monsieur; but I have no time; there are some ladies whom I must assist—I cannot talk any longer."

Monsieur Cherami compressed his lips, frowned, and shrugged his shoulders, saying:

"Ah! this is your way of being polite, is it, you old numskull! He puts on airs because he's made a little money in Elbeuf broadcloth; as if that were such a wonderful thing! And to think that I have sent him more than fifty customers,—my tailor, among others!—and he acts as if he hardly knew me! All because he has money! a lot of merit in that! for who hasn't money now? It has become so common that persons of distinction don't want it."

"In that case, I fancy that tall, lanky fellow must be very distinguished!" whispered Mademoiselle Laurette to her friend; for the two girls had left the omnibus office to see the wedding party, and they were near enough to Monsieur Cherami to hear what he said. That was an easy matter, by the way, even at a distance, for our friend talked as *Mangin* does when he is describing his drawings in public.

Meanwhile, the four wedding carriages had discharged their freights, who had entered the restaurant; then the carriages drove away, and the bystanders dispersed, except those who had business at the omnibus office.

V

THE CAPUCINE FAMILY

Monsieur Cherami remained on the square, staring at the porte cochère of the restaurant, and tapping his legs with his switch, with a nervous, jerky movement; he seemed undecided as to the course he had better

pursue, and muttered, quite loud enough, however, to be overheard:

"I don't know what restrains me; I am tempted to join that wedding party; I have a perfect right to force myself on that crowd. If I were dressed, I'd do it. On my word of honor, I'd do it! not that I care so much for the banquet; I know what a feast is; I've had a hand in a few of them in my time, God knows! and some that this one can't hold a candle to. Sapristi! what is this that I feel against my legs?"

"Don't move, monsieur, I beg you! Abdallah's string has got tangled round your legs; I'll untwist it."

"Corbleu! madame, that's a most insufferable dog of yours! When you're leading a dog, you shouldn't give him so much string."

The old woman, having succeeded in disentangling her spaniel from our friend's legs, concluded to take Abdallah in her arms, then went away, glaring fiercely at all those in her neighborhood.

But Monsieur Cherami, being rid of the dog, turned about and spied the stout woman and the two small boys, who were still awaiting an opportunity to go to Belleville. Thereupon he exclaimed anew, saluting profusely, and shouting so loud that he attracted the attention of everybody within hearing:

"God bless me! do I see Madame Capucine? What a fortunate meeting! I didn't expect such good fortune. What! you have been here all the time, madame, and I did not see you!"

"Yes, Monsieur Cherami; here I am, and here I've been a long, long time, alas! I'm getting pretty impatient, I tell you; think of having to wait an hour for seats in an omnibus!"

"Don't speak of it; it's intolerable! That's the reason I always walk, myself; I can't make up my mind to wait. Ah! there are the two dear boys, Narcisse and Aristoloche; they improve every day—they'll be superb men—they're the living portraits of their mother!"

A smile, to which she strove to give an expression of modesty, played about Madame Capucine's lips, as she replied affectedly:

"Oh! there's a look of the father, too!"

"Do you think so? No, I can't see it; Capucine isn't a handsome man; an insignificant face; while his wife——Ah! the rascal showed taste in his choice, on my word! But I don't understand how you ever made up your mind to marry him; if I were a woman, I'd never have done it; it's Venus and Vulcan over again."

"Oh! you always exaggerate, Monsieur Cherami; to hear you talk, one would think my husband was hunchbacked."

"If he isn't, he ought to have been."

"What! what do you mean by that?"

"Sh! I know what I mean. Ah! if Capucine wasn't a friend of mine!"

"Adelaide! Adelaide! I think that's a green 'bus coming; come here, quick!"

The servant left the office, with her basket. Monsieur Cherami greeted her with an affable bow, which she barely acknowledged, muttering:

"Bah! there goes the rest of our money! I wonder if that man's coming to dine with us? If he is, there'll never be enough to eat."

"Are you going into the country, Madame Capucine?"

"Yes, monsieur; we're going to Romainville."

"Have you bought a summer house, a villa, in that neighborhood?"

"No, monsieur; my Aunt Duponceau has a little place there, and we're going to pass Sunday with her."

"You begin the day before, I see."

"She made me promise to come Saturday with the children. Capucine will join us to-morrow."

"Ah! he isn't with you?"

"It wasn't possible; we can't all leave at once, on account of the business; it's stretching a point for me to go away with my servant."

"But you have your clerk?"

"Monsieur Ballot? Oh! yes, he's still with us; we're very lucky to have him—a very intelligent fellow, and full of ideas."

Monsieur Cherami smiled maliciously, as he replied:

"Yes, yes, I saw at once that he attended to your business very well. I'm sure that you'll push that young man ahead."

"Oh! he'll push himself all right. He's coming to Romainville to-morrow with my husband."

"The party'll be complete, then; but, meanwhile, you are without an escort to give you his arm, to look out for you."

"There is no danger on this little trip."

"A lovely woman is always in danger. All the men are tempted to carry her off. They don't always yield to the temptation, but they feel it, I promise you. Pardieu! I have my cue—a charming plan suggests itself to my mind: suppose I go with you to Romainville? Your Aunt Duponceau won't be sorry to see me, I'm sure. Indeed, I believe she urged me one day to go to see her in the country—yes, she certainly did. What do you think of that plan, lovely creature?"

Madame Capucine, having carefully scrutinized her friend's costume, seemed not at all anxious to take with her to the country a cavalier whose attire would not do her honor; and so, instead of answering his question, she observed:

"By the way, Monsieur Cherami, my husband told me, if I should happen to meet you, to remind you of that little bill—you know, eh? It's for some flannel vests, and it's been running a long while. You promised to pay it; I believe it's about a hundred and thirty francs."

Monsieur Cherami made a wry face, and struck his hat with his hand, muttering:

"Oh! madame, I know very well that I owe you a small account, a trifle, a mere nothing; but I have had much more important matters than that to think about."

"It's been running at least three years."

"What if it were twenty years! it's a trifle, none the less."

"Madame, madame! they're calling our numbers; there are some seats."

"Ah! mon Dieu! I must go. Come, Aristoloche; come, I say. Bonjour! Monsieur Cherami; think of us when you have time. Mon Dieu! I don't say it to hurry you, you know. Here I am, conductor."

Madame Capucine and her boys ran after the servant, and soon all four were in the omnibus.

"There are two more seats, mesdemoiselles," said the clerk to the two grisettes, who also had numbers for Belleville; but Mademoiselle Laurette shook her head.

"Thanks," she replied; "we'll give up our chance; we'll wait for the next; I don't travel with fish. In a boat, it's all right; but in a carriage it scents you up too much."

As for Monsieur Cherami, he had hardly responded to Madame Capucine's farewell; he looked after her with a disdainful air, saying:

"What a beast that haberdasher is! to talk to me about the balance of an account, in the street, in broad daylight, when I am kind enough to pay her compliments and to call her two little brats pretty! Go and sell your cotton nightcaps, you Hottentot Venus! for that woman strikes me as a caricature of Venus. Fine stuff her flannel vests are made of; I've only worn them three years, and they're torn already! I see plainly enough why you don't care to have me go to Aunt Duponceau's—that might interfere with your little tête-à-têtes with your clerk Ballot. Oh! poor Capucine! when I told that huge woman that her husband ought to be hunchbacked, she knew what I meant. However, I'd be glad to know where I shall dine to-day; indeed, to express my meaning more frankly, for I can afford to be frank with myself, I would like to know if I shall dine at all to-day."

VI

MONSIEUR CHERAMI

It is a very sad thing to have reached the point where one wonders whether one will have any dinner. And yet there are every day in Paris people who find themselves in that predicament; but it is comforting to know that such people generally end by dining; some very meagrely, to be sure, others moderately well, and others very well indeed and as if they were still prosperous. Those who succeed in dining well generally accomplish that end by some stratagem, by some new exertion of the imagination, which, however, must well-nigh have exhausted its ingenuity. What seems to me most surprising is that they dine gayly, with an excellent appetite, and with no concern for the morrow. One becomes accustomed to everything, they say; if that is philosophy, I do not envy the philosophers.

Especially when one has fallen into adversity by his own fault, his misconduct, his dissipated life, it would seem that adversity must be most painful, most bitter, most difficult to endure, and that shame must be his constant companion.

Those who are really victims of the injustice of fate, or of the stupidity of their contemporaries, can, at all events, hold their heads erect and refrain from blushing because of their poverty. Such were Homer, who was not appreciated during his life; Plautus, who was reduced to the necessity of turning a potter's wheel; Xylander, who sold his work on Dion Cassius to obtain a crust of bread; Lelio Girardi, author of a curious history of the Greek and Latin poets, who was reduced to a similar extremity; Usserius, too, a learned chronologist; Cornelius Agrippa, who wrote on the vanity of learning, and the excellent qualities of womankind; and the illustrious Miguel Cervantes, to whom we owe the admirable romance of *Don Quixote*.

We may add to this list Paul Borghese, who died of hunger; Tasso, who lived a whole week on a crown, which someone loaned him: true, he ceased to be poor, but only on the eve of his death; Aldus Manutius, who was so poor that he became bankrupt simply by borrowing money enough to ship his library from Venice to Rome, whither he had been summoned; Cardinal Bentivoglio, to whom we owe the history of the civil wars of Flanders: he did not leave enough to pay for his burial; Baudoin, translator of almost all the Latin authors; Vauglas, the grammarian; Du Ryer, author of tragedies, and translator of the Koran; all these lived in indigence. But we will pause here; examples are not lacking, but they would carry us too far; and then, they are not cheerful, and are out of our usual line; it was Monsieur Cherami's plight which induced us to cite so many. Let us now return to that gentleman.

Monsieur Cherami, whom we have seen so poorly dressed, and uncertain as to whether he will have any dinner, had once occupied a brilliant position, and had been noted for his dress, his bearing, and his gallant adventures. His father, who had been an eminent figure in the magistracy during the Consulate, had no other child. Arthur (such was Monsieur Cherami's baptismal name) had been petted, fondled, worshipped, spoiled, and his parents had proposed to make a great man of him. Poor parents! who believe that they can make their son an eminent personage, just as they would make him a tailor or a bootmaker. Arthur did become great, but in stature only. They sent him to school and gave him an excellent education; young Cherami learned readily enough; he was intelligent and quick-witted; he became especially strong in such elegant accomplishments as fencing, riding, and gymnastics; but he had the greatest aversion for serious work of every sort, and when his parents asked him: "Do you want to be a lawyer, a doctor, a man of letters, a broker, or a general?" Arthur replied: "I prefer to walk on the boulevards and smoke big eight-sou cigars."

This reply, which left nothing to be desired in the way of frankness, indicated a most generous inclination to consume the fortune which his parents had so laboriously amassed in business, and which, in fact, they left to their beloved son without undue delay. At the age of twenty-two, Arthur, who had as yet done nothing else than promenade and smoke, found himself an orphan and possessed of thirty-five thousand francs a year.

Thereupon, he abandoned himself to his taste for pleasure, augmented by a very keen penchant for the fair sex; and the fair sex is never ungrateful to a rich and open-handed man. Arthur was not handsome: his crooked nose, his small eyes, and his pointed chin, did not tend to make him a very attractive youth; however, the women told him again and again that he was charming, adorable, irresistible, and he believed it. We are so ready to believe anything that flatters our self-esteem! And yet, Arthur was no fool; indeed, he had his share of wit; but he was totally lacking in common sense, and without common sense, wit, as a general rule, serves no other purpose than to make one do foolish things. La Rochefoucauld makes this reflection with respect to women; for my part, I consider it perfectly applicable to both sexes.

At thirty years, Beau Cherami had spent, consumed, swallowed, his entire inheritance. But he had been noted for his costumes, his horses, his conquests, his love affairs. Eight years to run through a fortune worth thirty-five thousand francs a year—that is not such a very rapid pace; we often see young men who use up three times as much in much less time; to be sure, young Arthur did not gamble on the Bourse.

Being obliged then to sell his furniture, horses, and silverware, Cherami lived some time longer on the product of the sale; but his friends already began to find him less clever and amiable, and the women no longer called him their handsome Arthur. That was because he could no longer make them beautiful presents; and instead of loaning money to his friends and paying their shares of the expense of an orgy, he asked them to pay for him, and often applied to them for loans.

At thirty-five, Arthur was what these good friends of his called utterly *dégommé*: in other words, ruined. After he had lived for some time on credit, his tailor, his shirtmaker, his bootmaker, refused to trust him any more; whereupon he was obliged to wear garments that were worn and faded, and eventually threadbare; hats that had turned from black to rusty; worn boots that were rarely polished. When Cherami, in this garb, said to one of his former acquaintances: "I have left my purse at home; lend me twenty francs, will you?" the acquaintance would make a wry face and loan him five francs instead of twenty, and sometimes nothing at all; for a man in a threadbare coat does not inspire confidence. We loan money to the rich, because we think that they will return it.

After some time, Beau Arthur found that this last source of income was exhausted. He had said so often to his quondam friends: "I have forgotten my purse," or: "I have just discovered that there's a hole in my pocket," that they fled as soon as they saw him; many of them even ceased to return his bow, and pretended not to know him. Misfortune is the reef on which friendship is wrecked.

However, Cherami still possessed a remnant of his handsome fortune; a very small remnant, but enough to keep him from starving; and chance had decreed that the ci-devant beau could not dispose of it, otherwise he would not have failed to make away with it like the rest.

VII

THE COAL DEALER

The father of our spendthrift had, shortly before his death, obliged one of his employés by loaning him eleven thousand francs to start in the coal business. And the creditor, knowing his debtor's probity, had made the loan subject to no other condition than this: "You will pay my son the interest on this sum at five per cent. That makes five hundred and fifty francs a year that you will have to pay him so long as it doesn't inconvenience you; and, in any event, not more than ten years. After that time, your debt will be paid. But it must be understood that I forbid you ever to repay the principal."

These conditions were witnessed by no written contract; the merchant had declined to take his debtor's note. But the latter had faithfully carried out his former employer's intentions. Every three months, he brought Arthur one hundred and thirty-seven francs fifty centimes, the stipulated interest of the money he had received. In his prosperous days, when he still had an income of thirty-five thousand francs, young Arthur had often said to Bernardin—that was the coal dealer's name:

"What the devil do you expect me to do with your hundred and thirty-seven francs, Bernardin? As if I cared for such a trifle! Go and have a good fish dinner at La Râpée—with some pretty wench. That will be much better. I consider that you've paid up."

But the coal dealer, an upright, economical man, scrupulously exact in all his dealings, always contented himself with replying:

"I owe you this money, monsieur; it's the interest on what your late father was kind enough to give me. I say *give*, because my late excellent master would not even let me pay him the interest."

"I know all that, Bernardin; I know all that; but, you see, I don't ask you for the interest either. You are welcome to keep it; buy bonbons for your children with it."

"My children have all they need, monsieur; and I make it a point to fulfil my engagements."

"There is no real obligation in this case, as I have no note, no receipt, from you."

"Between honest men there's no need of any writing, monsieur. I offered your father a note, and he positively refused; just as he forbade me ever to repay the principal on which I pay you the interest."

"And you are to pay the interest only ten years; I know that too."

"Oh! as to that, monsieur, I made your father no answer when he added that condition; but I shall do my duty."

And the honest coal dealer took his departure, leaving with Arthur the small sum he had brought.

When the thirty-five thousand francs a year had disappeared, and Arthur was reduced to the necessity of turning his furniture into cash, he received less scornfully the hundred and thirty-seven francs fifty centimes which Bernardin never failed to bring him on the first of each of the months when rent falls due.

One day, Cherami, having no more furniture, jewels, or horses to sell, had taken a furnished lodging, when

Bernardin brought him his quarterly interest. The faithful coal dealer was informed as to the conduct of his former employer's son; he had watched the young man squander in riotous living the fortune which his parents had amassed with such unremitting toil; sell the house they had left him; then move from a fine hôtel to a more modest apartment, and finally to furnished lodgings. Bernardin had never ventured to make the slightest comment; but at each new downward plunge of the young man, he heaved a profound sigh, and said to himself:

"O my poor master! it's very fortunate that you do not see your son's conduct!"

Now, on the day in question, Arthur, being absolutely penniless, was overjoyed when his paltry income arrived; but as Bernardin, having paid the money, was about to leave him, he detained him, saying:

"Look you, Monsieur Bernardin, I have a proposition to make to you."

"I am listening, monsieur."

"You bring me regularly the interest on the eleven thousand francs which you received from my father; you would be perfectly justified, however, in ceasing to pay it; for more than ten years have passed, and——"

"I think I have told you, monsieur, that I should continue to pay it; I should not consider that I had paid my debt, otherwise."

"Very good! Far be it from me to blame such scrupulous probity; but I am going to propose to you a method of paying your debt once for all. Give me a thousand crowns—three thousand francs—cash; that will gratify me, indeed, it will be a favor to me, because with three thousand francs one can do something, you know; whereas I can't do anything at all with your hundred and thirty-seven francs. So give me that amount in cash, and I will discharge you entirely and you'll have no more interest to pay me. Is that satisfactory?"

"No, monsieur; I can't do that."

"Why not, if I am satisfied?"

"It wouldn't satisfy me to discharge a life-rent of five hundred and fifty francs for three thousand francs; that would be usury."

"What are you talking about with your usury? if it suits me, if I ask it as a favor——"

"No, monsieur; I must not accept this proposition."

"Very well! then give me the eleven thousand francs you received, as you're so finical in the matter of probity. In that way, your conscience will be altogether at rest, and we shall both be satisfied."

"No, monsieur; I will not hand you the principal sum which I received, because your father expressly forbade me to do it. That was the first condition on which he let me have the money; and who knows if he didn't read the future then? if he didn't foresee that the day would come when this small income would be his son's last resource?"

"Monsieur Bernardin, you presume to——"

"I beg your pardon, monsieur; I do not presume at all. But monsieur must realize that I am aware of his position."

"My position? Why, pardieu! it's the position of all young men who have lived well, who have amused themselves, and adored the ladies."

"True, monsieur; but perhaps you have been too kind, too generous, to them."

"I have done what I chose; if I could begin over again, I would do the same."

"I don't doubt it, monsieur; and, of course, you are at liberty to dispose of your own property."

"Yes, to be sure I am—that is to say, I was. Come, Bernardin, won't you give me the eleven thousand francs?"

"No, monsieur; for, from above, your father would blame me."

"Give me a thousand crowns, then."

"Not that, either; but I shall continue to pay monsieur the interest; and if I should die to-morrow, my children would continue to pay it. Oh! it's a sacred thing, and monsieur can rely upon it."

"Very good! pay me three years in advance: sixteen hundred and fifty francs. You can't refuse me that?"

"Excuse me, monsieur; I do refuse, and in your own interest; for you would spend the three years' interest in less than six months; and then you would not have even that trifling resource."

"Monsieur Bernardin, do you refuse to make me any advance?"

"I cannot do it, monsieur."

"Very well! off with you, then; I have my cue!"

Bernardin saluted his late master's son with the utmost respect, and took his leave.

Some time after, when he was in a most desperate plight, Arthur Cherami had renewed his urgent solicitations to Bernardin, in the hope of obtaining a little interest in advance or a portion of the principal; but all his entreaties were of no avail. The old fellow was not to be moved, and his resolution was the more inflexible because he knew that by acting thus he was saving a modest income for his benefactor's son.

The years passed. Far from becoming wiser in the school of adversity, the ci-devant Beau Arthur retained the same passions, the same faults, and the same impertinence, as in his prosperous days. Doubtless forty-six francs a month is a very small allowance; it amounts to about thirty sous per day; and when with that amount a man must board, lodge, and clothe himself, he must needs live very sparingly. However, in this Paris of ours, where living is said to be so expensive, since the opening of those beneficent establishments for the sale of soup and cooked beef, and especially since those establishments have conceived the happy idea of serving their own products, a man may dine for seven sous; yes, reader, for seven sous! to wit: soup, two sous; beef, three sous; bread, two sous. And that man will have eaten more healthful and more nourishing food than he who, for thirty-two sous, regales himself with soup, his choice of three entrées, dessert, bread at discretion, and a pint of wine.

But when Monsieur Cherami received his quarterly interest, instead of husbanding that small sum, his last

resource, paying some few debts, and dining inexpensively at one of the soup-kitchens, he would betake himself, with head erect and an arrogant air, to one of the best restaurants in Paris, take his seat with a great flourish, call the waiter, and order a sumptuous dinner of the daintiest dishes and the most expensive wines; and all in such wise that everybody who was in the room could hear him. In short, he would resume his rôle of dandy, forgetting that he no longer wore the costume of the rôle, yet imposing respect on the multitude by his lordly manner.

Some said: "He's an original, who affects a shabby costume to conceal the fact that he's a millionaire." Others: "He is some foreigner, some eminent personage, who desires to remain incognito in Paris."

And the waiters served promptly and with the utmost respect this party in a threadbare frock-coat, who ate truffled partridges and drank champagne frappé; and when he paid his bill, Cherami never took the change which the waiter brought him, even if it amounted to two or three francs.

"All right!" he would cry; "keep that; it's for you!"

Thereupon, the waiter would bow to the ground before so generous a patron; and he would stalk forth proudly from the restaurant, enchanted with the effect he had produced. And the next morning he would have nothing with which to procure a dinner.

I beg you not to believe that this character is an imaginary one; that there are no men foolish enough to act in this way; there are, and many of them. For our own part, we have known more than one.

But when naught remained of the small quarterly payment, he had to live anew on loans and stratagems; he had to content himself with the very modest fare of a cheap restaurant, where the mistress was willing to supply him on credit because he flattered her and compared her with Venus, although she was blear-eyed and had a purple nose. In that place he could not order champagne and truffles, to be sure; that would have been a waste of time; but Cherami found a way, none the less, to make a sensation: shouting louder than anybody else, bewildering everybody with his chatter, and always having some marvellous adventure to relate, of which he was the hero, and in which he had performed wonderful exploits. If one of his auditors seemed to doubt the veracity of his narrative, he would insult him, threaten him, challenge him, insist on fighting him instanter, and, in order to pacify my gentleman and restore peace, the person abused must needs treat him to nothing less than a cup of coffee followed by a *petit verre* of liqueur. As for the waiters, as he had nothing to give them, he treated them like dogs, and threatened them with his switch when they did not serve him promptly enough.

If, instead of passing his time in smoking and loitering, Monsieur Cherami had chosen to do something, he might have increased his income, and have lived without constantly resorting to loans. He was well informed; he retained from his early education a superficial idea of many things; he knew quite a lot, in fact, and might have passed for a scholar in the eyes of those who knew nothing. His handwriting was so good that he could have obtained work as a copyist. In his youth, he had studied music, and he could play the violin a little; he might have made something of his talent in that direction and have found a place in the orchestra of a second-class theatre, or played in dance-halls for the grisette and the mechanic.

But the ci-devant Beau Arthur considered every sort of work that was suggested to him very far beneath him; he thought that he would degrade himself by becoming a copyist or a minstrel, and he was not ashamed to borrow a hundred sous when he knew that he could not repay them. What do such people understand by the word *honor*? Let us conclude that they fashion a kind of honor for their own use, just as some painters paint scenes from nature in which there is nothing natural, but which by common consent are called conventional nature.

One day, when he was without a sou, having been denied by all those from whom he had sought to borrow, and not daring to go to his cheap restaurant, because the mistress was absent, Cherami found himself confronted by the stern necessity of going without a mouthful of dinner, when it occurred to him to call upon his payer of interest. So he set out for the abode of the coal dealer, saying to himself on the way:

"Bernardin always refuses to make me the smallest advance; but, sacrebleu! when I tell him that I have nothing with which to pay for a dinner, it isn't possible that he will let me starve to death."

The modest tradesman was just about to sit down to dinner with his family when Cherami appeared, crying:

"The deuce! it would seem that you are about to dine! You're very lucky! For my part, I haven't the means to pay for a dinner. Lend me a crown, Bernardin, so that I can satisfy my hunger, too."

"I never have money to loan," the coal dealer replied respectfully; "but if monsieur will do us the honor to take a seat at our table, we shall be happy to offer him a share of our modest dinner."

"Oho! that's your game! Well, so be it!" rejoined Cherami, taking his seat without further parley.

But Bernardin's dinner was very simple; it consisted of soup, beef, and a dish of potatoes. The wine was Argenteuil, and very new.

Cherami exclaimed that the soup was watery, the beef tough, and the wine execrable; for dessert there was nothing but a piece of Géromé cheese, which he declared to be fit only for masons; and he was much surprised that they did not take coffee after the meal; in short, he rose from the table in a vile humor, saying to Bernardin and his wife:

"You live very badly, my dears; you live like rustics; I shall not dine with you again."

That was his only word of thanks to his hosts.

VIII

THE RESTAURANT IN PARC SAINT-FARGEAU

On the day on which our tale opens, Arthur Cherami found himself anew in this perplexing plight, which was aggravated by the circumstance that he had gone without dinner on the preceding day.

To be sure, he had only to go to Bernardin's, where he was very sure that they would not refuse to give him a dinner, in default of cash. But you know that our ex-high-liver was far from satisfied with the meal of which he had partaken at the coal dealer's board; not only did he find everything bad, for my gentleman, even in his poverty, was still very hard to please, but he had discovered that at his debtor's house it would be of no use for him to try to *blaguer*—that is to say, to put on airs, to lie, to display his impertinence. The coal dealer's family did not even smile at the extraordinary tales he told, and it was that fact which had irritated Cherami even more than the simplicity of the dinner, perhaps. At the cheap resort to which he was obliged to go sometimes, he was content with a wretched, ill-cooked dish, because, while he ate it, he could talk at the top of his voice, speechify, and force most of the habitués of the place to listen to him. We know how he compelled those who ventured not to believe all that he said to pay for his coffee.

Arthur had no business whatever at the omnibus office, but he knew that one frequently meets acquaintances at such places. Amid the constant going and coming, departures and arrivals, it is no uncommon thing to meet someone whom you have not seen for a long time, and whom you did not know to be in Paris. So that Arthur, who had nothing to do, frequently visited the railroad stations, where he walked to and fro in front of the ticket offices, as if he were expecting someone; and, in fact, he was always expecting that chance would bring there some acquaintance from whom he could borrow five francs.

Or he would go and take his stand in front of an omnibus office, always with the same hope. On this occasion he had, in fact, met several acquaintances, but the result had not fulfilled his expectations. Coldly greeted by Papa Blanquette, repulsed by Madame Capucine, he was beginning to think that he should not make his expenses, and he said to himself, but not aloud as usual:

"Sapristi! what times are these we live in? The world is becoming vile beyond cleansing! No courtesy, no affability, no good manners! Formerly, when I met a friend, my first words were: 'You must come to dine with me.'—He might accept or not, but I had made the offer. To-day, I meet nobody but cads, who are very careful not to offer me the slightest thing; indeed, many of them presume to pass me by, and act as if they didn't know me. There are others who carry their insolence so far as to dare to ask me for some paltry hundred-sou pieces which they have loaned me and I have not paid. Pardieu! I've loaned them plenty of 'em in the old days; and I never asked for them, because I knew it would be of no use. As if one ever returned money loaned among friends! As if what belongs to one doesn't belong to the other! That's the way I understand friendship—that noble, genuine friendship which united Castor and Pollux, Damon and Pythias, Achilles and Patroclus, Orestes and Pylades. Do we find in the *Iliad* that Patroclus ever said to Achilles: 'I loaned you a hundred sous, or twenty francs; I want you to pay them'? Bah! nothing of the sort; there's no instance in history of such a thing! And I defy all my former companions in pleasure to cite a single one. However, I am conscious to-day that the need of eating is making itself felt; I can't go to my little cabaret on Rue Basse-du-Temple, for the mistress is sick; her husband takes her place at the desk, and he is always ill-disposed toward me; he presumes to ask me for money! Vile turnspit! do you suppose I would go to your place for food if I had money? Ah! there's Bernardin; I am sure of a dinner there; but I am horribly bored with those good people. And then, it wounds my self-esteem to dine with one of my father's former clerks. Corbleu! can it be that, like Titus, I have wasted my day?"

And Cherami, still tapping his trousers with his switch, cast his eyes about him. Thereupon he spied the two girls who were waiting to go to Belleville.

"There are two little grisettes, whose aspect rather pleases me," he said to himself, throwing his weight on his left hip; "a blonde and a brunette—meat for the king's attorney, as we used to say at the club. They're pretty hussies both; the blonde has a rather stupid look, but the dark one has wit in her eye.—Suppose I should try to make a conquest by offering them a good dinner? Ten to one, they'll accept! I know the sex; these girls are so fond of eating! Yes, but in that case—they'll have to pay for the dinner; that might embarrass them, and I don't want to embarrass any woman. But if I did, I should do no more than avenge myself."

While making these reflections, Cherami had walked toward the young women; he struck a pose in front of them, humming a lively tune, and darted a glance at them into which he put all the seductiveness of which he was still capable. The young women looked at each other and laughed heartily; Mademoiselle Laurette went so far as to say, in a bantering tone:

"That must be a smoke-pipe from the Opéra-Comique that has a vent in this neighborhood; however, it's better than an escape of gas."

"Aha! we are clever and satirical!" said Cherami, addressing Mademoiselle Laurette; "I had guessed as much, simply by observing your saucy face."

"Why, I don't know what you mean, monsieur!" replied the girl, trying to assume a serious expression.

"I was simply answering the reflection in which you just indulged on the subject of a roulade which I ventured to perform, and which, perhaps, was not rendered with perfect accuracy."

"But, monsieur, I really didn't know that you were singing; I was saying to my friend Lucie that we should be very late in getting to the restaurant in Parc Saint-Fargeau, and that I didn't know whether there was dancing there on Saturday."

"Aha! so the young ladies are going to Parc Saint-Fargeau?—That is just beyond Belleville, I believe?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"And there's a restaurant there now, where they have dancing? Pardon me, I ask simply for information, being a great lover of places where one can dine well—and enjoy one's self; and it's a long while since I have been in that neighborhood."

"In that case, you'll find great changes. Yes, monsieur; there is a restaurant now in Parc Saint-Fargeau, with a large garden where there's a pond. But it's no toy pond; it's big enough for a boat, and you can go rowing; it's quite big, and there's an island in it which you can row around if you're very careful, for the water's quite deep."

"You can be drowned in it," observed Mademoiselle Lucie.

"Oho! one has also the right to drown one's self, eh?"

"Why, yes! if you should fall into the water!"

"True. And there's a dance-hall, you say?"

"Yes, monsieur; one out-of-doors, and one inside for rainy days."

"Good; I see that everything is complete; and if, with all the rest, the cooking is good——"

"Very good; and they give you fine *matelotes*, because they catch the fish on the spot."

"This rustic restaurant will certainly receive a call from me very soon; indeed, I would go there to-day—delighted to take the trip with you, mesdemoiselles—if I were not expecting someone—who, I am beginning to think, will not come. It's an infernal shame! we are invited to dine at the Palais-Royal; it's almost five o'clock now, and we shall break our engagement and they'll dine without us, all on his account!"

"You'll dine somewhere else; that's all. There's no lack of restaurants in Paris."

"Vive Dieu! who knows that better than I! So I have no difficulty on that score—that is to say, I don't know which to select, and if you young ladies will do me the honor to accept a little dinner in the suburbs——"

"Thanks, monsieur; but we don't accept dinners; besides, we are to meet someone at Parc Saint-Fargeau."

"That's just the reason I venture to invite them," said Cherami to himself.—"Are you young ladies engaged in business?" he asked.

"Yes, monsieur; we make feathers; we work in one of the best shops on Rue Saint-Denis; but to-day is the mistress's birthday; that's why we have the whole day to ourselves."

"Enchanted to have made your acquaintance. Ah! so you're in feathers—a charming trade for a woman! They have the same volatility: birds of a feather flock together."

"Is he talking nonsense to us?" whispered Mademoiselle Lucie in her friend's ear.

"Why, no, stupid; not at all; that's a compliment."

"Belleville! passengers for Belleville!"

"Here's the Belleville 'bus, Laurette, and they're making signs that there are seats for us."

"Oh! we must run, then. Bonjour! monsieur."

"What! you are going so soon! I thought—I hoped——"

The two girls were already in the omnibus, which soon disappeared. Cherami turned on his heel, muttering:

"They were shrewd to refuse my dinner. Peste! how should I have got out of it? I'm not sorry to have had a chat with the little dears—one's name is Laurette, and the other's Lucie, or Lucile; they may be desirable acquaintances, on occasion; if I ever want to buy feathers, for instance."

IX

ANOTHER WEDDING PARTY

A young man of some twenty-five years, fashionably dressed, but whose costume was in some disorder, suddenly appeared upon the scene. He was walking very fast, and did not stop until he reached the porte cochère of the Deffieux restaurant. There he halted, and gazed under the porte cochère with every indication of anxiety, not to say distress; then looked all about him and along the boulevard. From the pallor of his cheeks, the distortion of his features, the expression of his eyes, it was easy to see that he was suffering keenly, and that his distress was augmented by the expectation of some impending event. Cherami had no sooner espied the young man, than the latter ran to where he stood and said, in a trembling voice:

"Have you been here some time, monsieur?"

"Why, yes, monsieur; quite a long time."

"I beg your pardon, but in that case you can tell me—— Have you noticed a wedding party arrive at this restaurant?"

"A wedding party? Certainly, I have seen one; it's only a short time since the carriages went away."

"They have arrived already? I thought I should be here before them."

"No; you are late."

"They have gone in?"

"Yes, monsieur; I had a very good view of the bride."

"You saw Fanny?"

"I don't know whether her name's Fanny, I'm sure; but what I do know is that she's very pretty."

"Oh! yes, monsieur; she's charming, isn't she?"

"She's a very pretty bride, without being a beauty."

"Oh! monsieur, there's no lovelier woman on earth."

"That's a matter of taste. I don't propose to contradict you."

"Was she pale, trembling? did she look as if she had been crying?"

"Why, not at all! She was fresh and rosy and affable; she laughed as she jumped out of the carriage; then I saw her figure, which isn't so bad, although she's a little stout."

"Stout! why, no! she's slender and rather small."

"I tell you, she's decidedly plump. But that does no harm in a blonde; a thin blonde is too much like a feather-duster."

"Blonde? Fanny is dark! You made a mistake, monsieur; it wasn't the bride that you saw."

"It wasn't the bride that I saw? Oh! I beg your pardon, monsieur; I can't be mistaken, for I talked with the

groom's uncle, whom I know very well, Papa Blanquette, wholesale linen-draper."

"Blanquette! I beg your pardon, monsieur; the party you saw isn't the one I am expecting."

"Faith! it's not my fault. You ask me if a wedding party has arrived at this restaurant, and I tell you what I've seen. It seems that that isn't the one you are looking for; pray be more explicit, then."

"Oh! monsieur, pardon me; it's no wonder that I make mistakes, I am in such agony!"

"Agony? The deuce! In truth, you are very pale. Where's the pain?"

"In my heart!"

"The heart? Why, in that case, you must take something. Come with me to a café; I know what you need; I often have a pain in my heart."

"No, no! I won't leave this spot until I have seen her—the perfidious, faithless creature!"

"You are waiting for a faithless creature, eh? That ought not to prevent your taking something to set you up. You are horribly pale; you'll be ill in a moment. When one is waiting for a perfidious female, one needs strength, courage, nerve! Come and take a plate of soup; there's a soup-kitchen close by."

"Ah! here they are! here they are! Yes, I am sure that these are they; I know it by the way I feel. Look, monsieur; do you see those carriages on the boulevard?"

"Yes, this seems to be another wedding party. Peste! this is evidently a swell affair."

"The carriages are coming here—do you see, monsieur?"

"Glass coaches, with footmen in livery!—this goes away ahead of the Blanquette party."

"They are stopping here. Come, let us go nearer."

"Yes, yes. Oh! never fear; I'll not leave you. Is your unfaithful one there?"

"Fanny! She has married another—and I loved her so dearly!"

"Poor boy! I understand your suffering, now."

"Oh! I would like to die before her eyes."

"No nonsense! As if any man ought to die for a woman! Pshaw! there's nothing so easy to replace!"

The first carriage of this second wedding party had stopped at the door; four young men alighted, fashionably dressed all, and of genteel bearing. One of the four was evidently the hero of the ceremony; it was he who gave the orders, sent his groomsmen to the other carriages, or told them to whom they were to offer their arms. He was a little older than the others, apparently about thirty, and his life had evidently been well occupied, for his strongly marked, but jaded, features denoted excess of toil or of dissipation. He was a good-looking fellow, tall and slender, with an air of distinction; but there were dark rings around his great, brown eyes, his lips were thin and compressed, his smile was rather satirical than amiable, his forehead was already furrowed by numerous wrinkles, and he frowned repeatedly when he spoke with the slightest animation; his hair, which was of a glossy black and trimmed close, was already decidedly thin in front, and scarcely plentiful enough elsewhere to protect the top of his head.

"That's he! that's Auguste Monléard!" the young man to whom Cherami had attached himself murmured, with a shudder; and, as he spoke, he gripped his companion's arm in a sort of frenzy. But Cherami, far from complaining of that liberty, passed his arm through his new acquaintance's, saying:

"Ah! that young man is Auguste Monléard, is he? Wait! wait! Monléard; I knew a Monléard, twenty years ago, but this can't be the same man. Is he the groom?"

"Yes; it is for him that she has forgotten me, thrown me aside."

"She is wrong. That young man is good-looking, but you are younger; and then, too, that fellow looks to me as if he had had a devilishly intimate acquaintance with the joys of life!—I don't impute it to him as a crime—but he'll soon have to wear a wig."

"Ah! I am strongly inclined to go and strike him across the face!"

The young man had already started to attack the bridegroom; but Cherami detained him, putting his arm about him.

"What are you going to do? make a fool of yourself? I won't allow it. Well-bred people don't fight with their fists. If you want to fight with the groom, very good; I consent, I will even be your second; but you have plenty of time, and you must agree that this would be an ill-chosen moment."

The poor, lovelorn youth was not listening; another carriage had stopped in front of the restaurant. In that one there were ladies, among them the bride, who was easily recognizable by her head-dress of orange blossoms. She was a young woman of small stature, slender and dainty. Her hair was brown like her eyes, which were large, fringed by long lashes, and surmounted by slight but perfectly arched eyebrows. Her mouth was small and intelligent; she rarely showed her teeth, because they were uneven. She was an attractive woman, nothing more; a man must have been deeply in love with her to declare that there was no lovelier creature on earth. But for a man who is deeply enamored, there is but the one woman on earth; consequently, she must be the fairest. The bride's most remarkable points were her hands and feet, which were extraordinarily small, and worthy to be a sculptor's model.

The groom stepped forward to offer his arm to his wife, to assist her to alight. She barely rested her hand upon it, and, light as a feather, she was already on the ground, where she seemed busily occupied in looking to see if her dress had been rumpled in the carriage.

"There she is! it is she! it is Fanny!" murmured the young man, leaning heavily on Cherami.

"She doesn't look to me at all as if she'd been crying," was the reply.

"Mon Dieu! can it be that she will not look in this direction?"

"What's the use? She would see that you are pale and distressed, with the look of a disinterred corpse; that's no way to appear before a woman, to make her regret you."

"She would see how I suffer; she would realize that I shall die of grief!"

"I promise you that that wouldn't prevent her dancing this evening. I am a good judge of faces, and I divine that that woman has a cold disposition, heart ditto; there's very little feeling under that cover, or I am immeasurably mistaken."

Meanwhile, other ladies had left their carriages, and numerous young women, who flocked about the bride; one fastened a pin; another adjusted the folds of her veil; another remade her bouquet; and while they attended to these trivial details of the toilet, which are so momentous in a woman's eyes, especially a bride's, she glanced here and there, and soon her eyes fell upon the pale, dishevelled, heart-broken young man; for he had thrust aside all those who stood in front of him and who prevented him from gazing at his ease upon her for whom he had come here.

A faint tremor of emotion passed over the bride's features; there was in her eyes a momentary expression of pity, of sympathy; but it did not indicate suffering on her own part; and as her husband, who had noticed her preoccupation, hurried toward her at that moment, she speedily changed her expression, assumed an amiable, joyous manner, and accepted his arm with pretty, caressing little gestures.

Thereupon the young man, whom Cherami held by the arm, could not restrain a paroxysm of rage, crying:

"Oh! this is frightful! not a glance of regret, of farewell, for me! She sees my suffering, my despair, and she smiles at that man! and she walks off on his arm, with joy and happiness in her eyes!"

X

THE YOUNGER SISTER

At that moment, one of the young women who had arrived in the bride's carriage ran hastily to him whom the wedding party made so miserable, and said to him in an undertone, but in a voice overflowing with kindness and sympathy:

"Why are you here, Gustave? Why did you come? You promised me to be brave."

"I am, mademoiselle; you see that I am—for I did not overwhelm the false creature with reproaches, here, before her husband's face, before her new relations!"

"Ah! that would have been very ill done of you; and how would it have helped you? I implore you, Gustave, be reasonable.—Do not leave him, monsieur, will you?"

The last question was addressed to Cherami, who hastened to reply:

"I! leave my dear Gustave in the state he's in now! I should think not! What do you take me for, mademoiselle? I will cling to him as the ivy to the elm. If he should throw himself into the water, I would follow him! But, never fear; he won't do it. Oh! I am here to look out for him; he has no more devoted friend than me."

At that moment, several voices called:

"Adolphine! Adolphine! do come!"

"They are looking for me and calling me," murmured the young woman. "Adieu! Gustave; but if you have the slightest regard for me, you will not abandon yourself to your grief. You won't, will you? I implore you!"

And the amiable young woman, as light of foot as a gazelle, disappeared under the porte cochère, as did all the other persons whom the carriages had brought.

"There's a little woman who pleases me exceedingly!" cried Cherami; "she must be the bride's sister or cousin, at least. For my part, I think that she's prettier than the bride. Perhaps her eyes aren't as big; but they are sweet and tender and kind; and then, they are blue, which always denotes true feeling: I have studied the subject. Her hair's not as dark as the other's, but it's of a light shade of chestnut which does not lack merit. Her mouth isn't so small, but neither are her lips so thin and tightly shut as the bride's. Distrust thin lips; they're a sure sign of malignity and hypocrisy. Lastly, she is less dainty than your faithless Fanny, but she is taller; her figure has more distinction and elegance. All in all, she is an exceedingly attractive person, this Mademoiselle Adolphine; I say *mademoiselle,* for I suppose that she still is one. Have I guessed right?"

But Gustave was not listening to his new friend. He stood with his eyes fixed on the door through which the wedding party had passed, apparently under the spell of a vague hallucination.

Cherami shook his arm, saying:

"Well, my dear Monsieur Gustave—I know your name now, and I shall never forget it; you probably have another, which you will tell me later. Come, what do you propose to do? Everybody has gone inside; we two alone are left at the door; the carriages have gone away, or are waiting on Rue de Bondy, and you have seen what you wanted to see. I presume that you do not intend to stay here until the wedding guests go home to bed; that might carry you too far. Come, sacrebleu my dear friend—allow me to call you by that name; I merit the privilege by the interest I take in you—you heard what that fascinating young woman said, who came and spoke to you with tears in her voice and her eyes—yes, may I be damned if she hadn't tears in her eyes, too! She begged you, implored you, to be brave, did the charming Adolphine—I remember her name, too. Well! won't you do what she asked? What the devil are you waiting for in front of this door? those people have all gone to dinner, and we must follow their example and ourselves go and dine. I say *we* must go, because I promised the excellent Adolphine not to leave you, and, vive Dieu! I will keep my promise! I am expected at a certain place, to eat a truffled turkey; but there are truffled turkeys elsewhere, so that doesn't trouble me. Well! what do you mean to do? You can't seduce a woman by starving yourself to death."

"I want to speak to Fanny's sister."

"The bride's sister? Oh! I see, that's Mademoiselle Adolphine."

"Yes, she's the one I mean. I had many things to say to her, to ask her, just now. I was so confused, I couldn't think, I had no time."

"You want to speak to that young lady again; that seems to me rather difficult, for the whole party has gone in—unless—after all, why not? This is a restaurant, and although there are several wedding parties here, that doesn't prevent the restaurateur from entertaining all the other people who come here to dinner. Come, let's dine here; what do you think?"

"Oh! yes, yes! let us go in here and dine. We will ask for a private room near the wedding party, and during the ball—or before—I can see her again. I can speak to Adolphine."

"Pardieu! once there, we are in our castle; we will set up our batteries, and no one has the right to send us away; we can sup there, and breakfast to-morrow morning; so long as we eat, they will be delighted to have us stay."

"Ah! monsieur, how kind you are to take an interest in my troubles, to lend me your support, although you do not know me, do not know even who I am!"

"Oh! I am a physiognomist, my dear friend. At the very outset, you aroused my interest; besides, I love to oblige; I do nothing else! Let's go and dine."

"We will ask where the Monléard party is, monsieur; we will take a room on the same floor."

"Agreed! Let's go and dine."

"Without any apparent motive, I will question the waiter. Indeed, I can speedily enlist him in my interest with a five-franc piece."

"He will be entirely devoted to you. Let's go and dine."

"I will tell him to place us as near as possible to the room where the ladies are talking."

"But, sacrebleu! if we delay much longer, there'll be no vacant room near your wedding party."

"You are right! Come, come!"

"At last!" said Cherami to himself, striding behind young Gustave; "this time, I have my cue!"

XI

A CALCULATING YOUNG WOMAN

The five francs given by young Gustave to a waiter instantly produced a most satisfactory result. He placed the new-comers in a private room on the first floor, at the end of a corridor; and the large hall in which Monsieur Monléard's wedding feast was to be given was at the other end of the same corridor. Gustave would have preferred to be nearer the scene of festivity, but that was impossible; and his companion persuaded him that they were much better off at the end of the corridor, where Mademoiselle Adolphine could, if she chose, come to exchange a few words with him, unobserved by the wedding guests.

"And now, let us dine!" cried Cherami, hanging his hat on a hook; "I will admit that I am hungry. All these events—your distress—your despair—have moved me deeply, and emotion makes one hollow. You also must feel the need of refreshment, for you are very pale."

"I am not at all hungry, monsieur."

"One isn't hungry at first; but afterward one eats very well. Besides, we came here to dine, if I'm not mistaken."

"Look you, monsieur; have the kindness to order—ask for whatever you choose—whatever you would like; but don't compel me to think about it."

"Very good; I agree. In truth, I am inclined to think that's the better way! With your abstraction, your sighs, you would never be able to order a dinner; you would order veal for fish, and radishes for prawns, while I excel in that part of the game. You see, I have lived, and lived well, I flatter myself! Some madeira first of all, waiter—and put some Moët in the ice; meanwhile, I will make out our menu!"

The madeira having been brought, Cherami immediately drank two glasses to restore the tone of his stomach; then he took the bill of fare, and took pains to order the best of everything. The waiter, who scrutinized our friend's costume while he was writing, would probably have displayed less zeal in serving him, had not his companion begun by slipping five francs into his hand. But that spontaneous generosity had given another direction to the waiter's ideas, and he concluded that the gentleman with the check trousers was a Scotchman who had not changed his travelling costume.

While Cherami wrote his order, young Gustave was unable to sit still for a moment; he went constantly to the door and took a few steps in the corridor, then returned to question the waiter, to whose particular attention Cherami commended his menu.

"Waiter, is the wedding party at table yet?"

"They sat down just a moment ago, monsieur."

"Above all things, don't have the fillet cooked too much."

"Never fear, monsieur."

"Where is the bride sitting?"

"At the middle of the table, monsieur."

"And well supplied with truffles."

"By whose side?"

"I think her father's on one side, monsieur."

"And on the other?"

"A salmon-trout."

"A lady, monsieur."

"If it isn't fresh, we won't take it."

"How is the lady's hair dressed?"

"She has lilies of the valley on her head."

"What's that! lilies of the valley on a salmon-trout! I never saw it served so."

"Not the trout, monsieur; I was speaking of a lady—one of the wedding party."

"And the groom, where is he sitting?"

"Opposite his wife, monsieur."

"Next, a capon *au gros sel.*"

"Does he look at her often?"

"Done to a turn."

"Faith! monsieur, I didn't have time to notice as to that."

"What's that! Sapristi! you haven't time to tell the chef to cook it to a turn?"

"Pardon, monsieur; monsieur was asking me about the bridegroom.—Now I am at your service."

And the waiter, to escape these questions, which confused him, took the menu and disappeared. Cherami poured out another glass of madeira, saying to his new friend:

"Come, come, my dear Gustave; if you persist in imitating the bear of Berne, by going from this room into the corridor, and returning from the corridor to this room, you won't do yourself any good. You know that the wedding party is at the table. Naturally, they will be there some time. So follow their example. Take a seat opposite me, recover your tranquillity, and let us dine. See, here's our soup, just in time, exhaling a delicious odor. Allow me to help you."

The young man took his seat, and swallowed a few spoonfuls of soup; then pushed his plate away, crying:

"No; it's impossible for me to eat anything."

"Very well! then talk to me. Look you, while I am eating, as you don't choose to do the same, you have an excellent opportunity to tell me the story of your loves—with the ungrateful Fanny."

"Oh! yes, monsieur, gladly. I will tell you all, and you will see if I am wrong to complain of her inconstancy."

"Men are hardly ever wrong. Go on, my dear friend; tell me the whole story; I shall not lose a word of your narrative, because one can listen splendidly while eating."

"My name is Gustave Darlemont, and I am twenty-five years old. My parents lived on their income; but in order to obtain the means to live more expensively, they invested all their capital in an annuity."

"The devil! rather selfish parents, I should say. If everyone did the same, the word *inheritance* would be superfluous. Here's a fillet that is worth its weight in gold. Just taste it."

"No, thanks, monsieur.—For my part, I find no fault with my parents for doing as they did; they had earned their fortune by their own labor, they had given me a good education: what more could I ask?"

"You are delightful! Pardieu! you could ask for money. Let me give you some of this Château-Léoville.—It's cool and sweet—it will refresh your ideas. Go on, I beg."

"My parents died, and from what they left me in furniture, jewels, and plate, I had an income of twelve hundred francs."

"A mere trifle! that's not enough to pay one's tailor. To be sure, there's the alternative of not paying him at all."

"I was then seventeen; I didn't know just what business to embrace."

"And, pending your decision, you embraced all the pretty girls who came to hand. I know all about that."

"Oh! no, monsieur; I was very virtuous; I have never been what is called a lady's man."

"So much the worse, young man; so much the worse! There's nothing like women for training the young. You may say that they overtrain them sometimes. But think of the experience they acquire! I might cite myself as an example; but we haven't come to me yet. Go on, my young friend—for I am your friend. Although Aristotle said: 'O my friends, there are no friends!' I maintain that there are. And that's simply a play upon words by the Greek philosopher, to whom, had I been Philip, I would not have intrusted the education of my son Alexander, because of that one assertion.—But I beg your pardon; I am listening."

"Luckily, I had an uncle, Monsieur Grandcourt, my mother's brother. He took me into his family. He is rather an original, but kind and obliging. He is not an old man: only about forty-eight now."

"So much the worse, so much the worse! You certainly have hard luck in the matter of inheritances. Is this uncle of yours rich?"

"Not rich perhaps, but very comfortably fixed, I fancy."

"What does he do?"

"He's a banker."

"Everybody is, more or less."

"Oh! my uncle is a prudent man, who never risks his money in doubtful speculations; he is noted for the exactitude with which he fulfils his engagements, and for his absolute probity."

"Good! there's a man to whom I will intrust my funds, when I have more than I can handle."

"So I entered my uncle's employ as a clerk. I was very happy there. We often went to the theatre, to concerts, and to the best restaurants; and my uncle always paid."

"Pardieu! it would have been a fine thing if the nephew had had to stand treat! However, I see that your uncle's not a miser; he likes to enjoy himself. That's the kind of an uncle I like. I shall be glad to make his acquaintance."

"I have now arrived, monsieur, at the moment which changed the whole course of my life, which made me acquainted with a sentiment of whose power I had thus far been entirely ignorant. For, while I had had a few

amourettes, I had never known a genuine passion. Ah! monsieur! the instant that I saw Fanny, I felt as if my heart were born to a new life; I was no longer the same. No, until then I had not lived!"

"That's a common sort of talk with lovers. They never have lived before their frantic passion,—the ingrates!—and they often forget the happiest days of their youth.—Ah! here's our salmon-trout—a delicious fish! You will surely taste a mouthful?"

"My uncle had bought some shares in the Orléans railway for Monsieur Gerbault, Fanny's father. He gave them to me to deliver to him. Monsieur Gerbault was not at home. Fanny received me, and invited me to wait till her father returned. We talked; I was amazed to hear that young girl discuss affairs at the Bourse quite as intelligently as a broker could do."

"And that was what fascinated you?"

"Oh! no, monsieur. But while Fanny was talking to me, I examined her. Her eyes were bright and intelligent; her smile was charming. Her whole person was instinct with a childish grace which fascinated me, and a perfect naturalness which put me at my ease at once. Before I had been with her half an hour, you would have thought that we were old friends. I took the greatest pleasure in listening to her, and I think that she perceived it, for she was never at a loss for something to say. Her father returned, and I was terribly sorry. Monsieur Gerbault is a very courteous old man. He smiled at me when he heard his daughter ask me the prices of all the different securities, and said:

"'It's very unfortunate for Fanny that women are not allowed on the Bourse, for I believe she would go there every day; she has a very pronounced taste for speculation; I dare not say for gambling, for I hope that it won't go so far as that. However, monsieur, she has five or six thousand francs, and so has her sister; it comes from their mother. Adolphine has very wisely invested her funds in government securities; but Fanny—oh! she's a different sort! she wants to speculate, to buy stocks, and she will probably lose her money.'

"'Why so, father, I should like to know?' said Fanny; 'why shouldn't luck be favorable to me? Besides, I don't mean to buy anything on margin, but only for cash; I shall keep what I buy, and not sell until I can sell at a profit. It seems to me that that is easy enough, and that there's no need of being a clerk in a broker's office to understand the operation. With my six thousand francs I could only get a miserable little income; why shouldn't I try to increase my principal?'

"'As you please,' said Monsieur Gerbault; 'you are perfectly at liberty to dispose of what belongs to you.'

"You can understand that I flattered the young woman's hopes, feeling as I did that I was already in love with her. I offered to keep her posted as to the general tendency of values on the Bourse and the financial situation. She accepted my offer; and Monsieur Gerbault, knowing that I was Monsieur Grandcourt's nephew, gave me free access to his house. In short, my dear—my dear—monsieur—I beg your pardon, but I don't as yet know your name."

"Pardieu! that's true; I had not thought to tell you. My name is Arthur Cherami, former land-holder, ci-devant premier high-liver of the capital. I set the fashion, I was the arbiter of style, and all the women doted on me. Oh! my story is very short: at twenty-two, I had thirty-five thousand francs a year; at thirty, I had nothing left. When I say *nothing*, I mean practically nothing; I still have a small remnant of income, a bagatelle, but my fortune is all eaten up. Well! young man, I give you my word of honor, that, if I could start afresh, I believe I would do the same again. I employed my youth to good purpose, and everybody can't say as much. For God's sake, must a man be old, infirm, and gouty, to enjoy life? You can't crack nuts when your teeth are all gone; therefore, you shouldn't wait till you're old to play the young man. Now, if I add that I am still a lusty fellow, as brave as Caesar, as gallant as François I, and as philosophical as Socrates, you will know me as well as if you had been my groom.—I have said."

"Very good! Your name, you say, is——? I beg your pardon, but I have forgotten it already."

"You are absent-minded; I can understand that. My name is Cherami, and I am yours, which constitutes a pun;[B] but, to avoid mistakes, call me Arthur; that is my Christian name, and all the ladies call me that. Sapristi! this is an excellent fish; do eat a bit of it."

"I prefer to talk to you of my love."

"So be it!—That won't give you indigestion. Meanwhile, I'll eat for two—and listen to you. Fire away!"

XII

GUSTAVE'S LOVE AFFAIR

"I was saying, Monsieur Arthur, that, as I had received permission to go to Monsieur Gerbault's house, you will divine that I took advantage of it."

"Yes, indeed.—This fish is perfect; you make a great mistake not to eat it."

"Monsieur Gerbault, formerly a clerk in one of the government offices, has only a modest fortune; he is a widower with two daughters, to both of whom he has given an excellent education. Fanny is talented; she is a good musician, and knows English and Italian."

"And her sister?"

"Adolphine plays the piano, too, and sings quite well. She is very sweet and of a very amiable disposition; but, you see, I didn't pay any attention to the sister; I had eyes for Fanny alone. Her grace, her wit, her lovely eyes, all combined to turn my head. She saw it plainly enough, and, far from repelling me, she seemed to try to redouble her charms, in order to make me more in love with her than ever."

"The devil! she's a shrewd coquette!"

"Oh! no, monsieur! but it's her nature always to make herself attractive; she can't help it."

"Here's the capon *au gros sel*.—Now's the time for the champagne frappé. Corbleu! you'll drink some of this."

"But, monsieur——"

"It will give you strength, nerve. Nobody knows what may happen to-night; a man should always be ready for action."

"A year passed; I had the good fortune to make some lucky turns for Fanny; she had made nearly three thousand francs in railroad shares; she was overjoyed, and was already dreaming of an immense fortune. I had told her that I loved her, and she had replied, with a smile, that she suspected as much. Thereupon, I asked her if she would marry me, and she replied: 'My father can give only twenty thousand francs to each of his daughters, and you know what I have besides. That doesn't make much of an income.'

"'What does it matter?' said I; 'I love you with all my heart; if you had no marriage portion at all, I should none the less consider myself the happiest of men if I could obtain your hand.—I have twelve hundred francs a year,' I added, 'and my uncle pays me eighteen hundred; you see that we shall have enough to live comfortably.'

"Fanny listened to me, and seemed to reflect; but I had taken her hand and squeezed it, and she did not take it away.

"'Are you willing,' I said, 'that I should prefer my suit to your father to-morrow?'

"'That's not necessary,' she replied; 'we have time enough; and then, you need have no fear in that respect; father has told me a hundred times that he would not interfere with my choice; that he was sure that I would not marry anyone who would not make me happy.'

"For my part, I wanted to be married at once, but Fanny desired to add a little more to her capital before marrying, so that she might have a more substantial dowry to offer me. It was of no use for me to say that I cared nothing about that; I could not make her listen to reason."

"If you took that for love, my dear Gustave, you can hardly claim to be a connoisseur.—Here's your very good health!"

"Ah! monsieur; Fanny was always so amiable! her eyes always had such a sweet look in them when they met mine! she had such pretty, caressing little ways with me!"

"Yes, yes, I know. The whole battery of the petticoat file!"

"Six months more passed, and I implored Fanny to fix a date for our wedding. Unluckily, her operations in railroads no longer showed a profit; the shares she had bought had gone down; it was necessary to wait; and Fanny was angry at the way things were going on the Bourse.—It was about that time—— Ah! it was then that my misfortunes began."

"Courage, dear Gustave!—and another glass of Moët! Do take a wing of this capon—just a bit of white meat. What! nothing? Well, then, sapristi! I will sacrifice myself and eat the whole bird. Never mind what the result may be; but I will drink, too, for I must wash it down.—Your health!"

"As I was saying, it was about this time that Monsieur Auguste Monléard made the acquaintance of the Gerbault family—at a ball, I believe; he asked and obtained from the father permission to come occasionally and play and sing with the young ladies. I did not know that until later, for I did not happen to meet him for some time. The very first time that I saw him, I had a presentiment that his presence in Monsieur Gerbault's house would be fatal to my love. This Monléard made a great parade; he had a cabriolet and a negro footman; indeed, he had, so it was said, forty thousand francs a year. All that would have been a matter of indifference to me, if I had not noticed that he was very attentive, very gallant, to Fanny. However, she continued to smile on me in the most charming way; but when I said to her: 'Fix a day for our wedding, I beg you, and let me speak to your father,' she replied: 'Oh! not yet; we have plenty of time; I must increase my capital first.'

"One morning, I had escaped from my duties at my uncle's, who scolded me sometimes because love led me to neglect business."

"Did your uncle approve your matrimonial plans?"

"Not very warmly; he had said to me several times: 'You're too young to marry; wait awhile.'

"But when he saw how dearly I loved Fanny, he finally said: 'Do as you please; but if I were in your place, I'd have nothing to do with a young woman who speculates in railroad stocks.'"

"I am much of your uncle's opinion."

"And he added: 'You know that I will not give you a sou to be married on, don't you?'

"I replied: 'And you know that I ask you for nothing but your affection.'"

"A noble reply! and one that binds you to nothing.—Have a glass of champagne."

"I have already had one."

"So much the more reason for taking another. I say, my boy, order us a Périgord macaroni, and a *parfait à la vanille.*"

"Yes, monsieur."

"Waiter, how is the wedding party getting along?"

"They're at the second course, monsieur."

"They have not got beyond that!"

"What a delightful fellow this dear Gustave is! because he doesn't eat, he fancies that nobody else has any appetite."

"Is the bride eating, waiter?"

"Yes, monsieur; she's eating everything, I may say."

"Everything!"

Gustave angrily resumed his seat at the table, and held out his plate, saying to his companion:

"Very good! then I will eat, too! Give me some capon, Arthur; give me a lot of it!"

"Ah! good, good! spoken like a man! Now you're a man again! There's nothing left of the capon but one

drumstick and the carcass, but they're the most delicate parts."

"Give them to me, give them to me! Oh! what a fool, what an idiot, I have been! To give way to despair for a woman who makes sport of me, who eats everything, when she knows that I am consumed by grief!"

"You acted like a fool, and that's just what I've been killing myself telling you."

"Give me some wine!"

"Bravo! let's drink! This champagne is delicious, and I know what I'm talking about."

"Yes, I will think no more of her, I will forget everything, I will love some other woman."

"Pardieu! that's the true way! In love especially, I believe in homœopathy."

Gustave swallowed his glass of wine at a draught, then ate a few mouthfuls with a sort of avidity; but he soon pushed his plate away, and let his head fall on his breast, muttering:

"Oh! no, I shall never love another woman; I know well enough that it would be impossible."

"The deuce! here he is in another paroxysm of his passion! We shall have some difficulty in curing the dear boy; but we will succeed, even though that should necessitate our not leaving him for a second for ten years to come! Be yourself, Gustave, and finish your story, which, I presume, must be drawing near its end, and which interests me in the highest degree."

"Yes, yes; you are right!—I was saying that one morning, having gone to Monsieur Gerbault's house, I found Mademoiselle Adolphine alone. She greeted me with such a sorrowful air that I could not refrain from asking her what caused her sadness, and she replied: 'I suffer for your sake, I am grieved for you; for I know how dearly you love my sister, and I foresee how you will suffer when you learn that she is going to be married, and not to you.'

"'Great heaven!' I cried; 'can it be possible? Fanny, false to me! Fanny, give herself to another!'

"'Yes,' said Adolphine. 'It seems to me that it is especially cruel to let you hope on, when her marriage to Monsieur Auguste Monléard was decided on a fortnight ago.'

"'She is going to marry Monsieur Monléard!' I cried; 'she throws me over for that man! And she smiled at me only yesterday when I swore to love her all my life!'

"'That's the reason I determined to tell you all,' said Adolphine. 'I did not choose that you should be deceived any longer.'

"I need not tell you what a state of despair I was in. Adolphine tried in vain to comfort me; I could not believe in Fanny's treachery, and I insisted upon seeing her, and learning from her own lips that she preferred my rival to me.

"The next day, I found her alone. Can you believe that she greeted me with the same tranquillity, the same smile, as usual? So much so, that I cried: 'It isn't true, is it, Fanny, that you are going to marry another man?'—Thereupon, with a little pout to which she tried to give a fitting touch of melancholy, she replied: 'Yes, Gustave; it is true. Mon Dieu! you mustn't be angry with me. At all events, it will do no good, my friend; I have reflected. We haven't enough money to marry; we should have had to lead the sort of life in which one is always forced to count the cost before indulging in any pleasure, to see if it is compatible with one's means; and, frankly, it is not amusing to figure up whether one can afford to enjoy one's self a little, to buy a hat or a jewel which takes one's fancy. So I concluded that it was more sensible to marry Monsieur Monléard, who has a handsome fortune, and I have accepted his hand. But it seems to me that you shouldn't bear me a grudge, because I have acted like a sensible woman, and we can still remain friends.'

"'I, your friend!' I exclaimed, bursting into tears; 'when you give yourself to another, when you make me miserable for life!'

"I don't know what reply she made; but somebody came to tell her that the materials for her wedding gown had arrived, and she hurried away. Her calmness, her indifference, exasperated me. When I was alone, all sorts of incoherent ideas assailed me, but I know that I was determined to die. I was about to leave the house, fully resolved not to survive Fanny's treachery, when suddenly I felt a caressing hand on my arm, while a sweet voice said to me in an imploring tone: 'Be a man, Gustave, be brave; resolve to endure this misfortune, which seems to break your heart to-day. Time will allay your suffering—you will love another woman, who will love you in return, who will understand your heart; and later you will be happy—much happier, perhaps, than she, who thinks of nothing but money! But, I entreat you, promise me that you will live!'

"It was Adolphine who spoke to me thus. Her tears were flowing freely. When I found that my grief was shared, I felt a little relieved, for unhappiness makes a man selfish, and, when we are unhappy, it seems to us that other people ought to suffer as we do. I promised Fanny's sister to renounce my thoughts of death, and I left that house, to which I shall never return!"

"I drink to good little Adolphine's health! For my part, I love that feeling heart—I shall never forget her. And our dear uncle, what said he when he learned the result of your love affair?"

"My uncle? Oh! he doesn't believe in love, not he!"

"He was quite right not to believe in your Mademoiselle Fanny's."

"He has no confidence in women."

"He has probably made a study of them."

"In fact, when I told him that Fanny was to marry another, he had the heartlessness to retort that that was lucky for me."

"Frankly, I agree with him; for, after all, my boy as the damsel didn't love you——"

"Why, yes, she did love me, before she knew this Monléard."

"She gave you the preference when there was nobody else."

"He turned her head by his magnificence, his presents."

"It is much better for you that it happened before your marriage rather than after.—Here's to your health! Ah! here's the Périgord macaroni—with truffles on top—that's the checker! Do you know this way of

preparing macaroni?"

"It seems that he hastened the ceremony after our last interview; for that was only twelve days ago, and to-day I learned that the wedding was to take place at Notre-Dame-de-Lorette, to be followed by a banquet and ball here."

"Yes, and then you lost your head! You said to yourself: 'I will be there, I want to see what sort of a face the faithless creature will make when she sees me.'"

"True, monsieur, true. But they must have misinformed me as to the hour of the ceremony, for when I reached the church it was all over—they had gone."

"So much the better! that saved you one stab."

"Then I started off like a madman and ran all the way here, saying to myself: 'I simply must see her!'—And you know the rest, monsieur."

"I do, indeed; and if I hadn't been here, God knows what would have happened! But I'm a lucky dog; I almost always turn up when I'm wanted. Let us water the macaroni! I defy all the wedding parties in the place to dine better than me!"

XIII

A GENTLEMAN WHO HAD DINED WELL

Cherami had reached the dessert stage; he had amply repaired the ravages wrought in his stomach by the privation of the previous day, and he had watered his food so copiously with madeira, bordeaux, and champagne, that his face had become very red, his eyes very small, and his tongue very thick, which fact did not prevent his making constant use of it.

Gustave had drunk only two glasses of champagne; but, as he had eaten nothing at all, that had made him slightly tipsy, and he was beginning anew his trips from the dining-room to the corridor, when the waiter who served them hurried up to him, saying:

"The ladies are leaving the table, monsieur; I believe they are going to dress for the ball, for some of them have already put on their hats."

"Hurry back, then; take the bride's sister, Mademoiselle Adolphine, aside, and tell her that—Monsieur Gustave insists upon speaking to her—that I am waiting for her at the end of the corridor. Tell her that she simply must come; you understand, she must come! See, here are five francs more for you."

"Very good, monsieur. The bride's sister. But I don't know her, do I?"

"Mademoiselle Adolphine."

"Oh! yes, yes. I go, I fly, monsieur."

Gustave returned to the private room, where Cherami was occupied in admiring the bubbling of the champagne in his glass.

"She is coming! I am going to speak to her!" cried the young man.

"What! Do you mean that she's coming to join us here?"

"Yes. Oh! I am certain that she'll come. She would not like to drive me to do some crazy thing."

"All right! so much the better, sacrebleu! Let her come, and we'll tell her something. She's a sinner, a flirt."

"But it's Adolphine who's coming, not Fanny."

"Adolphine, the good little sister? Oh! that's a different matter. I will embrace her, I will even make love to her a bit, if she will permit me."

"They are going away, to dress for the ball; but first, I am determined—— Ah! someone is coming—a woman—it's she!"

It was, in fact, the young Adolphine, who ran along the corridor, trembling with distress and emotion, and entered the room, crying:

"What! Monsieur Gustave! you here! Why, in heaven's name, did you come?"

"Because I knew that she was here—and I hope to see her once more."

"Ah! mon Dieu! what madness!—And you, monsieur, you promised to take care of him."

"Why, mademoiselle, I am doing just that; I haven't lost sight of him a moment; and if I hadn't been here, to constantly restrain him, he would have gone twenty times to make trouble at your wedding feast, and to insult the husband."

"Oh! Gustave!"

"No, no, Adolphine; have no fear of that."

"Don't you trust what he says, mademoiselle; he's lost his head; luckily, I am here; I am calm and prudent."

"But why did you come here?"

"We came here to dine, mademoiselle, which we had a perfect right to do. For, after all, although a man may not belong to a wedding party, that need not prevent his dining, and dining very well too, I give you my word."

"But I can't stay any longer!—We are going away to dress; I am sure they are waiting for me. What do you want of me, Monsieur Gustave?"

"To beg you to give me an opportunity to speak to your sister once more."

"To Fanny? Why, it isn't possible! Besides, what would you say to her?"

"I will say good-bye to her forever; I will tell her that I hope that she will be happy—although she has wrecked my life."

"But how do you suppose that she can speak to you in secret? she is always surrounded; there's always somebody with us. What would people say? what would they think?"

"If you refuse, I will go and speak to her during the ball."

"Well—no—— Wait here, then; and, when we return from dressing, I will try—I will make her come through this corridor."

"Oh! thanks, thanks a thousand times! Ah! you are too kind!"

"I must go; adieu! But, in heaven's name, keep out of sight, don't show yourself!"

As she spoke, Adolphine made a sign of intelligence to Cherami, who imagined that the charming young woman was throwing him a kiss; but she disappeared just as he left the table to go to embrace her; and as the waiter entered the room at that moment, the ex-beau bestowed a resounding smack upon that functionary's cheek.

"Sacrebleu! what is this?" cried Cherami, roughly pushing back the waiter, who stood by the door in open-mouthed amazement at the caress he had received.—"Why the devil do you come up under my nose, waiter? Plague take the knave! I said to myself: 'Gad! this young lady uses very cheap soap!'"

"Pardon, monsieur; it isn't my fault; I was coming in, and you ran into my arms. I know well enough that it wasn't me you meant to embrace."

"It's lucky that you understand that."

"Waiter, what are the ladies doing now?"

"They are all going away, monsieur."

"And the men?"

"Some of them have gone, too; but many stayed, and are playing cards."

"And the Blanquette party, waiter—what are they doing now?"

"The Blanquette party are still at table, monsieur, and singing."

"Ah! I recognize them by that. They'll sit at table till ten o'clock, those people; the petty bourgeois sing at dessert, which is very bad form. However, I confess that I have sometimes gone so far as to hum a ditty myself; I have even composed one on occasion, one which Panard or Collé wouldn't have been ashamed to father. But I like a touch of smut myself; don't talk to me of your insipid ballads about roses and zephyrs and the springtime; no, nor your political ballads either; I abominate them; and yet, that's the kind of thing that makes great reputations; and I know men who would have been nothing more than common ballad-mongers, if they hadn't flattered parties and passions, and who have reached the very pinnacle of fame because they always end their couplets with the words *fatherland* and *liberty*. O Armand Gouffé! O Désaugiers! you didn't resort to such methods, so very little is heard of you. You are none the less the real French ballad-makers; your fruitful and vigorous muse has discovered innumerable varied subjects and described them in song, which is much more difficult than to keep harping on the same refrain."

"But, my dear Monsieur Arthur, now that I am waiting for the return of the bride, to whom I shall say adieu forever, if your affairs call you elsewhere, do not hesitate to go. Leave me; I have abused your good-nature too far already."

"I, leave you! No, indeed! What do you take me for?—What! after accepting your suggestion that we should dine together, leave you all of a sudden at dessert? Fie! Only a cad would do that; and, thank God! I know what good-breeding is. Tell me, do I annoy you? Is my presence distasteful to you?"

"Ah! far from it, my dear sir; you have shown an interest in my affairs, which I shall never forget."

"We were born to be friends, and we are; that is settled, your affairs are mine, what concerns you concerns me. Wherever there is danger for you, it is my duty to look after you; and, you understand, if, while you are talking with the bride, her new husband should happen to come prowling about here, I will just step in front of him and say: 'I am very sorry, my boy, but you can't pass!'"

"Oh! a thousand thanks for your devotion to me! Waiter! waiter! our bill!"

"Here it is, monsieur."

"You pay for the dinner; that's all right; but as we are to stay here some little time perhaps, we must have something to keep us busy."

"Order whatever you want."

"Waiter, make us a nice little rum punch; it's excellent for the digestion; the English eat a great deal, but they drink punch at dessert, and they're all right. Would you like to play cards, to kill time?"

"Thanks, it would be impossible for me to put my mind on the game."

"I don't insist. I am rather fond of cards, but I don't carry that passion to excess. Pardieu! I don't say that I may not take a hand by and by at the Blanquette function. Did I tell you that I knew them? They're linen-drapers; that sort of people play rather high; but that doesn't frighten me. Ah! here's our punch! I divine it by the odor; the table is excellent at this house."

Cherami lost no time in partaking of the punch. Gustave refused it at first, but finally consented to take a glass.

The night had come; the lights were lighted on all sides. With the darkness, the unhappy lover's thoughts became more gloomy, his suffering more intense; he buried his face in his hands, muttering:

"It's all over! O Fanny! Fanny! you will belong to another! Ah! I shall die of my grief!"

"Sapristi!" said Cherami to himself, swallowing several glasses of punch in rapid succession; "this youngster is very lachrymose; he isn't lively in his cups. With me, it's different; I feel in the mood to dance at all the wedding parties, and to play cards too—only I shall have to borrow a few napoleons from my new friend, in order to be able to tempt fortune. I have an idea that I shall have a vein of luck! I say, my dear friend, aren't we drinking any more?"

"Oh! no, thanks, monsieur!"

"Then I will drink for both of us. This punch is too sweet! Here, waiter, put in more rum, a lot of it!"

"But, monsieur, there's no more punch in the bowl."

"Well! then make another bowl, but make it stronger."

The other bowl was brought.

After drinking two more glasses, Cherami tried to rise, but was obliged to hold on to the table to keep from falling; however, although he felt that his legs were wavering under him, he determined to maintain his dignity, and did his best to keep his balance as he walked toward the door.

XIV

THE PUNCH PRODUCES ITS EFFECT

"They are a long while coming back, those ladies!" muttered Gustave, coming and going from the room to the corridor.

"Oh! my dear fellow, when a woman's at her toilet, one can never be sure how long a time she'll spend over it. One day, I remember, in the time of my splendor, I was waiting for my mistress, to go to the theatre, to see a new play. I believe it was at the Opéra-Comique—but, no matter. She had finally got dressed,—it had taken her a long while,—when, happening to look in the mirror, she cried: 'My wreath of blue-bottles is too far down on my forehead—I must change it—it's just a matter of putting in a pin.'—'All right,' said I; 'put in your pin. I'll wait'—My dear fellow, that pin, and all the others that she put in after it, took an hour and a half! and when we reached the theatre, the new play was over."

Observing that his young companion had fallen into abstraction once more, and was paying no heed to him, Cherami decided to leave the private room and try his fortunes in the corridor, saying to himself:

"I feel the need of a little fresh air; it's as hot as the tropics in these private dining-rooms. Ah! what do I see yonder? Ladies—many ladies. I must go and cast an eye in that direction. The fair sex attracts me—it's my magnet."

The ladies of the Monléard party were beginning to return, arrayed for the ball. To reach the room where they were to dance, they had to pass along the corridor to the main staircase. Cherami took his stand at the head of the staircase, and there ogled the ladies, bowed to them all as if he knew them, and spoke to each of them as she passed.

"Charming, on my word! A divine costume!—White shoulders that would drive Venus to despair!—Ah! how we are going to flirt!—A very pretty head-dress; bravo!—Ah! here's a mamma who proposes to play the coy maiden. Dear lady, you will find difficulty in getting partners, I warn you. There are pretty faces here that will monopolize all the cavaliers. Oho! what fine eyes! they are like carbuncles. Who will deign to accept my hand or my arm? I am at your service, fair ladies!"

But the ladies, instead of accepting the hand which my gentleman offered them, passed him without replying, or shrank from him, because there was in his whole aspect a seediness entirely out of harmony with their ball-dresses; moreover, he smelt so strongly of punch and liquors that it was impossible to pass him without receiving a whiff of the odor.

Several ladies put their handkerchiefs to their faces as they hurried by, and some exclaimed: "Why, who can that man be? Where did he come from? He is drunk!—Surely he is not one of Monsieur Monléard's wedding guests. What is he doing there, like a sentinel? He speaks to everybody, and with an astonishing lack of ceremony. He poisons the air with wine and liquor. Can't somebody send the horrible creature away?"

These complaints soon reached the ears of the gentlemen who had remained to play cards. Some of them rose and walked into the hall, saying:

"Parbleu! we will find out who this fellow is who takes the liberty of speaking to ladies whom he doesn't know!"

Cherami had just offered his hand to a pretty little woman, who had refused it and instantly put her handkerchief to her nose. This pantomime, having been frequently repeated in front of the ex-beau, began to offend him, and he suddenly exclaimed:

"Deuce take it! what's the matter with all these prudes, that they hide their faces with their handkerchiefs? Can it be because they think that I have any desire to kiss them! Ah! I've seen prettier women than you—who didn't run away from me, my princesses!"

"To whom are you speaking, monsieur? Is it these ladies to whom you dare to address such language?"

"Hallo! who's this? where did he come from? Ah! what a noble head!"

"It is for you, monsieur, to answer those questions. Off with you, at once, or I'll put you out-of-doors."

"Out-of-doors, eh? Understand that I dined here—with my friend Gustave—Gustave something or other—and that I have as much right as you to stay here—that I won't go away."

"I forbid you to speak to these ladies."

"Thanks! I have my cue."

The ladies interposed to prevent a dispute, and succeeded in taking their champions away with them, saying:

"You can see that the man's drunk. What satisfaction do you expect to obtain from a man who hasn't his senses? Leave him there, and pay no more attention to him."

The men yielded to this request, and they left Cherami standing there and entered the ballroom.

Meanwhile, the waiter who had served the dinner in the private room ran up to Cherami.

"The gentleman who dined with you is going away; someone has come for him."

"What! my friend Gustave going away? Why, it's impossible! He won't go without me; besides, he's waiting for the bride; we must have the bride; she's been promised to us."

"He's going, I tell you."

The ex-beau decided to return to the private room, and found at the door his young friend and a man of mature years, short of stature, but with a cold, stern face which imposed respect. They were on the point of leaving.

"Well, well! what does this mean?" cried Cherami. "What! my dear Gustave, going, and without me—your intimate friend, your Orestes, your Patroclus?"

"Who is this new friend of yours, whom I don't know, whom I have never seen with you?" the short man asked Gustave, whose arm he held fast.

"It's a gentleman who has been kind enough to take some interest in me, uncle," faltered Gustave;—"I was so unhappy—and to keep me company."

"And whose dinner you have paid for, I presume? Your friend did not spare himself."

"What do I hear? Monsieur is your uncle?"

"Yes, monsieur; I am Gustave's uncle."

"Then you are Monsieur Grandcourt?"

"Just so."

"Oh! Delighted to make the acquaintance of my friend's uncle."

"I am obliged to you, monsieur; but we are going."

"What! you are going? Pray, do you not know that your dear nephew desires to speak once more with the bride, the faithless Fanny?"

"Indeed, I do know it, and it was for the express purpose of preventing that interview, which might result in a scandalous scene, that I came here and that I am taking my nephew away."

"But her little sister, the charming Adolphine, would have obtained an interview for us in secret."

"You are mistaken, monsieur; for it was Mademoiselle Adolphine herself who sent word to me that my nephew was here, and begged me to exert my authority to take him away and prevent his seeing her sister; that young woman realized all the impropriety of the proposed interview."

"What! it was the little sister who sent word to you? Ah! the little mouse! These women are all leagued together to fool us."

"On this occasion, monsieur, Mademoiselle Adolphine showed as much good sense as prudence, and she deserves only praise from us. Come, Gustave, say adieu to monsieur, thank him for the service which he intended, I doubt not, to render you, and let's be off."

"So it's all over, uncle, is it? you drag me away without allowing me to see her once more?"

"Really, nephew, you disgust me with your love and your regrets for a woman who has treated you with contempt, played with you like a child. Be a man, for God's sake! Repay contempt with contempt, scorn with scorn! and blush to think that you placed your affections so ill. Let us go."

"One moment, dear uncle of my friend: I desire most earnestly to know you more intimately. Gustave will tell you that I am worthy of your friendship. I do not accompany you, because I am going to the Blanquette wedding feast, which is on the second floor. Give me your address, please; I will call and breakfast with you to-morrow."

"It is useless, monsieur; to-morrow, we shall be at Havre."

"At Havre? Very good! it's all the same to me; I will go there with you. Ah! my dear Gustave, do let go of the dear uncle's arm a moment; I have a word to say to you in private, just a word; but it's very important."

But, paying no further heed to Cherami, Monsieur Grandcourt led his nephew away at a rapid pace, and they left the restaurant while Gustave's friend was still talking to them in the corridor.

XV

THE ÉCARTÉ PLAYERS

When he finally discovered that he was alone, Cherami returned to the private dining-room, sat down at the table, looked into the bowl, where there was still some punch, and poured out a glass, saying to himself:

"After all, I shall have no difficulty in finding them again. The uncle doesn't seem quite so amiable as the nephew; there's a something stiff and cold in his face. He fell in here like a bombshell. It's a pity; I felt just in the mood to kidnap the bride before the noses of the Athenians and of all those hussies who hid their faces with their handkerchiefs. Suppose I go and clean out the whole crowd? No, they're not worth the trouble. I prefer to pay a visit to the Blanquette festivity; there I am known, they won't treat me as an intruder. Sapristi! what a pity that I hadn't the time to borrow a few napoleons from my new friend. He would have loaned them to me; there's no doubt about it. Ah! I waited too long; but I couldn't suspect that an uncle would arrive all of a sudden—just as they do in vaudevilles, to bring about an unexpected dénouement. Aha! what do I hear? Music, they're playing a quadrille. Gad! it seems to me that I could make a pretty figure at a little contra-dance. That music puts me right in the mood for it. O power of music! *Emollit mores nec sint esse feros.* I think I'll go and say that to the bucks who are dancing upstairs! They'd think I was asking them for a cigar.—Pretty music! Sapristi! it shall not be said that I remained alone in this room, like a bear in its cage, while everybody else in the place is enjoying himself. Here goes for a look in at the Blanquette function."

And Cherami jumped to his feet, put his hat on his head, took his little cane, and rushed from the room. When he was in the corridor, he lurched against the wall more than once; but, with the instinct of a man accustomed to frequent over-indulgence, he drew himself up and steadied himself on his legs.

"What does this mean?" he said.—"You stumble for a glass or two of punch? Come, come, Arthur, I shouldn't know you, my boy; you're not drunk, you can't be drunk."

Thereupon the mind steadied the body, and he walked to the stairway with a somewhat less uncertain step. There he could plainly hear the orchestra of the elegant Monléard ball. He paused a moment, saying to himself:

"Suppose I should enter abruptly, and make a scene with the perfidious Fanny, in behalf of my young friend Gustave—what a stunning coup! what an effect I would produce!—Yes, but those people don't know me; they don't know that I once had thirty-five thousand francs a year, and that I have been the most popular man in Paris. They would be quite capable of treating me as an intruder! I should talk back—and then, duels! Let's not end in sadness a day so well employed. *Dies fasti*, as the Romans used to say. It's surprising how the punch brings back my Latin! Let's go up a floor, and join the Blanquette wedding party; there, at all events, I know the bridegroom slightly, and the uncle very well. I owe him four or five hundred francs for cloth—an additional reason why he should receive me well; a man never closes his door to his debtors."

Having arrived on the second floor, Cherami heard the strains of another orchestra; he passed through a large room where he saw nothing but men's hats hanging on hooks, and immediately hung up his own and placed his cane beside it.

"I must show my breeding," he said to himself; "one doesn't appear at a wedding party as at a messroom. Ah! what do I see in that corner? a very fine yellow glove, on my word! Pardieu! it arrives most opportunely! It's for the left hand, but, no matter: I can keep the other in my pocket. It fits me, it really fits me beautifully! What a pity that the man who dropped it didn't drop the right-hand one too! No matter; this one gives a sort of dressed-up, coquettish air, which sets off the wearer. I will keep my right hand under the tail of my coat—nay, I will skilfully hold both tails in my hand, and people will think I'm in full dress. Forward, charge their guns!"

Cherami passed into a second room, which was occupied by card-players: there were two tables of whist and one of écarté. With the exception of two elderly women at one of the whist tables, there were only men in the room; and as they were all busily engaged in playing, or watching the play, nobody noticed the arrival of the party in plaid trousers.

Cherami smiled at everybody, although he saw no one whom he knew; there were very few persons about the whist tables—only one or two enthusiasts watching the games—so that one could easily approach them. It was not the same with the écarté table; there was a crowd of young men about it, and it was very difficult to see their hands.

Cherami walked about for some minutes, daintily scratching the end of his nose with his gloved hand, and holding the other behind his back, under the skirt of his coat. Suddenly one of the players cried:

"Twenty francs lacking! Come, gentlemen; who'll make it good?"

"Not I, by a long shot!" said a young man, turning toward Cherami; "they're having extraordinary luck! They have passed six times over there! But I know Minoret; he's a lucky dog! When he sets about it, he's quite capable of passing twenty times in succession."

"Still twenty francs lacking," the same voice repeated; "who makes it good?"

"I," cried Cherami, in a loud voice. "I make it good; I trust to Monsieur Minoret's luck."

This remark attracted general attention to Cherami. The young men scrutinized him, then smiled, and said to one another:

"Who the deuce is this fellow?"

"What an extraordinary figure!"

"And his dress is even more extraordinary. Who ever heard of going to a wedding in plaid trousers and waistcoat!"

"And they're far from new."

"He wasn't at the supper, I'm sure."

"No. I would like right well to know who he is. He seems to know Minoret."

A moment later, the player addressed as Minoret spoke again:

"Well! who is it who makes good the twenty francs? Why doesn't he put up the money?"

"I am the man, monsieur, who makes it good," replied Cherami, still louder than before; "and, sapristi! when I say that I make it good, it seems to me that it's the same thing as if I had put up the money! But perhaps you'll give me time to find my purse, which has slipped into the lining of my waistcoat."

The tone in which Cherami spoke imposed silence upon all those who surrounded the écarté table. It rarely happens that one cannot, by talking loud enough, produce that effect on the multitude; and if the victory on the battlefield almost always remains with the greatest numbers, so in a discussion it almost always remains with the loudest voices.

So the card-players concluded to deal the cards and go on with the game. Meanwhile, Cherami went through a very curious pantomime. Having decided to withdraw his right hand from behind his back, he plunged it into one pocket of his waistcoat, then into the other, then into his trousers-pockets, pretending to be in search of something which he was very sure of not finding; but he went about it with a zeal which deceived the most incredulous, interspersing his investigations with such ejaculations as:

"Where the devil have I put my purse! It's inconceivable—as soon as you begin to look for a thing, you can't remember what you did with it! I certainly had it just now when I paid my cabman. Can I have dropped it beside my pocket, thinking that I put it inside? Let's try this side; it seems to me that I feel something. Yes—I have it at last. Oh! the devil! it isn't my purse, it's my cigar-case!—I believe I haven't looked in this pocket."

But, as our bettor hoped, the game came to an end before he had finished his search; and ere long these words reached his ears, and filled his heart with joy:

"I was sure of it; Minoret has won again!"

Cherami instantly rushed to the table, extended his left hand, closed, to the player on whom he had bet, and said:

"I have just found my purse: here's the twenty francs I bet on you, monsieur."

"You don't need to put up the money, monsieur, as we have won," replied Minoret; "on the contrary, here's twenty francs that belongs to you."

As he spoke, the player handed Cherami a twenty-franc piece; but in order to take it, he would have had to open the hand which he held tightly closed, and then they would have seen that he had nothing in it. Like the shrewd man he was, he realized the peril of his position, and boldly solved the difficulty by replying in his turn:

"Very good, monsieur; keep the twenty francs; I will bet on you again."

To those who consider that it was very imprudent for a man who had not a sou, to risk upon one deal the twenty francs he had just won, we reply that, as a general rule, those who are most in need of money play for the highest stakes. Moreover, in this instance, Cherami was excused by the embarrassing position in which he was placed.

Monsieur Minoret's luck did not change; he won six times more, and was not beaten until the seventh; and Cherami, who had continued to bet on the same side, found himself in possession of one hundred and twenty francs when he left the table, at which he had taken his place without a sou. There was a fitting occasion to speak Latin; and our gambler, after the sacramental "I have my cue," did not fail to add: "*Audaces fortuna juvat!*" Never was maxim more fittingly applied; indeed, one might perhaps consider that on this occasion Cherami was something more than audacious.

"I must confess that I did well to bet!" said Cherami to himself, jingling in his pockets the gold pieces he had won. "Pardieu! I am tempted to go and buy a right-hand glove. Bah! what's the use? I may well have lost the other. The first owner of this one must find himself in the same predicament. Let's go to the ballroom; I feel in the mood for a polka, and if there's any susceptible female there, I will fascinate her by my glances."

XVI

THE BLANQUETTE WEDDING BALL

The ballroom was long and narrow; a waltz was in progress at the moment selected by Cherami to make his appearance. He began by running into a couple who were waltzing in two-time, which means that they were out of step, as a waltz is always in three-time. Surely they who invented that style of dancing could not have had a musical ear. Now, waltzers in two-time always move very rapidly; indeed, that is the main purpose of the innovation. Cherami, colliding suddenly with the couple as they passed, stepped back and came in contact with some waltzers in three-time, who were abandoning themselves voluptuously to the charms of the waltz; the lady, letting her head hang languidly on one side, and keeping her eyes half-closed to avoid being dizzy; her partner, holding himself firm on his legs, pressing his partner's waist with an arm of iron, and gazing down at her with eyes that flashed fire.

Being abruptly aroused from their ecstasy by a person who bumped against them and threw them out of step, they cried:

"Pray be careful! Mon Dieu! how awkward some people are!"

"What's that! be careful yourselves!" retorted the man with one glove. "What the devil! you waltzed into my back."

"But you should get out of the way, monsieur! The idea of standing in front of people who are waltzing!"

"Ah! monsieur, you have torn my dress, and you trod on my foot!"

"But who is this shabbily dressed individual, who scratches his nose with a bright yellow glove, and runs into everybody? Do you know him?"

"No."

"Nor I."

"Nor I."

"Wait; Minoret must know him; he bet on Minoret's hand."

And a young man went up to Minoret, who had also entered the ballroom, and said to him:

"My dear Minoret, tell me who that extraordinary person in the Scotch trousers is, who bet twenty francs on you just now?"

"Who? that tall man with the red face, holding his left hand in the air?"

"Yes."

"I don't know him at all."

"But he called you by name when he bet."

"I don't know whether he knows me, or not, but I don't know him."

"That's strange. He acts as if he were a little tipsy. We must find out who he is. Ah! there's Armand, one of the groomsmen. I say, Armand, come here a moment; tell us who that man is, whose costume is so unconventional for a wedding party?"

"The gentleman in a frock-coat, who runs into everybody?"

"The same."

"I have just asked the bride, and she doesn't know him either."

"And the groom?"

"He is dancing. But there's his uncle, Monsieur Blanquette; I'll go and ask him about the fellow; and if

nobody knows him, we'll soon show him the door, I promise you."

But before the groomsman could reach the bridegroom's uncle, Cherami, who had spied the linen-draper, hastened to meet him, and said, tapping him on the stomach:

"Here I am, my dear friend! You didn't ask me to your party, but I said to myself: 'I'll go all the same, because, with old acquaintances, one shouldn't take offence at trifles.'—Then what did I do?—I dined here, in a private room on the first floor, and dined magnificently, too, I flatter myself! and then I came up to say bonsoir to you, and to salute the bride—and to dance with anybody, I don't care who! I'm an obliging person, you see.—So there you are, my dear Papa Blanquette. Old friends are always on hand, as the song says."

Monsieur Blanquette was surprised beyond words to find himself confronted by the gentleman whom he had met in the afternoon, when he alighted from his carriage. He did not seem overjoyed to see him at the ball; but as he did not desire his nephew's wedding party to be disturbed by any unpleasant scene, he strove to conceal his annoyance, and rejoined:

"Faith, Monsieur Cherami, I didn't expect to see you again! So you dined at this restaurant, did you?"

"Yes, my estimable friend; and dined deliciously, too, I beg you to believe."

"So I perceive!"

"What! so you perceive! and by what do you perceive it, I pray to know?"

"Why, because you seem to be much inclined—to laugh."

"I am always cheerful when I am among my friends. That's my nature, you know. Pray present me to the bride."

"But, excuse me—it seems to me that you are hardly in ball dress—and the ladies are rather particular about that."

"If you'd invited me, I'd have come in full dress; you didn't invite me, so I came as a neighbor. All is for the best, as Doctor Pangloss says. Present me to your niece."

"Later; they are going to dance now; you see they are forming a quadrille. Let us go into another room."

"They are going to dance, eh? Then I'll not go, deuce take me! for I can dance, you know. I used to be one of the best of La Chaumière's pupils, and she was a pupil of Chicard. People fought for places to see me dance the *Tulipe Orageuse.* I propose to show you that I haven't forgotten it all."

Thereupon the ex-beau, leaving Monsieur Blanquette, walked toward the benches on which the ladies were seated, and offered his gloved hand to one of the younger ones, saying:

"Will you do me the honor, lovely coryphée, to accept my hand for this contra-dance?"

"I am engaged, monsieur."

Cherami thereupon addressed the same request to one after another, varying his phrase slightly; but there was no variation in the replies; it was always the same formula:

"I am engaged."

For no young woman, married or unmarried, cared to dance with a person so red of face, so shabbily dressed, smelling so strongly of rum, and with his right hand always behind his back.

"Sapristi! it seems that all the ladies have been engaged beforehand!" cried Cherami, glaring at the benches in turn; "I am refused all along the line!"

But at every ball there is sure to be some elderly woman, ugly, dowdily dressed, who still has the assurance to take her place among the dancers. Our Arthur finally espied a lady of that type, sitting in a corner; on her head was a sort of turban, laden with an appalling mass of flowers, feathers, and lace.

"I shall be unlucky indeed, if this creature is engaged!" said Cherami to himself, boldly directing his steps toward the turbaned dame.

He had not delivered half of his invitation, when she rose as if impelled by a spring, and seized his gloved hand, saying:

"With pleasure; yes, monsieur; I accept. Oh! I will dance as long as you please."

"In that case, fair lady, let us take our places."

Almost all the sets were full. But Cherami was not to be denied; he planted himself in front of a short youth and his partner; and when the youth remonstrated: "But, monsieur, this place is taken, we were here before you," he replied, in a supercilious tone: "I don't know whether you were before us, my good man; but I do know that I have the honor to be here now with madame, and that I will not stir except at the point of the bayonet!"

The young man dared not make any further resistance; moreover, the guests were whispering to one another on all sides:

"That original is dancing with Aunt Merlin!"

"What! Aunt Merlin dancing?"

"Yes, with the man in Scotch trousers. This is going to be great fun!"

And all those who were not dancing ran to watch the set in which Cherami and Aunt Merlin were to figure.

"Sapristi! I have lost one of my gloves!" cried Arthur, making a pretence of feeling in his pocket, and looking on the floor. "Will you pardon me, fair lady, for dancing with a single glove?"

"Oh! certainly, monsieur," replied the lady with the turban, in a simpering tone; "you are forgiven; indeed, the same thing happened to Monsieur Courbichon; when he arrived here for the ball, he discovered that he had lost one of his gloves—only it was the left one, in his case."

"Ah! that's very amusing! Then we have the pair between us! I shall laugh a long while over that. It's our turn, fair lady."

The first figure passed off quietly enough, as the English chain and the cat's tail gave Cherami no chance to display his talent; but in the second, in the *avant-deux*, he began to take steps and attitudes of the cancan in

its purest and most unblushing form. The men laughed till they cried, and the women as well, murmuring:

"Why, this is frightful! where does that fellow think he is, for heaven's sake?"

The most amusing feature of the episode was that Cherami's partner, spurred on by the strange evolutions and the eccentric steps of her cavalier, thought that she ought to do as he did, and began to twist and turn, and throw her legs to right and left, with an ardor which kept all the flowers on her turban in commotion.

The laughter became more uproarious.

"I venture to believe that we are producing some effect," said Cherami to his partner; "but I am not surprised; whenever I dance, the people crowd to watch me."

Meanwhile, from one end of the room to the other, the guests were saying:

"The man in the plaid trousers is dancing the cancan with Aunt Merlin; it's most amusing!"

Some of the couples ceased dancing, in order to watch the performance of Aunt Merlin and her partner. The uproar soon reached the ears of Monsieur Blanquette, the uncle; the bride's mother, a most respectable woman, said to him:

"I beg you, Monsieur Blanquette, go and tell my sister not to dance the cancan. Everybody here is laughing at her, and she doesn't notice it. Oh! what a mistake you made in inviting that tall man with the red face!"

"Mon Dieu! madame, I assure you that I didn't invite him. He's a man who owes me money—whom I knew when he was rich and well-dressed.—He has ruined himself completely. He caught sight of me this morning, when we were getting out of the carriages; and to-night he takes the liberty of coming to our ball. I didn't dare tell him to leave—because, you understand, that's an embarrassing thing to do. But if he presumes to dance indecently—why, then I shan't hesitate."

Monsieur Blanquette walked toward the quadrille which caused such a prodigious sensation. Cherami was in the act of executing the *chaloupe* with his partner, who continued to second him as best she could. The bridegroom's uncle sidled up behind her, and said in an undertone:

"Don't dance like that, Madame Merlin, I beg you; that's the way they dance at low dance-halls. Decent people don't make such exhibitions of themselves in a salon."

"It seems to me that I am dancing very well, monsieur," replied Aunt Merlin, sourly; "and the way the people crowd to watch us proves it."

"I assure you, Madame Merlin, that it isn't proper, and your sister is much annoyed."

"My sister's annoyed because she's got beyond dancing. Let her leave me alone! I propose to dance, I tell you!"

"What is it, my nymph, eh?" cried Cherami; "what did old Père Blanquette say to you?"

"He declares that our dance isn't proper."

"Ah! that's very fine! What box has he just come out of, to be shocked at our dance? Doesn't he go to the play, I wonder? Hasn't he ever seen the Spanish dancers? They've been at almost all the theatres. Ah! bigre! if he'd seen those females do their *fandangos*, their *iotas*, and their *boleros*, and indulge in all sorts of antics, showing their legs, yes, and their garters too! that's much worse than the cancan. But that doesn't prevent those Spaniards from drawing the crowd, wherever they are. And you don't like it, because I dance the cancan, and yet you rush to see licentious dances performed by women whose costumes add to the effect of their dancing! Sapristi! for God's sake, try to make up your mind what you want!—Our turn, my Terpsichore; attention! this is the *pastourelle*, and I am saving a little surprise for you in the *cavalier seul*."

Aunt Merlin darted off like an arrow, paying no heed to the remonstrances of Père Blanquette, who heaved sigh upon sigh when he saw how easy it is to lead a woman on to make a fool of herself, even when her age should make her sensible. But the time came for Cherami to perform the *cavalier seul*; excited by all that he had drunk, and recalling the feats of his younger days, he performed the evolution called the *araignée*, which consists in throwing yourself flat on your stomach in front of the opposite couple. This bit of gymnastics was greeted with frantic laughter; and Aunt Merlin, turning to Papa Blanquette, cried:

"What do you say to that? Could you do as much?"

"No, certainly not, madame; and I wouldn't try," retorted the uncle; "but I consider it very presumptuous. Your partner must have the devil in him, to do such crazy things!"

Aunt Merlin had ceased to listen; the last figure had arrived, that in which the galop is the leading feature; and said Cherami, as he put his arm about her waist:

"We'll just show the others how to galop. Fichtre! they'd better look out for themselves. They ran into me when they were waltzing, but we'll pay them back in their own coin."

With that, he started off with his partner, whirling her about as they danced. Beau Arthur had been one of the most notable performers in the formidable galops which are a feature of the masked balls at the Opéra. The punch renewed the vigor of his youth. Throwing himself headlong into the midst of the assemblage, dancers and onlookers, he rushed through the room like a whirlwind or an avalanche, hurling this one aside, colliding with that one, and sowing confusion everywhere. In vain did they shout to him:

"Stop, monsieur; stop at once! you're throwing the ladies down!"

Cherami kept on; not until Aunt Merlin's turban fell, would he consent to deposit her upon a bench, with her eyes starting from her head. But at that moment several gentlemen, boiling over with wrath, surrounded the terrible galoper.

"Monsieur, you threw my partner down!"

"Monsieur, you have crushed my daughter's nose!"

"Monsieur, you upset my wife; when she fell, her elastic skirt sprang up over her head, so that everybody could see—what I alone have the right to see!"

"Monsieur, you must give me satisfaction!"

"Monsieur, you haven't seen the end of this!"

While he was thus apostrophized on all sides, Cherami calmly wiped the perspiration from his face, and said:

"Sapristi! what's the matter with them all? They are delightful!—I consider that you're a delightful lot! You ought to have got out of the way; that's what I did, when you ran into me while you were waltzing just now. Is it my fault, if you don't know how to keep on your legs? What a terrible thing, if your estimable daughter's nose is a little bruised; and if your wife, monsieur, did show some admirable things! It seems to me that you ought to be flattered by the accident, for everybody must envy your good fortune."

These retorts were far from appeasing the wrath of the husbands, brothers, and fathers who had been maltreated in the persons of the objects of their affections. But Uncle Blanquette forced his way through the crowd, and said to him who had caused all the confusion, assuming a tone which he strove to make dignified:

"Monsieur, you have caused a grave perturbation at my nephew's wedding party——"

"Ha! ha! *perturbation* is a pretty word; I must remember it. Never mind; proceed, Papa Blanquette."

"People in our society do not indulge in such improper dances as those you have performed, monsieur."

"But, if I remember right, Aunt Merlin seemed to enjoy that dance pretty well."

"I didn't invite you to our ball, monsieur; so I consider it much too—much too——"

"Presumptuous!—you can't find the word, but that's it, I fancy; eh?"

"Yes, monsieur; too presumptuous, to appear where you're not invited, and especially in a costume so negligée as yours. You have thrown down enough persons; we don't care to have any more of it, and I beg you to go."

"Ah! that's your idea of politeness, is it? Very good! bonsoir! I will go! Your party isn't so very fine, after all; I haven't seen a single glass of punch. And you fancy that you do things in style, do you? No, no! you're a long way behind the times!"

"Be good enough to remember also, monsieur, that you owe me four hundred and ninety-five francs; and, if you don't quit, I will take harsh measures——"

"Bravo! I expected that—that's the bouquet! The idea of talking about your account at a ball! Look you, old Blanquette: you make me sick! *Adieu, Rome, I go!*—Mesdames, I lay my homage at your feet. I am sorry to have jostled you a little; but, on my word of honor, it was the fault of your partners; they didn't know how to hold you."

This fresh insult to the male portion of the guests renewed their wrath, and they threatened to attack Cherami. He removed his yellow glove and threw it at their feet, saying:

"Here, this is all I can do for you! I expect you all to-morrow morning. My friend Blanquette[C] of veal will give you my address. Bring pistols, sabres, swords, what you please. I shall have nothing but a rabbit's tail, understand, and with that rabbit's tail I defy you all!"

This heroic challenge seemed to calm the wrath of his adversaries to some extent. But, while they were staring at one another, a little, bald man darted forward and picked up the glove.

"That's my glove," he cried; "I recognize it; it's the left-hand glove that I lost; it has been mended on the thumb; this is the very one!"

Cherami did not hear Monsieur Courbichon. He left the ballroom, passed rapidly through the cardroom, and, taking a hat from a nail and a cane from a corner, left the last of the rooms and descended the stairs, saying to himself:

"I snap my fingers at them. I'm not sorry I went to that party. I have my cue!"

And Cherami patted the pocket in which were the gold pieces he had won at écarté.

At the foot of the staircase, he saw several ladies standing, waiting for their carriages; they were guests of the party on the first floor, just leaving the ball. In a moment, another young couple appeared, and one of the ladies said to another:

"What does this mean? the bride going away already?"

"Yes, I believe she doesn't feel very well."

"Aha! that's the bride, who goes so early!" cried Cherami, putting his head forward. "Yes! it's she! it's the faithless Fanny! I recognize her."

These words were hardly out of his mouth, when the husband, who had his wife on his arm, left her abruptly, looked about, and rushed up to Cherami, to whom he said in a voice that trembled with emotion:

"Was it you who just spoke, monsieur?"

"What's that! Suppose it was? Well, yes, I did speak. Do you mean to say that it isn't my right?"

"Was it you who said: 'It's the faithless Fanny'?"

"Yes, pardieu! it was. Oh! I never deny my words."

"This is neither the time nor the place for an explanation, monsieur; but I will call on you to-morrow, and, if you're not a coward, you will give me satisfaction."

"I, a coward! Arthur Cherami, a coward! Well, well! that's a good one! And I have just challenged the whole Blanquette wedding party! I am always ready to fight with whatever anyone chooses—from a pin to a cannon, I'm your man!"

"We will see about that to-morrow. Your address?"

"There it is. I always carry a card about me with a view to affairs of this sort."

Monléard took the soiled yellow card which Cherami drew from his pocket, and hastened after his wife, who was already in the carriage. This little scene had taken place so rapidly that the persons who were standing had been able to catch only a few words.

The carriage which contained the newly married pair drove away. Cherami looked about for a cab, and having finally found one, jumped in, and called out to the driver:

"Rue de l'Orillon, Barrière de Belleville. I will tell you when we reach my hôtel."—Then he stretched himself out comfortably on the back seat, with his feet on the other, murmuring: "The day has been complete. An excellent dinner, punch, cards, a ball, and a duel! And this morning I hadn't the wherewithal to buy a small loaf! In my place, a fool would have jumped into the water. But, with clever people, there is always some resource."

XVII

FURNISHED LODGINGS ON RUE DE L'ORILLON

Rue de l'Orillon, which is outside the barrier, near the Belleville theatre, bears not the slightest resemblance to Rue de Rivoli, or to Rue de la Paix. There is much mud there at almost all seasons, and there are very few shops of the Magasin du Prophète variety; indeed, I think that I can safely say that there are none.

It was in a wretched furnished lodging on this street outside the walls that the ci-devant Beau Arthur, who had once dwelt in the fashionable precincts of the Champs-Élysées and the Chaussée d'Antin, had been compelled to take up his abode. He did not often pay his rent; however, on the day when he received his quarterly stipend, he sometimes persuaded himself to give two or three five-franc pieces to his landlady, and she waited patiently for her arrears, because she was proud to furnish lodgings to a man who had once had thirty-five thousand francs a year, and who still retained a trace of his former social position in his manners and his language.

The room occupied by Cherami was not furnished like the apartments of the Hôtel du Louvre. A blue wallpaper, at thirteen sous a roll, took the place of hangings; but this paper, already old, was torn in several places, and the breaches were concealed by scraps of paper of a different design, and, in many instances, of a different color, which gave to the room a sort of Harlequin aspect which was not altogether disagreeable—especially to those persons who like that costume. Now, Harlequins are very popular in Rue de l'Orillon.

A miserable cot-bed, surmounted by a rod which had never been gilded, and over which was thrown a curtain of yellow cloth much too narrow to surround the bed, stood opposite the window. At the foot of the bed was a screen four feet high, which was supposed to be a protection against the wind that came in under the ill-fitted door. A Louis XVI commode, an old Louis XV armchair, and a desk which claimed to be Louis XIII, with a few common chairs, were all the furniture that the apartment contained. On the mantel were two kitchen candlesticks, a small box of matches, and several cigar-butts, but not a single pipe: Arthur would have deemed himself a dishonored man if he had put a pipe to his lips.

It was noon, and Cherami lay on his bed, having just waked up. He stretched his arms, rubbed his eyes, and, glancing at the window, said to himself:

"On my word, I believe I've had quite a nap! Yes, if I can judge by the sun, which is shining in at my window, the morning must be well advanced. It is often unpleasant not to have a watch; but, at all events, in a furnished lodging-house there should be a clock on each mantel. That villainous Madame Louchard, my landlady, promises me every month that indispensable complement of my furniture, and I am like Sister Anne, I see nothing coming. *Par la sambleu!* as they say in Marivaux's plays, the rest has done me good, for yesterday was a tiresome day! But it seems to me that I had at least a dozen duels on hand for this morning; the deuce! and I don't know what time it is."

Thereupon Cherami began to knock loudly on the thin partition beside his bed, shouting at the top of his voice:

"Madame Louchard! I say there! Goddess of Cythera! Landlady of the Loves! Venus of La Courtille! hasten hither, I beseech thee.—Come, lady fair; I await thee! I await thee!—Damnation! start your boots, will you!"

After some five minutes, heavy footsteps were heard in the corridor, and a tall woman, thin as a lath, whose flat hips indicated a most profound contempt for every sort of hoop-skirt, entered the room occupied by Cherami. This woman had a huge nose, huge mouth, huge teeth, huge ears, and feet and hands to correspond. A child who had heard the tale of Little Red Riding Hood would inevitably have been afraid of her, mistaking her for the wolf disguised as the grandmother.

To complete the portrait, we may add that Madame Louchard had a yellow complexion, bleared eyes, and a nose always smeared with snuff; that her costume consisted of a long dressing-gown, shaped like an umbrella case (a reminder of the style in vogue under the Directory); and, finally, that her head-dress was a white cap, around which was tied a colored cotton handkerchief.

"Well! what's the matter? What are you shouting and hammering for? Couldn't you get up, Monsieur Lazy-bones? I should think it had been light long enough."

Such was this lady's way of bidding her tenant good-morning.

"You are right as to that point, Queen of Cythera," replied Cherami, half rising.

"God forgive me! I believe he intends to get up before me! Was that why you called me—to let me see that sight? That strikes me as a strange kind of joke!"

"Nay, nay, virtuous Louchard; I will not rise in your presence. I know the rigidity of your morals, and I respect them! I know that with you Richelieu and Buckingham would have wasted their time."

"I don't know those gentlemen, but it would be just the same with them as with others! I have told you a hundred times that, since my husband's death, the late Louchard, men are nothing to me!"

"It would seem that the late Louchard was a phœnix, a jewel, the very pearl of husbands?"

"On the contrary, he had a lot of hidden drawbacks, and he was always drunk. That's what made me take a dislike to your sex, in the matter of love."

"Very good! I agree with you, on my honor. I think you did well to adopt that course."

"Why?"

"Because it makes you resemble Dido. But let us change the subject; tell me quickly what time it is."

"*Dame!* it's a good half-hour—yes, at least half an hour—since I heard the clock strike twelve."

"Then say at once that it's half-past twelve. Bigre! I have been lazy, and no mistake; but when I came in last night, it was two o'clock in the morning."

"No earlier; and you woke me up, too; you always make such a noise on the stairs!"

"At all events, I didn't wake your concierge, as you haven't one."

"What's the good of a concierge?—Everybody knows the secret of the passageway, and they can come in when they choose."

"And by feeling their way, which is often very imprudent."

"But I believe you rode home last night. Do the omnibuses run as late as that nowadays?"

"Omnibuses! Understand, Widow Louchard, that when I come home after midnight, I always come in a coupé or a cab."

"Peste! so the funds have gone up, have they? You'd better give me something on account."

"Don't bother me! I gave you ten francs."

"That was two months ago."

"That's not the question. Has anybody called to see me this morning?"

"No, not a cat."

"Not a cat! Oh! the cowards!"

"Why do you say that cats are cowards? Mine would fight a bulldog."

"I'm not talking about your cat, Widow Louchard; but about a lot of braggarts, all of whom challenged me yesterday, and who don't dare to call on me to-day."

"Do you mean that you wanted to fight again, pray? Good God! is it a disease with you? It isn't so very long since you were cured of that bullet in your side."

"Bah! a trifle, a scratch. I am not quarrelsome; but when a man seems to look askance at me, that irritates me. After all, I am not particular about seeing those walking rushlights of the Blanquette wedding party. But there was another man; if he doesn't come, I shall be surprised. However, it's not too late yet; he was only married yesterday, and a man doesn't get up very early on the day after his wedding."

"What! you expect to fight with someone who was married yesterday?"

"Why not? We marry, we fight, we kill—or are killed! Such is life, lovely Artemisia!"

"What makes you call me Artemisia? that isn't my name."

"Because she was a widow who profoundly regretted her husband."

"But I have never regretted mine a single minute."

"That makes no difference.—So you say it's half-past twelve? Sapristi! Madame Louchard, when is that clock coming that you've been promising me so long?"

"I'm waiting for a good chance. I want something to match the rest of the furniture."

"In that case, my dear friend, as I have here a so-called Louis XIII desk, a Louis XV armchair, and a Louis XVI commode, it seems to me that you cannot do otherwise than procure a Louis XIV clock, to fill up the interregnum and reestablish the continuity of the dynasty."

"Yes, yes; I've seen lately a little rococo Pompadour one, second-hand."

"Take care! you don't go back far enough; I didn't say Pompadour, which would land you in the middle of Louis XV's reign! I said Louis XIV."

"Fourteenth or fifteenth! so long as it ain't too dear.—But what's all this? when I said you were in funds, I wasn't mistaken, was I? You've bought a new hat! I must say, you did well; for yours wouldn't have lasted out a storm."

"A new hat! What are you talking about, my fair hostess? I have thought of it more than once, but I have not yet carried out my project."

"Why, what's this, then?"

Madame Louchard took a hat from the commode and handed it to Cherami, who stared at it with wide-open eyes; for the hat was quite new and of a stylish shape.

"What the devil! is that my hat? That's a surprising thing; it has changed, much to its advantage; it has grown at least two years younger; and it fits me, pardieu! Yes, it fits me nicely; it's just the shape of my head."

"Of course you bought it yesterday?"

"Oh! no, I didn't buy it, I tell you again. Ah! I see: when I left that wedding ball, I was a little excited—a little angry; I seized the first hat that came under my hand, thinking it was mine."

"Well, there's no denying that you've got a lucky hand; you haven't lost by the change."

"Oh! dear me, such mistakes occur so often at balls and evening parties, that, frankly, I shall not demand mine back."

"You will make no mistake; but the man who found your hat in place of his—he may want his back."

"Very well! let him come; I am ready for him; I'll return his old tile, and give him others to boot."

"Ah! but that isn't all."

"What else is there, Widow Louchard? Can it be that I came home with two hats? I admit that that would astonish me."

"No, it isn't a hat this time; but this cane—this isn't your clothes-beater, which wasn't worth six sous."

Madame Louchard picked up a cane which lay in a corner of the room; it was a genuine rattan, with an agate head surrounded by gold rings, and cut in very peculiar fashion. She showed it to Cherami, who exclaimed in admiration:

"Oho! why, that's a beauty! A charming cane, excellent style—not too heavy; I like this sort of cameo for a head very much."

"So you got your cane the same way you did your hat, eh?"

"Pardieu! that goes without saying. It stood beside the hat. You see, I had placed my switch beside my beaver—so the joke was complete."

"Well, you're mighty lucky in your mistakes; that's sure. This cane must have cost a lot of money."

"Oh! I have seen much finer ones than this, in the old days. What the devil are you looking for on the floor and on the furniture, Madame Louchard?"

"*Dame!* I'm looking to see if you haven't brought something else home, by mistake."

Cherami instantly sat up in bed, crying:

"Thunder of Jupiter! Widow Louchard, what do you take me for, I'd like to know? Do you think I'm a thief, a pickpocket? I had a hat and a cane, and on leaving a ball I took a hat and a cane. They're not the ones that belong to me; I made a mistake, I was in error, and that may happen to anybody—*errare humanum est*, do you understand? No, you don't understand; never mind. But to carry away anything to which I have no right—fie! for shame!—To prove that I wouldn't do such a thing—I found a glove, and I returned it. Let me tell you, madame, that a man may be without money, have debts, borrow and not pay, and even play cards on his word—for if I had lost last night, I shouldn't have been able to pay on the spot; but all those things don't prevent one's being an honest man."

"Mon Dieu! Monsieur Cherami, I don't say they do; you go off all of a sudden, like a spitfire!"

"Last night, I confess, I had dined very well. I wasn't drunk; I never get drunk; I was simply a little confused, which fully explains all these mistakes; and now, I feel as if I could take something."

"Would you like to have me make you a nice onion soup, while you're getting up? There's nothing that'll set you up better, the day after a spree."

"Onion soup! I do not disdain that dish; but I am tempted to look higher, and I believe that a good chicken —— But what's all that noise? I should say that a carriage was stopping in front of the hôtel! Go and look, my dear hostess."

Madame Louchard went to the window.

"Yes, it is," she said; "a handsome private cabriolet, with a fine dapple-gray horse, and a groom in livery! And there's a young dandy getting out; he's looking at the house; he's coming in; it must be for me."

"For you? Oh! no, it's for me, by all the devils! It must be that young husband, and here am I still in bed! I must dress at the double-quick."

Cherami jumped out of his bed, in his nightshirt; whereupon Madame Louchard instantly took flight, crying:

"I don't like this sort of thing, Monsieur Cherami; I told you not to get up before me. And a man who don't wear drawers, too!"

"Aha! my dear hostess, it would seem that you risked a glance! Oh! these women! they are all descended from Lot's wife! It's a pity that they're not changed into salt nowadays at every indiscretion; that would make a handsome reduction in the price of that product!"

XVIII

A DUEL WITHOUT WITNESSES

It was, in fact, Monsieur Monléard who had alighted from the cabriolet, and, having scrutinized the exterior of the furnished lodging-house, had ventured into the rather gloomy hall of that establishment. There he looked in vain for the concierge; but the proprietor often served in that capacity, and it was she herself who hastily descended the stairs.

"Do you know a certain Monsieur Cherami in this house, madame?"

"Yes, monsieur; indeed I know him, as he's my tenant."

"Ah! very good. Would you kindly direct me to his room?"

"Second floor, second door on the right."

"Do you think that I shall find him?"

"Certainly, monsieur; for I just left him, and he was just going to get up."

"Thanks! Pardon me, madame; a word or two more, if you please."

"As many as you want, monsieur; I'm in no hurry."

"I would be glad, madame, to obtain some information about this gentleman: to know who he is, and what he does."

"Mon Dieu! it won't take long to tell you; he don't do anything, he lives on his income; he's a man who used to be very rich, and who did as so many others do—ran through his fortune with fast women; now, he's on his uppers; for I guess the income isn't very heavy!"

"Exceedingly obliged, madame."

Monléard left Madame Louchard, and went up to Cherami's room. That worthy was dressing behind his screen; but as it barely reached his shoulders, he was perfectly able to see anybody who came in, and could converse over the leaves of the article of furniture which encompassed him.

"Monsieur Arthur Cherami?" said the fashionably dressed young man as he entered.

"Present! here I am, monsieur. A thousand pardons for not being dressed; but it will take me only a minute. Pray be kind enough to take a seat while you wait."

"Thanks, I am not tired."

"Then, remain standing. You may do as you please.—Where the devil did I put my false collar?"

"You divine the motive of my visit, monsieur, I fancy?"

"What! do I divine it? Why, I have been waiting for you, with some impatience. But I said to myself: 'That gentleman will not come very early, because, on the day after his wedding—— ' Ha! ha! I don't think I need say any more."

"It has occurred to me, monsieur, that our duel might as well take place without witnesses. The subject of our dispute is such a delicate one! There are some things which one doesn't like to make a noise about; for the world, which is unkind, as a general rule, sometimes makes a mountain out of what was——"

"Only a mouse—*parturiens montes.* I am entirely of your opinion.—Ah! I have my collar."

"Then, monsieur, you consent to fight with no other witness than my servant?"

"Very gladly; I have already fought that way more than once."

"Thinking that you might have no weapons, monsieur, I brought two swords and a pair of pistols with me."

"You did very well; for, as you foresaw, I am without weapons at this moment. Ah! I used to have some beautiful ones in the old days! My pistols were made by Devisme; I could bring down a fly at fifty yards; but I had to let them go. What would you have? *Deus dederat, Deus abstulit.*—I will just put on my coat, and I am at your service."

"This is a most extraordinary individual," said Auguste Monléard to himself as he listened.

The Latin with which Cherami sprinkled his discourse, and his air of good-breeding, had modified the opinion he had formed of him; and he was not sorry to learn that he was not about to fight with a man devoid of breeding and education.

At last, Arthur came out from behind his screen, and saluted his adversary with all the ease of a man of the world, saying:

"Now I am at your service."

"Very good, monsieur. Doubtless you are well acquainted with this quarter, this neighborhood. It is entirely unfamiliar to me. Is there any spot hereabout where we can fight comfortably—without having to travel a couple of leagues to Vincennes or the Bois de Boulogne?"

"Wait a moment, while I think. We could go behind the Buttes Saint-Chaumont; there are some quarries there, where no one would see us. But it's rather hard to get there in a carriage; and then, too, the ground's rather uneven, and sometimes there are some low-lived rascals prowling about. But, pardieu! we have just what we want, close at hand. In the next street there's a large vacant lot, on which they're going to build, but the building isn't begun yet. No one ever passes through that street; we shall be as retired as we should be in our own house."

"But can we get into the lot?"

"Yes, indeed. On the street there's nothing but a board fence, and there's a gate in it. If there's anyone there, we'll say we are architects; that will make it all right."

"And it's not far from here?"

"We shall be there in five minutes."

"In that case, monsieur, let us go. We will let my cabriolet follow us."

"That's right; and as we must avoid making a noise and attracting attention, we will fight with swords, if you choose."

"With pleasure, monsieur."

Monléard and Cherami went down the stairs together. Madame Louchard, who was standing at the hall-door, was very much puzzled when she saw her tenant leave the house with the fashionably dressed owner of the cabriolet; but she dared not ask him a question. Instead of turning toward the main street of Belleville, the two men took a street which ran behind the theatre of that suburb.

Walking side by side with the individual with whom he was to fight, Monléard, more and more amazed by his adversary's courteous manners and by his use of language which denoted familiarity with good society, said to him after a while:

"We are going to fight a duel, monsieur; that is a settled thing, which neither you nor I, I am sure, have any intention of avoiding."

"I agree with you, monsieur."

"But, before the duel takes place, will you not do me the favor to tell me where you knew the lady whom I have married, and how long you have known her?"

"It will give me very great pleasure to answer you. I have not the slightest acquaintance with your wife, and I never saw her until yesterday. First, when she alighted from her carriage at Deffieux's restaurant; and again, when you were taking her away last night, and I met you."

"But, in that case, monsieur, how do you explain the words you uttered: 'There's the faithless Fanny'? Was it a bet? Was it an insult?—And, again, how did you know my wife's Christian name, since you did not know her?"

"Mon Dieu! my dear monsieur, I can explain it all to you in a few words, and you will say that events succeeded one another naturally enough. When your young wife alighted from her carriage, a young man—a very pretty fellow, on my word! but a perfect stranger to me—was standing near me, in front of the restaurant. The poor fellow really made my heart ache: he was in the depths of despair, he tore his hair—no, he didn't go so far as that; but, what was worse, he insisted on accosting the bride and making a scene. I

remonstrated with him, I prevented his doing it, and made him see that it would be in the worst possible taste to cause such a scandal in the street."

"I thank you, monsieur. But the young man's name—do you know it?"

"He told me while we were dining; for we dined together, and he told me the whole story of his love affair. I must hasten to add that there was nothing in it which casts the slightest reflection on madame's honor. But she allowed that young man to pay court to her, she flattered him with the hope that she would marry him some day. But when you appeared, the scales were very soon turned in your favor, and my poor lover was given the mitten."

"Then the man who told you all this must have been Monsieur Gustave Darlemont?"

"The very same; those are his names."

"Yes, I remember meeting him now and then at Monsieur Gerbault's, in the first days of my intimacy with that family. You will agree, monsieur,—for you seem well acquainted with society and its customs,—that it is indiscreet, to say no more, for a young man who has been kindly received by a respectable family, to go about telling of his love affairs, his disappointed hopes, in short, all his affairs, to someone whom he doesn't know, and whom he meets by chance in the street."

"It was, perhaps, a little foolish, I admit; but we must excuse some foolish performances in a lover. Poor Gustave adored your wife—he adores her still. She flirted a bit with him."

"Monsieur!"

"Oh! bless my soul, all the women do it; I know that well enough; maids, wives, and widows—before, during, and after—they always do it. It's their original sin. Eve set the example by flirting with the serpent. To try to cure them of that failing would be to attempt the impossible: women are made that way. *Quid levius pluma? pulvis! Quid pulvere? ventus! Quid vento? mulier! Quid muliere? nihil!*"

"But, monsieur, how did it happen that it was you, and not this Monsieur Gustave, who indulged in that insulting exclamation?"

"For a very simple reason: Gustave wasn't there. After dining with me, at the same restaurant where you had your wedding banquet, for he was absolutely determined to speak to your wife, to bid her a last farewell ——"

"The impertinent wretch! if he had dared!"

"Oh! mon Dieu! you wouldn't have known anything about it. The women do so many things that we don't know! But a certain uncle made his appearance—a gentleman who doesn't joke, and who hasn't an amiable manner every day. He dragged his nephew away, deaf to his prayers and lamentations—and poor Gustave had to go, without a sight of his faithless Fanny.—I beg your pardon, but that's the expression he always used in speaking of madame your wife; and that is why that exclamation escaped me last night, when I saw her on your arm. Now you know the whole story. Faith! here we are; see, this is the board fence about the vacant lot. We can go in here; there's a solution of continuity. Not so much as a cat, inside or out; this is delightful. You can get the swords from your servant."

Monléard, having taken the swords from his groom, ordered him to stay by the cabriolet; then he and Cherami entered the vacant lot, which had been made ready for building, but as yet contained nothing but stone. They soon reached a spot where there was nothing to embarrass them; there they removed their coats and stood at guard. By the way in which Cherami stood, the young dandy saw at once that he had to do with an expert fencer; and, as he was himself well skilled in the use of the sword, he was not sorry to meet an adversary worthy of his steel.

But after one or two passes, one or two deftly parried attacks, Monléard realized that he had before him an antagonist of the first order; and that he must needs exert his utmost talent and strength to gain the advantage. He had expected to have done with his opponent in a few thrusts; his self-esteem was touched by the necessity of defending himself. He attacked with an impetuosity which sometimes made him forget to be prudent; and Cherami, who fought as coolly as if he were playing shuttlecock, said to him from time to time:

"Take care, you are making mistakes, you'll run on my sword, you strike down too much! I give you warning; it won't be my fault. Ah! what did I tell you?"

Monléard, attacking awkwardly, had received a thrust in the arm, and the wound was so painful that he had to drop his sword.

"Enough, I am beaten!" said the young man, struggling to conceal his suffering. "But you are a skilful fencer, monsieur."

"Yes, I am somewhat expert with the foils. Wait a moment; let me take your handkerchief and bind up the wound, to stop the blood. Then we'll make a sling with your black silk cravat."

"I am extremely obliged, monsieur; a thousand pardons for the trouble I am causing you."

"Why, between honorable men, this is the way it should always be: when the fight's over, shake hands. It's a pity the sword went in so far, or we might have breakfasted together."

"Oh! I am forced to admit that that would be quite impossible."

"Yes, I understand. You are in for a fortnight of it, perhaps three weeks. There's a lot of muscles in the arm, that are as obstinate as the devil about getting well. Are you strong enough to walk to your cabriolet, leaning on me? Shall I call your groom?"

"Oh! there's no need; I can walk with your assistance."

"Take my arm, and don't be afraid to lean on it."

Monléard succeeded, although suffering intensely, in reaching his carriage, which Cherami assisted him to enter, after putting the swords inside. Then, saluting his adversary, who thanked him again, Cherami walked away, saying:

"Delighted to have had the pleasure of making your acquaintance!"

XIX

A SALON IN THE CHAUSSÉE D'ANTIN

Three weeks after the marriage of Fanny Gerbault and the brilliant Auguste Monléard, the exceedingly handsome salon of a house on Rue Neuve-des-Mathurins contained, about nine o'clock in the evening, a company in which, although small in numbers, we shall find several persons of our acquaintance.

First of all, this young woman seated on a *causeuse*, beside a lovely table of Chinese lacquer, and working carelessly upon a piece of embroidery, is the newly made bride, Fanny, now Madame Monléard, in a charming gown of the sort one wears at home, to receive a few friends; she has no other head-dress than her own hair, which is arranged with much taste, the back hair being braided and wound about the head, like a crown.

Marriage has not impaired the young woman's beauty; her complexion is fresh and rosy, her eyes gleam with greater animation, and about her lips plays a smile of satisfaction, almost of beatitude, except, however, when her eyes happen to fall upon a newspaper which lies on the table, open at the page containing the transactions on the Bourse, and the stock quotations. At such times, her brows contract slightly, and her lips close; but that feeling of vexation soon disappears, the charming Fanny turns her eyes elsewhere, and her face resumes its amiable and contented expression.

A short distance away, another young woman is sitting at the piano, turning over the leaves of a volume of music. It is Adolphine, Fanny's sister. You know already that her hair is not so black as her sister's, and that her eyes are a little smaller, which fact does not prevent Adolphine from being a charming person; above all, there is on her face a sweet and melancholy expression, which always attracts, and arouses interest. A little taller than her sister, Adolphine has a slender, elegant figure; her walk is always graceful. Pretty women have this peculiarity in common with cats, that there is in their slightest movements an indefinable fascination; and this quality is not the attribute of the most coquettish only, but equally of those in whom grace of movement is entirely natural.

For some time past, Adolphine's melancholy had almost become sadness; her eyes were often fixed on the ground, and she would sit for hours buried in thought, which, if one could judge by the expression of her features, was not concerned with pleasant memories. Suddenly, she would emerge from her abstraction, and, as if ashamed of having abandoned herself to her reveries, would glance hastily about, to see if anyone had noticed her; and would strive to smile, in order to conceal the thoughts with which her heart was occupied; but her smile was never very real, and her merriment was like her smile.

Beyond the piano was a card-table, at which four persons were playing the inevitable whist. First, there was a lady evidently on the wrong side of forty, but who had once been very pretty, and who still produced a brilliant effect by artificial light, thanks to an extremely careful toilet, in which were employed all those invaluable cosmetics which help to prevent a lady from appearing old. Furthermore, Madame de Mirallon—such was her name—wore diamonds of very great value at her neck and in her ears. But those who claim that diamonds embellish a woman are entirely mistaken; we should say simply that they enrich her; and, in this connection, we may well remember the remark of Apelles: "You make her rich, because you cannot make her beautiful."

At this lady's right was a man of about fifty years, with an intelligent and distinguished face, somewhat cold and reserved in manner, but unimpeachably courteous, even when, in the course of conversation, he indulged in a stinging retort. He spoke but little, however, and his dress and bearing were perfectly consonant with his age. He was Monsieur Clairval.

Opposite him was a young man, neither handsome nor ugly, but dressed with extreme care, and with a head of hair worthy to figure in a wig-maker's show-window. It should be said that the young dandy was the proud possessor of a forest of chestnut locks, a fertile field for the invention of a hair-dresser. Monsieur Anatole de Raincy—such was the young man's name—played cards in straw-colored gloves, moulded to a pair of tiny hands of which he seemed to be very proud, and which he kept always in evidence. To complete the portrait, we must add a small light chestnut moustache, eyeglasses, and a constant lisp in his speech.

The fourth whist player, who was the lady's partner, was a man about forty years old, a faded blonde, with a conceited and idiotic air; a doll's face, from which protruded a pair of great eyes which were always rolling from side to side with an astonished expression—an expression which never varied. He bowed whenever anyone spoke to him, and found a way to pay compliments to everybody, accompanying his speeches with a conventional smile, which he retained even when he was listening to others; all of which may afford you in anticipation an accurate idea of the ingenuousness of this individual, whose name was Batonnin.

An old beau, of at least sixty years, but who affected the dress, the gait, and all the manners of a young man, fluttered about the table, dancing attendance on the ladies; his face alone persisted in betraying his age, although its owner did his utmost to avoid the scrutiny of the curious. But his cheeks, which had fallen in on account of the loss of his teeth, a very long nose, purple at the end, and an assortment of wrinkles which streaked his temples, made it impossible for that face to create an illusion. As for the hair, it was of a fine, glossy black, which proved that he wore a wig.

Such was Monsieur le Comte de la Bérinière, a venerable dandy, who still possessed a handsome fortune, although he had consumed a portion of his means by living like a prince, and paying assiduous court to the fair sex. Monsieur de la Bérinière's great fault was his obstinate belief that he was still young and fascinating, and his consequent persistence in seeking to make conquests. However, being descended from an illustrious family, and having all the manners of a grand seigneur, the count, albeit he had not overmuch intelligence, had, at all events, the merit of being always amiable and cheerful; and, as we see, he had never chosen to meddle with any but the attractive features of life. We may add that he had never married.

The count left the whist table, and, approaching Madame Monléard, examined her embroidery.

"Ah! what pretty work that is you are doing, belle dame! Why, you seem to possess all the talents!"

"Mon Dieu! I haven't so very many!"

"Is it a rug you're making?"

"No; it's a design for a footstool."

"What a lucky dog Monléard is! He has married a treasure!"

"You exaggerate, monsieur le comte."

"No, I say what I think; and if I had known you earlier—— Oh! I know what I'd have done! Ah! Dieu!"

"What a sigh! Ha! ha! ha!"

"It makes you laugh to hear me sigh?"

"Why, what other effect should it have on me?"

"Ah! women are cruel sometimes. But, no matter! if I had known you before Monléard, I would have solicited the honor of making you Comtesse de la Bérinière."

"What nonsense!"

"Oh! I am not joking. But fate willed otherwise. And I say again that Monléard is a lucky dog.—By the way, how is his arm?"

"It is improving slowly; he can't use it yet."

"It's a long while getting well.—And to think that that accident happened the very day after your wedding!"

"Yes, the next day."

"He fell on the stairs, I believe?"

"Yes, he slipped, and fell on his arm."

"For heaven's sake, Monsieur de la Bérinière, do come and advise my partner, Monsieur Batonnin. Upon my word, he's been making mistake after mistake!"

"It must be my pleasure in playing with you, madame, that distracts me," rejoined the little man with the protruding eyes, bowing to his partner.

"In that case, monsieur, moderate your pleasure, I entreat you, and don't trump my kings any more."

The count regretfully quitted the young bride and returned to the card-table, saying:

"But monsieur doesn't need my advice; he plays very well."

"Oh! you are too good, monsieur!"

"I am well aware that Monsieur de la Bérinière prefers to pay court to the ladies rather than watch the game!" rejoined Madame de Mirallon, in a tone which she intended to be ironical, but in which there was a slight tincture of mortification; "but he can afford to spare us a few moments."

"Whatever is agreeable to you, I will do, madame."

"Indeed! But it did not suit your pleasure to join our game?"

"Madame, if you would kindly attend to your play——"

"Oh! Monsieur Clairval is so severe!"

"No, madame; but we don't usually talk when we're playing whist."

"Mon Dieu! if one must never say a word—— Ah! Monsieur Batonnin, that is too cruel! Don't you remember my signal?"

"I beg your pardon, madame; but no man is required to do the impossible."

"I don't understand proverbs."

"That means," observed the count, with a laugh, "that monsieur has no club."

"That makes no difference; his game was to play one."

"Let us put our cards on the table, and play that way; it will be simpler," interposed Monsieur Clairval.

"I had thutht ath lief; I played that way onth, a three-handed game with a dummy."

"Monsieur de Raincy, I might justly complain, as well as madame; but I see that this is an evening of absent-mindedness."

"Why, what did I do wrong. I don't thee——"

"Oh! I shall tell you later."

"I flatter mythelf that I play a fine game of whitht."

"You are quite right!"

"Well, Monsieur Batonnin! well! what are you thinking about?"

"I thought you would trump, madame."

"We've lost the odd—and it's your fault."

"We have won."

"Now for the rubber!"

"I beg you, Monsieur de la Bérinière, stand behind Monsieur Batonnin.—Oh! he doesn't listen to me! he has gone to pay his court to Mademoiselle Adolphine. What a butterfly that man is, and when will he sober down?"

"It seems to me," observed Monsieur Clairval, with a smile, "that it would be rather hard for him to change his habits now."

The count had, in fact, approached Adolphine, who was still pretending to be absorbed in the music-books, and who apparently did not see that anyone was by her side.

"You are fond of music, mademoiselle?"

"Ah!—I beg your pardon. Yes, monsieur, very."

"Do you sing?"

"A little."

"Young ladies are never willing to admit that they sing more than a little. I don't refer to you, mademoiselle. I am told that your voice is very sweet and true."

"Your informant flatters me, monsieur."

"Shall we have the pleasure of hearing you this evening?"

"I don't know at all, monsieur. But, if it will gratify my sister——"

"Your sister, of course; but the whole company as well."

"Oh! whist players care but little for singing."

"You are more or less right; that game makes savages of people—ferocious savages, I may say. Whist enthusiasts close the door when there is singing in the next room. I verily believe, that, if you told them the house was burning down, they'd insist on finishing their *rub* before making their escape."

"You see that it would be very unkind of me to sing."

"Pardon me, I am not playing; and what do you care if——"

"Monsieur de la Bérinière, in the name of your ancestors, come and show Monsieur Batonnin how to play; it's very important! We are playing the rub, and I don't want to lose it through my partner's misplay."

"That Madame de Mirallon is a terrible creature, really! Ah! when women grow old, they gain in exactingness what they lose in attractions; and the compensation isn't sufficient."

Having indulged in this muttered reflection, the count returned to his station behind Monsieur Batonnin; and Madame de Mirallon bestowed a long and searching glance upon him as she said:

"It's very hard to keep you, now!"

And the *word* now brought a smile to the lips of Monsieur Clairval, who said to his partner:

"Come, Monsieur de Raincy, we must stand to our guns; we are playing against three."

XX

A NEWLY MARRIED PAIR

Adolphine left the piano and sat down beside her sister.

"I am sure that you are annoyed, Fanny, because your husband doesn't come home."

"I? Mon Dieu! I wasn't thinking about him at all. If he stays away, it is probably because he has business to attend to. You don't understand business, you see, Adolphine; you don't know that, if you want to make a lot of money, you must sometimes deprive yourself of a little pleasure."

"No, it's true, I don't understand money matters; but I thought that two people just married could not be happy apart, that they must be horribly bored when they're not together."

"Oh! my dear girl, there's reason in everything. And then, we have plenty of time to be together."

"Still, when you marry for love—and Monsieur Monléard certainly seemed to be in love with you—— Is that all over already?"

"Why—no—but when two people are once married, they're no longer like two lovers. You'll find that out some day, my little sister! I still call you little, although you're taller than I."

"Ah! I know that I could never love as placidly as you do!—I was afraid that your husband might be angry with you on account of that duel."

"Auguste has too much good sense and breeding to charge me with the folly and extravagance of another, as a crime. It's not my fault that another man was in love with me!"

"Oh! that poor Gustave! He did love you so dearly!"

"Oh, yes! I advise you to pity him! He behaved nobly, didn't he? To go shouting jeremiads in the street, and end by sending someone to fight in his place! Fie! it was shameful!"

"Fanny, you judge Gustave too harshly; do you impute it to him as a crime, that he didn't insult your husband? Oh! he probably would have done it, if his uncle hadn't dragged him away, almost by force, from that restaurant, where he absolutely insisted on speaking to you."

"How do you know all that?"

"Because it was I who sent word to Monsieur Grandcourt that his nephew was at the restaurant where the wedding was being celebrated."

"Oh! yes, so you told me. That fellow wanted to make a scene—and by what right? Was I obliged to marry him, I should like to know?"

"You allowed him to believe that you loved him."

"Nonsense! because a woman listens to the soft things these men say to her, because she smiles when they sigh, they instantly assume that she adores them. A fine position he offered me, didn't he? Three thousand francs a year—magnificent!"

"If you had really loved him, you wouldn't have cared about his wealth."

"Oh! I'm not romantic like you. With Auguste, I have a coupé at my orders, and I find it very pleasant. I tell you again, your Monsieur Gustave is an idiot!"

"Ah! Fanny, it's wicked for you to talk like that; to treat him so, just because he loved you sincerely."

"Much I care about his love! His behavior was none the less blamable. What excuse had he for sending that tall ruffian to insult me when I left the ball—which, of course, compelled Auguste to fight with the fellow?"

"I would take my oath that Monsieur Gustave never told that person, with whom he had dined, to say a single insulting word to you. Besides, Monsieur Grandcourt took his nephew away long before you left the ball. That man, who presumed to address an offensive remark to you, was drunk; he had already had trouble

with some of the gentlemen, for he insisted on offering his arm to the ladies when they arrived for the ball."

"Then, my dear girl, you will agree that your Monsieur Gustave has some very low acquaintances?"

Adolphine made no reply, but sadly lowered her eyes. A moment later, her sister continued: "What surprises me is that I haven't once seen Monsieur Gustave, or met him anywhere, since my wedding. For a man so dead in love, not to try to see me at my window, at least once—— You see that he is consoled, so soon."

"He is not in Paris. His uncle forced him to start for Spain the very next day."

"Ah! he's in Spain? that makes a difference! But you seem to know all about him. From whom, pray?"

"Father met Monsieur Grandcourt not long ago, and he told him that his nephew was in Spain."

"Ah! someone has just rung."

"It's your husband, no doubt."

"If it's he, we shall see him in a moment."

It was not the master of the house who entered the salon, but Monsieur Gerbault, who, like an affectionate father, began by kissing his daughters.

"Good-evening, father," said Fanny. "Why didn't you come to dinner, with Adolphine? My husband didn't like it."

"I couldn't, my dear child. Adolphine must have told you that I had promised a gentleman from the provinces——"

"A fine reason! You should have sent your gentleman from the provinces off somewhere to dine by himself."

"No, when I have promised, I keep my promise. Where is your husband, by the way?"

"He had somebody to see to-night. He'll be at home soon."

"There! we have lost! I knew it!" cried Madame de Mirallon. "Ah! Monsieur Batonnin, I will never forgive you those six counters!"

"But, madame, I am well paid by the pleasure of having been your partner."

"Luckily, Monsieur Gerbault is here. He knows how to play! Come and take a hand, Monsieur Gerbault."

"I do not care to play any more," said De Raincy; "when I have played two rubberth, I have had enough; it maketh my head ache."

As he spoke, the nattily-gloved youth left the card-table and joined the two sisters.

"Were you at the Bourse to-day, Monsieur de Raincy?" inquired Fanny.

"Thertainly, madame; I go there every day."

"How were the Orléans and Lyon Railway shares?"

"Very thtrong, madame."

"Do you think they'll go higher?"

"Why, yeth, I think tho; unleth they go down."

"That's rather a vague opinion."

"I never have any definite opinion. At the Bourth one ith tho often mithtaken! But your huthband can keep you pothted better than I can. He ith alwayth there; he theemth to be interethted in thome big dealth."

"Auguste? True, but he doesn't like to have me ask him how the market is going; he declares that women know nothing about it; that they ought to attend to spending the money, not to making it."

"I fanthy that ith the general rule among the ladieth."

"I think differently. Oh! if I had been a man, I would have been a stock-broker!"

"Do you mean it! There are thome of them who have to put up with lotheth. Ah! here'th our dear Monléard!"

Fanny's husband had just arrived; he wore his right arm in a sling; he was very pale, his face was careworn, and his eyes almost sombre. However, finding guests in his salon, he instantly assumed the affable manner which a host should always display. Young De Raincy hastened to go to shake hands with him.

"Good-evening! dear boy."

"Good-evening! Anatole. Messieurs, mesdames, your servant!"

The Comte de la Bérinière also shook hands with Monléard, crying:

"Ah! here's the lucky man! the fortunate husband! So you still offer your left hand, eh?"

"What would you have! it's not my fault that I can't use my right."

"Why the devil do you want to fall on the stairs? You're too careless—and the day after your wedding, too! I'll stake my head you were running to your wife?"

"Just so!" Auguste replied, with a glance at Fanny, who simply smiled, without raising her eyes from her embroidery frame.

"I was sure of it! It was his haste, his love for you, belle dame, which caused his accident. Ah! your eyes are very dangerous! But, after all, as love caused the destruction of Troy, it may well make a man slip on the stairs."

"Monsieur de la Bérinière, pray come here a moment."

"Gad! Madame de Mirallon can't seem to get enough of me this evening. It's a conspiracy! Can she have conceived the idea of monopolizing me?"

And the count, who had made these remarks in an undertone, added aloud:

"But, madame, I see that Monsieur Batonnin is no longer your partner; Monsieur Gerbault has taken his place, so you can have no reason to complain now."

"Ah! what a cruel man you are! I wanted to show you an extraordinary hand."

"Mon Dieu! she has shown me her hand often enough!" muttered the count, turning toward young De Raincy; "I don't care to see it any more."

Auguste, having shaken hands with his father-in-law, and said a word or two to the different guests, went up to his wife and tapped her gently on the cheek.

"You are making me a piece of furniture, I see, madame," he said; "that is well done of you!"

"Oh! that would take too long," rejoined Fanny, looking up at her husband as she would have looked at the merest acquaintance; "it's a stool, that's all."

"Mon Dieu! what are you doing with that newspaper spread out before you?"

"I am posting myself as to the prices of stocks, my dear."

"That's a most entertaining occupation for a woman."

As he spoke, Auguste took the paper, crumpled it in his hands, and tossed it into a corner of the salon; Fanny watched him while he did it, then glanced at her sister, and said under her breath:

"You see, he doesn't want me to look at the market reports. But I shall look at some other paper—that's all."

"Does your arm still pain you, brother?" Adolphine asked Monléard, having observed his thoughtful expression.

"No, little sister, no. I thank you for being good enough to take some interest in it. There are people who take more interest in the rise and fall of stocks than in the wound I received; and yet——"

He paused, as if he were afraid of saying too much; but Adolphine had fully grasped the significance of his words, and she whispered to her sister:

"Your husband is vexed because you didn't ask him about his wound."

"Let me alone, pray! Haven't I seen my husband to-day? I fancy that the condition of his arm hasn't changed in a few hours."

"No matter; it isn't nice of you not to show more interest; for, after all, it was on your account that that duel took place."

"Oh! I beg you, Adolphine, don't talk to me like that; you set my nerves on edge! For several days, my husband has been in a very disagreeable mood; as I cannot be the cause of it, I don't worry about it in the least; indeed, I even pretend not to notice it."

"If I were in your place, I would ask him the cause of it."

"Oh! I should be very sorry if I did! My gentleman is capricious, it seems; so much the worse for him!"

"If I am not mistaken, you promised to sing for us, mademoiselle," said Monsieur de la Bérinière, who had once more escaped from Madame de Mirallon and hastened to Adolphine's side.

"Mon Dieu! monsieur, if it will give you any pleasure, I will gladly sing; but it will disturb the whist."

"Sing away!" said Monsieur Gerbault; "we will stuff our ears."

"Thanks, papa!"

"There's a father who doesn't say what he thinks, I am sure."

While Adolphine took her place at the piano, young Anatole said to Monléard:

"Ith it true that Morithel hath run away?"

"Why, yes!"

"The devil! And he'th carried off thix hundred thouthand francth, they thay."

"Something like that."

"You had thome buthineth relathionth with him; haven't you lotht anything by him?"

"No—a trifle—some thirty thousand francs or so."

"A trifle like that would embarrath me thadly! To be thure, I'm not a capitalitht like you."

Auguste bit his lips and took a seat by the piano. Adolphine sang a lovely romanza by Nadaud. Her voice was sweet and well modulated; in a word, it was a sympathetic voice, and, furthermore, its possessor had an agreeable habit of pronouncing distinctly the words she sang; which increased twofold the pleasure of those who listened to her.

Auguste's face lighted up a little. Young Anatole ceased to gaze at his hands; the count seemed fascinated, and did not once remove his eyes from the singer. At last, Madame de Mirallon exclaimed:

"It's your play, Monsieur Batonnin; do, for heaven's sake, attend to the game!"

"A thousand pardons, madame; I was listening to the singing."

"But we are not singing, monsieur!"

"Thank God!" muttered Monsieur Clairval.

"What's that! Why did you say: 'Thank God!' Monsieur Clairval?"

"Because, if we were all singing, madame, we should not have the pleasure of hearing mademoiselle."

"You see that I am disturbing the game," said Adolphine.

"No, no; pray go on, mademoiselle! As if people could play whist for two minutes without a dispute! You are the pretext at this moment, that's all."

Adolphine continued to sing. The game of whist came to an end, and Madame de Mirallon lost again. She left the table in a pet, exclaiming:

"I certainly will give up playing whist!"

"Do you know my favorite game?" said Monsieur Gerbault; "it's bézique."

"Fie, fie! a messroom game!"

"I don't know anything about that; but piquet is a messroom game, too, which doesn't prevent its being a very fine game. I've heard people say of lansquenet: 'It's a footman's game!' the same thing has been said of

écarté—but that doesn't prevent those games from being played in the salons. For my part, I believe in playing the game that amuses us, without disturbing ourselves about its origin."

"I am wild over bézique, too," cried Monsieur de la Bérinière; "and, if you will allow me, Monsieur Gerbault, I shall take great pleasure in playing a game with you."

"Whenever you choose, monsieur le comte, you will be welcome."

"That's a game I am very fond of, too," said Monsieur Batonnin.

"I am not thure whether I know it, but I think not."

"Very well, messieurs," said Fanny; "the next time, we'll have a bézique table for those who like it.—How is it with you, Auguste; do you play it?"

"I? What? what game is that?" replied Monléard, who had not listened to the conversation.

"Bézique."

"No. Oh! yes, I played it yesterday."

"My son-in-law is distraught this evening."

They talked a few moments more, then all the guests took leave of the young husband and wife. But, as she went away, Adolphine could not resist the desire to say to her sister, in an undertone:

"Do be more affectionate with your husband. He is unhappy, I assure you."

"And I assure you," rejoined Fanny, "that that's none of my affair; as if a woman must be forever worrying about her husband's looks! That would not be a very entertaining occupation!"

XXI

A MAIDEN'S REVERIES

More than a fortnight had elapsed since the Monléard's whist party, at which Adolphine had sung several romanzas. But her sweet voice had made a deep impression upon the Comte de la Bérinière, also upon young Anatole de Raincy; it had even caused a quickening of the heart-beats of Monsieur Batonnin, the gentleman who played whist so poorly, but who was said to have a much clearer comprehension of business, which, indeed, was his profession, for he held himself out as a business agent.

Adolphine was alone in a small salon, much less sumptuous than her sister's, but very comfortable none the less. I need not say that there was a piano in it: that has become an indispensable article of furniture; we see them even in the domiciles of concierges who have daughters at the Conservatoire.

Adolphine held a book in her hand, but she was not reading it; she was musing, and her face still wore a sad expression. Upon what subject can a maiden of eighteen muse? Everybody will conclude that her heart was engrossed by a tender sentiment. And yet, no man had ever paid court to Adolphine, no one had ever observed any youthful exquisite paying assiduous attention to her. But all love affairs do not begin in the same way; they do not all follow the beaten paths; there are secret, unavowed sentiments which those who inspire them are very far from suspecting; and when it is a virtuous maiden's heart in which one of those profound attachments takes root, she suffers all the more because of the pains she takes to conceal it.

Adolphine passed her hand across her brow, as if to brush away the thoughts that made her sad; she took up her book again, and for a few minutes tried to read; then placed it beside her, saying to herself:

"It's of no use for me to try to distract my thoughts—I cannot do it. I used to be so fond of reading! This book is intensely interesting, they say, and I have no idea what I'm reading; nothing interests me now! even music no longer has any charm for me; my poor piano is neglected; everything is a bore. Mon Dieu! shall I always be like this? Oh! no, that would be ghastly! It will pass away; it must pass away! Father has already noticed several times that I seemed sad, and it worries him; he thinks that I am sick. Oh! I don't want to make him uneasy. But it isn't my fault; I do all that I possibly can to drive out of my mind the memory of—that person—and it keeps coming back. And yet, I know perfectly well that there's no sense in it—that I'm a little fool. It's of no use for me to argue—I cannot cure myself!"

The door of the salon opened; it was Monsieur Gerbault. The girl hurriedly wiped away the tears that were rolling down her cheeks, and strove to assume a smiling expression, as she went to meet her father.

"I have come to tell you, Adolphine, that we shall have two guests at dinner to-day."

"You are very late in telling me, father. But, no matter! I will go and tell Madeleine."

"I couldn't tell you any earlier; I met Monsieur Batonnin only a moment ago. He said: 'I am going to play a game of bézique with you this evening.' I said: 'Come and dine with us, informally.'"

"Monsieur Batonnin! I don't care much for that young man."

"Still he is very gallant—and so courteous."

"He is forever paying compliments—it's a horrible bore! And then, he always has a smile on his face. Tell me, papa, is that natural? Can there be anyone in the world who is always satisfied and happy?"

"I should say that it was rather difficult. However, there are optimists who look at the bright side of everything."

"For my part, I believe that those people are not sincere, that they simply make a point of concealing what they think.—Who is the other one, father?"

"Monsieur Clairval."

"I am very fond of him; he isn't complimentary, at all events, and yet that doesn't prevent his being agreeable. He has plenty of wit, and doesn't flaunt it in everybody's face. I do like that so much—wit that doesn't parade itself!"

"But, my child, if one has wit without showing it, I should say that it was precisely equivalent to having

none at all."

"Oh! it always leaks out, father, here and there, even if it's only in the smile."

"I just missed inviting Monsieur de la Bérinière, too."

"Oh! papa, how fortunate it is that you missed it!"

"Why so, pray? The count is very pleasant. He's a very distinguished man in all respects."

"I don't say that he isn't, but for a count we should have had to make preparations; and then, he has been coming to see us quite often of late."

"And that bores you?"

"It doesn't amuse me overmuch."

"My dear girl, I hoped, by inviting a friend or two to dinner, to brighten you up, to give you a little diversion; for you have looked as if you weren't feeling well for some time. Tell me, are you sick?"

"Why, no, dear father; I am not sick, I am not in pain. I assure you that I am in my ordinary condition."

"Good! so much the better! Still, it seems to me that you're a little changed."

"Oh! you know one has days—when the autumn comes.—And you didn't invite Fanny and her husband, while you were in the mood?"

"Yes, I did. I was going to their house when I met Auguste. But they can't come; they are going to a grand dinner. Nothing but festivities, gorgeous parties!"

"All the better! it amuses Fanny; she's so fond of all that sort of thing!"

"True, true! Fanny is leading the life she used to dream of; she ought to be happy. But it seems to me that her husband has been in rather a gloomy mood lately; he always has such a startled, preoccupied manner; and when you speak to him, he hardly listens to you."

"I think that you're mistaken, father; Fanny's husband isn't of an expansive nature; his manner is cold, a little haughty, perhaps."

"Yes, I know it; but he likes to cut a brilliant figure, to dazzle other people by his magnificence; and that sometimes carries a man too far."

"What do you mean by that?"

"I have been told that he is speculating heavily on the Bourse."

"If he has the means to do it, it's all right; he must know what he's about."

"Batonnin was telling me just now that Monléard must have lost a great deal of money by the failure—or the flight, I don't quite know which it was—of one Morissel."

"Ah! Monsieur Batonnin told you that? I notice that disagreeable news is generally brought by smiling faces and honeyed words."

"I prefer to believe that my son-in-law's fortune has not sustained such a serious loss."

"After all, father, in business a man can't always make money, can he?"

"Hoity-toity! here you are talking almost as well as your sister.—By the way, I met Monsieur Grandcourt too."

"Monsieur Grandcourt?"

"Well, well! what's the matter now? You're as pale as a ghost. Don't you feel well?"

"Yes, father. I am all right, I promise you. What did Monsieur Grandcourt have to say?"

"Oh! he doesn't speculate! He's a prudent, intelligent man. He does an excellent business. His house is prosperous and is extending its connections every day."

"And his nephew—that poor Monsieur Gustave—did he tell you anything about him?"

"He is still in Spain."

"But when is he coming back? If he should come to see us—would that annoy you?"

"My dear Adolphine, in the first place, after what has happened, it's not at all likely that Gustave will ever come to our house again. That young man was in love with your sister. For a moment, he hoped that she would accept him for her husband, then his hopes were disappointed. He saw Fanny take Monléard in preference to him, and he must have suffered doubly—in his love and in his self-esteem. What do you suppose he will come to our house again for?—in search of memories, of regrets? No, our company would have no charms for him now."

"Ah! so you think, father, that our company would no longer be agreeable to him? But he was much attached to you."

"As the father of the young lady whose husband he wished to be; I know all about that."

"But, still, if he should come here, it seems to me that it would be very discourteous to send him away, to receive him unkindly."

"Without being unkind to him, you could easily make him understand that his presence here may be very embarrassing; that he may meet your sister and her husband here; that Monléard may have learned of his love for Fanny; and that it would be better, therefore, for him not to come again. But, I say once more, you will not have to tell him all that; for I am very certain, myself, that he has no intention of coming here."

"Poor Gustave!" said Adolphine to herself, as she left the room; "father doesn't want him to come here any more! What, in heaven's name, would he say if he knew about that duel? Then it would surely be: 'I don't want to see him in my house again!'—Luckily he thinks, like everybody else, that Auguste's injury was the result of a fall on the stairs. But I suppose father is right, and Gustave will never come here; I shall never see him again!"

The girl put her handkerchief to her eyes once more, then went in search of Madeleine, her maid, a young girl from Picardy, who did not know Gustave, because she did not enter Monsieur Gerbault's service until after his eldest daughter's marriage. Madeleine was very fond of her mistress; she saw that she was unhappy,

and often said to her:

"Mon Dieu! mamzelle, when shall I see you happy and gay, as you ought to be at your age?"

"Why, I am very happy, Madeleine," replied Adolphine, forcing back a sigh. Whereat the Picarde murmured, with a shrug of her shoulders:

"Oh! nenni! I can see well enough that you always have something inside that keeps you from laughing!"

XXII

A SOFT-SPOKEN GENTLEMAN

The guests were punctual; the dinner was voted excellent. Monsieur Batonnin ate for four, but was not thereby prevented from praising each dish, adding compliments for the host, for the young lady of the house, and even for the cook; if there had been a cat or a dog, it is probable that it would have come in for its share in that distribution of flattering speeches.

At dessert, the conversation fell upon the newly married couple, Monsieur Gerbault expressing his regret that they had been unable to come to dinner.

"Yes, they make a charming couple," said Batonnin, with his inevitable smile. "Can Monsieur Monléard use his right arm now?"

"Yes; it is entirely well. It took a long while, for a mere fall on the stairs."

"Ha! ha! a fall on the stairs! Ha! ha! Monsieur Gerbault says that as if he really believed it. Ha! ha!"

"What do you mean by that?" retorted Monsieur Gerbault, who understood neither Monsieur Batonnin's words nor the malicious tone in which he uttered them; whereas Adolphine changed color, fearing that her father might learn the truth. Monsieur Clairval alone seemed indifferent to what was going on; but he glanced at the soft-spoken guest with an expression which said plainly enough:

"In my opinion, that was a very stupid remark of yours."

Monsieur Batonnin smiled on, as he replied:

"Come, come, Monsieur Gerbault, you know perfectly well that your son-in-law's wound was caused by a sword-thrust, which he received in a duel. He preferred not to tell people that he had fought, especially because—because—— I know the reason."

"Why, monsieur, that isn't at all probable!" cried Adolphine. "If my sister's husband had fought a duel, I should certainly know it, and——"

"Why so, my dear young lady? If he has concealed it from Monsieur Gerbault, he may well have concealed it from you, too."

"Be kind enough, monsieur, to explain yourself more clearly," said Monsieur Gerbault, whose face had become very serious; "if my son-in-law has had a duel, I knew nothing about it, I tell you again; now, if you have any definite information on the subject, be good enough to impart it to me; it seems to me that I ought to be at least as well informed as a stranger, upon such a matter."

"Mon Dieu! my dear monsieur, I learned of it by chance two days ago. I met Madame Delbois, who was at your daughter's wedding, and who left the ball at the same time that she did. So, as you will see, they were in the hall at the same time, waiting for their carriages."

"I don't see yet what connection there is between that fact and a duel."

"One moment—we are coming to it. While the ladies were waiting, a person of unprepossessing aspect came out of the restaurant. He was just behind Madame Delbois when she said to one of her friends: 'There goes the bride; she's going away early.'—Thereupon, this person—of unprepossessing aspect—had the effrontery to exclaim in a loud voice—— But, really, if you know nothing of the episode, I am afraid that, if I go any further, I may say something that it would be unpleasant for you to hear."

"If what you have to tell Monsieur Gerbault is likely to be unpleasant for him to hear," interposed Monsieur Clairval, "it seems to me, Monsieur Batonnin, that you would have done much better to say nothing at all on the subject. As Monsieur Monléard concealed the fact that he had had a duel, it is to be presumed that he feared that it would displease his father-in-law; and, frankly, it isn't decent of you to come here and volunteer to tell something that nobody asked you to tell."

"I beg your pardon, Monsieur Gerbault just asked me to tell him what I knew."

"Go on, Monsieur Batonnin, finish your story, I beg; what did this person say, whom Madame Delbois overheard?"

"Your son-in-law heard him, too, and that is what led to the challenge. However, I simply repeat what Madame Delbois told me. I wasn't there; I was dancing at that moment."

"Well, Monsieur Batonnin, this man said——?"

"I give you my word of honor, my dear Monsieur Gerbault, that it gives me the greatest pain to repeat his detestable words. I am very sorry that I mentioned it; I did it quite innocently——"

"Oh! finish, for heaven's sake!"

"That man exclaimed, when he caught sight of the bride: 'Ah! there's the faithless Fanny!'"

Monsieur Clairval began to laugh, and Monsieur Gerbault deemed it the wiser plan to do the same; Adolphine decided to imitate them, and Monsieur Batonnin, who expected to produce a startling effect, looked very sheepish when he saw them all laughing.

"Ah! that strikes you as amusing, does it?" he faltered.

"Mon Dieu! Monsieur Batonnin, with all your hesitation and holding back, I thought that you were going to tell us something scandalous. Frankly, it seems to me that those words, from the mouth of a man who was

drunk, no doubt, and whose tongue may have been twisted, did not deserve such a long preamble——"

"Your son-in-law didn't think as you do, apparently; for he rushed after the fellow, and they exchanged cards."

"Did Madame Delbois see that also?"

"Why, yes."

"How does it happen that that lady, who is evidently very fond of talking, has not delivered herself before this of things that took place more than six weeks ago?"

"That's easily explained: she left Paris for the country the next morning, and didn't return until the day before yesterday."

"Oh! you needn't tell me that!—Come, let us go and have some coffee."

"Look you, my dear Batonnin," said Monsieur Clairval, laughing heartily, "your news fell rather flat. It's a pity, isn't it?"

Batonnin bit his lips, and, strange to say, did not smile.

XXIII

A GAME OF BÉZIQUE

They had just finished their coffee, when the Comte de la Bérinière was announced.

"I come early, you see. I made haste to get rid of the person with whom I dined," said the count, kissing Adolphine's hand, who seemed little flattered by the attention.

"That is very good of you; in return, we will have a game of bézique for your benefit."

"Oh! by and by; I will venture to request mademoiselle to give us a little music first. When one has once heard her sing, one has but one desire, and that is to hear her again."

"If it will give you any pleasure, monsieur—— I have not enough talent to require to be asked more than once."

"That is to say, you are always charming."

"The rest of us, who are not music-mad like Monsieur de la Bérinière, will play a three-handed game of bézique. You play, don't you, Clairval?"

"I do whatever you please."

"And you, Monsieur Batonnin?"

"It will be no less flattering than agreeable to me to have the privilege of playing with you. But I think that three-handed bézique is less interesting than two-handed."

"I beg your pardon; it is even more interesting."

Adolphine took her place at the piano, and the count seated himself beside it, darting burning glances at the girl, which she did her utmost to avoid.

Batonnin, who had taken a seat at the card-table, kept turning his head to look toward the piano, in order to see what was going on there, and to try to hear what was being said.

"Shall we play with four packs?"

"Yes; but we must take out two eights, so that the cards will come out even at the end."

"Very good; and how many cards do you deal?"

"Eight to each."

"Some people deal nine."

"That makes it too easy."

"What's the game?"

"Fifteen hundred."

"And the stakes?"

"Whatever you please, messieurs; what shall it be?"

"We don't want to ruin ourselves; say, two francs each."

"Two francs it is."

"I have seen people play for five hundred francs a game," said Batonnin.

"The deuce! that's flying rather high. But when a man's very rich——"

"Oh! it isn't always the richest men who play for the biggest stakes—rather, those who want to pass themselves off for millionaires, and who are in need of money."

"Our excellent Monsieur Batonnin, with all his air of indifference, seems to observe everything."

"I? Oh! dear me, no! I say that because I've heard someone else say it."

"I declare four aces!"

"That's a good beginning."

"I remember now that it's Monsieur Monléard whom I have seen play bézique for five hundred francs a game."

"My son-in-law? Oh! you must be mistaken; he doesn't play so high as that."

"I beg a thousand pardons, but it was he. There's nothing remarkable about that, for he plays whist at his club for a hundred francs a point."

"He has assured me that he doesn't go to his club now."

"I have that fact from someone who played with him, less than a week ago."

"Come, Monsieur Batonnin, its your turn; pray attend to the game."

"I am attending, my dear Monsieur Gerbault; I am paying the closest attention. Ah! that's a very pretty thing Mademoiselle Adolphine is singing!"

"Double bézique!"

"There, you have let Monsieur Clairval make five hundred!"

"I couldn't prevent him, could I?"

"Certainly you could: there were only three tricks left, and you had two aces of trumps."

"Well! that makes only two tricks."

"I would have taken the third with my ace."

"Ah! so you think we could have prevented monsieur from counting his five hundred?"

"That's plain enough. I don't see that you're any stronger at this game than at whist."

"I certainly wouldn't play for five hundred francs a game, like your son-in-law! But I didn't know that there was any skill in bézique; I thought it was all luck."

"You see that it isn't! Indeed, any game can be played well or ill."

"Even lotto?"

"Certainly, you can forget to count."

Adolphine was singing a second selection, when Anatole de Raincy was announced.

The arrival of the young man with the lisp interrupted the music, and seemed greatly to annoy Monsieur de la Bérinière, who decided thereupon to visit the card-table. The game was finished, and Monsieur Clairval had won.

"Take my place," said Monsieur Gerbault to the count.

"Thanks, but I never play bézique with more than two."

"Play with Monsieur Batonnin, then; I will play a game of chess with Clairval, if it's agreeable to him."

"Anything is agreeable to me."

"Unless Monsieur de Raincy would like to play whist with a dummy."

"Oh! I thank you, but I don't care about playing; I much prefer to thing with Mademoithelle Adolphine, if that ith agreeable to her."

"It will give me great pleasure, monsieur."

"I have brought a few thongth, which I thing pathably—tholoth and dueth.—You play everything at thight, I know?"

"I will try, at all events, monsieur; and if they're not too hard——"

"Here'th the aria from *La Dame Blanche*. I can thing that; it ith in the range of my voith."

"Very good! I will play your accompaniment."

"If that young man sings as he talks," muttered Batonnin, with an affable smile at the count, who had taken his place opposite him, "it will produce a strange effect."

"He would do much better to let us listen to Mademoiselle Adolphine."

"Oh! yes, she has a voice——"

"Shall we play for two thousand?"

"That goes to the heart, monsieur."

"And we play with four packs."

"Very well.—But there are some men who have a perfect mania for singing."

"And who often sing false—as, for instance—— I declare four queens!"

While these gentlemen played, Anatole shouted at the top of his voice:

"'Come, lady fair; I await thee, I await thee, I await thee!'"

"That is horrible!" said the count.

"It sounds like the hissing of a railroad train when it stops."

"I have a sequence!"

"It seems that we are not to see Madame Monléard and her husband this evening?"

"No; they have gone to some grand affair.—I declare a single bézique!"

"Ah! Monléard doesn't propose that his little wife shall be bored; they are going to parties all the time."

"Yes; if only it will last.—I declare four kings—eighty!"

"And why shouldn't it last?—Mon Dieu! how that fellow makes my ears ache with his 'I await thee! I await thee!'—I am sorry for Mademoiselle Adolphine."

"Haven't you heard, monsieur le comte,—a simple marriage in diamonds,—that Monsieur Monléard was speculating on the Bourse in a—another marriage, clubs this time—in a terrific way?"

"Faith! no.—Why, I am not counting at all. It's that infernal singer's fault!"

"I have been told for a fact that he has lost a lot of money lately."

"We must never believe more than half of what we're told, you know."

"Double bézique!"

"Deuce take it! how you are beating me! Ah! they're singing a duet now; we shall hear Mademoiselle Adolphine, at all events. If she could only drown that fellow's voice!"

"I have made eleven hundred on this deal."

"And I a hundred and twenty. I am a long way behind. Do we count the fifteen hundred?"

"To be sure; when you get three béziques, they count fifteen hundred. But, in order to count them, you must still have the first two in hand."

"Yes, yes, I know that. What is it they're singing now? Something else from *La Dame Blanche*, I think."

"It's your play, monsieur le comte."

"Yes, so it is; I beg your pardon. It's that man's voice that confuses me, or rather stuns me. Oh! what a squealer! Poor girl! she has a stock of patience."

"I declare a royal marriage!"

"You are counting all the time, Monsieur Batonnin; you are very lucky to be able to attend to your game."

"I try not to listen.—Single bézique!"

It was difficult not to hear the young singer, who at that moment was shouting, with all the force of his lungs:

"'Thith hand, thith hand tho lovely!'"

At last, the duet being at an end, Adolphine declared that she was tired, and left the piano.

"I can well believe that she's tired!" said Monsieur de la Bérinière; "she might well be, for less than that. To play that fellow's accompaniments—to sing with him! what a wicked task!"

"I have won, monsieur le comte!"

"Very good! give me my revenge. I can pay more attention to the game, now that I don't hear that hissing voice; he's a veritable serpent, is that young man."

But Monsieur de Raincy had seated himself beside Adolphine, and he talked to her while the others played. Naturally, they spoke in undertones, in order not to disturb the players. This conversation, of which he could not catch a single word, seemed to annoy the count even more than the music; and Batonnin made the most of his opponent's distraction and misplays, while saying to him in a wheedling tone:

"Monsieur le comte isn't in luck to-night.—I declare a sequence!"

"It's true, I am absent-minded.—Well, Mademoiselle Adolphine, have you stopped singing?"

"Oh! no, monsieur; I am resting."

"For heaven's sake, take care," said Batonnin; "you'll suggest to that young man the idea of beginning again!"

"Why, no; I am talking to Mademoiselle Gerbault. I am sure that Monsieur de Raincy is boring her at this moment. I would like to rid her of him."

"Bézique!—You think she's bored? But you may be mistaken—he's a very good-looking fellow, is Monsieur de Raincy.—Four aces!"

"Ah! upon my word! If he's a good-looking fellow—with that stupid, idiotic, conceited air!"

"He has a good figure.—Double bézique!"

"Sapristi! you never fail to get that.—And that pronunciation of his—do you think that's pretty, too?"

"Not in singing, at all events.—Take your card, if you please, monsieur le comte!"

"Ah! to be sure.—I was not paying attention. Whose play is it?"

"Mine.—I have the honor of winning again. I have triple bézique—fifteen hundred!"

"Is it possible?"

"Look for yourself."

"Well! I am not sorry it's over. I am not at all in the mood for cards to-night."

XXIV

MARRIAGE PROPOSALS

Monsieur de la Bérinière left the table and went to talk with Adolphine; she, no less indifferent to the gallant speeches of the old count than to young Anatole's compliments, was equally amiable to both; for neither of them diverted her thoughts for a moment, and it is easy to be amiable when the heart is not involved.

The party broke up at last; but, before taking their leave, the count and Monsieur de Raincy in turn exchanged a few words in undertones with Monsieur Gerbault; which proceeding aroused Monsieur Batonnin's curiosity to such an extent, that he went in the direction of the kitchen instead of toward the street-door.

"It's your turn to be absent-minded, I see," observed Monsieur Clairval, satirically.

"Oh! not at all; I made a mistake in the door; that may happen to anybody. Perhaps you thought that I had something to whisper to Monsieur Gerbault, like those two ahead of us?"

"Ah! so they whispered to our friend Gerbault, did they? I confess that I didn't notice it, and, furthermore, that it's a matter of indifference to me."

"And to me, too, of course; although I have an idea that I can guess what they had to say to Mademoiselle Adolphine's father."

"Ah! you have an idea? The deuce! do you possess the art of divination, then?"

"One needn't be a sorcerer to divine certain things.—Do you want me to tell you my conjectures?"

"No, I thank you, Monsieur Batonnin, keep them to yourself; I don't appreciate conjectures; I like official facts only. Good-night!"

"That means that he is vexed because he hasn't guessed it," said Batonnin to himself, as they separated. "For my part, I would bet—six francs to twenty—that young De Raincy and old De la Bérinière are in love with the charming Adolphine; and I would also bet—twenty francs to thirty—that the girl doesn't care for either of them. So much the better for me! I have all the more chance. Let us wait, let us let the mutton boil, as the common saying goes. That's an old proverb; and I am like Sancho, I love proverbs."

Adolphine also had noticed her father's brief *aside* with the count and with De Raincy. When all the guests had gone, she went to him, and said with a smile:

"So those gentlemen have secrets with you, have they, father? for Monsieur de la Bérinière, and then Monsieur Anatole, whispered to you in a corner."

"Faith! my dear girl, as yet I have no more idea than you what they have to say to me; but each of them asked me for an appointment to-morrow, having a very important matter to discuss with me. I said to Monsieur de Raincy: 'I shall expect you at eleven o'clock;' and to Monsieur de la Bérinière: 'You will find me at home at one;' so I suppose that, at three or four o'clock to-morrow, I shall be able to gratify your curiosity, and to tell you what those gentlemen have confided to me—— Unless it concerns serious matters, which one doesn't tell to little girls; but I fancy not."

"You fancy not?—Do you mean that you suspect what it is, father?"

"Why—bless my soul!—but, after all, as they will tell me to-morrow, it's useless to indulge in conjectures. Ah! there's something which interests me much more than that."

"What is it, father?"

"The duel that Batonnin told us about. I pretended, before him, not to put any faith in what he said; but, if all that he told us is true, why, your sister's husband didn't hurt himself by falling on the stairs—and it must have been Gustave with whom he fought."

"Oh, no, father, no; I give you my word that it wasn't Gustave."

"Aha! so you know the truth, do you? and you never told me anything about it?"

"Fanny and her husband didn't want it to become known, and she made me promise not to mention it to you."

"But tell me whom Auguste did fight with?"

"With a man who was drunk, and who didn't know what he was saying—that's the whole of it. And Auguste didn't attach the slightest importance to it."

"Very good! I hope he didn't; but I am convinced, none the less, that Gustave was mixed up in it in some way, and I repeat what I have said to you before: that young man must never come here again!—Good-night, my dear!"

"Good-night, father!"

Adolphine retired to her own room; the two appointments with her father, solicited by two men who had persecuted her with their attentions during the evening, caused her a vague feeling of uneasiness; a secret presentiment told her that she would be the subject of the interviews to be held on the morrow, and she was impatient to know whether her fears were justified.

The next day, Adolphine did not leave her room, in order to avoid meeting the two gentlemen who had appointments with her father. At precisely eleven o'clock she heard the bell, and honest Madeleine came and said to her:

"It's the tall young man who sang with you last night, mamzelle; he asked for monsieur your father, and he's with him now."

"Very well, Madeleine; if he should happen to ask for me, you must tell him that I have a headache and cannot leave my room."

"I understand, mamzelle."

"And come and tell me when he has gone."

"Yes, mamzelle."

Adolphine counted the minutes; but Anatole had not gone when the clock struck twelve. She lost her patience; she said to herself:

"What can that man have to say to father, that takes such a long time? For a young man, he's very talkative. If he doesn't go soon, he'll meet the count. But, after all, it makes no difference to me."

At last, about half-past twelve, Monsieur de Raincy took his leave. Madeleine came to inform her young mistress, and she was on the point of going to her father, when the bell rang again.

It was Monsieur de la Bérinière. He had come ahead of time, but he was at once ushered into Monsieur Gerbault's study. Madeleine informed Adolphine of his arrival, and received the same orders as before, in case the count should ask permission to pay his respects to her mistress.

This second interview was much shorter; Monsieur de la Bérinière went away before one o'clock. Thereupon, Monsieur Gerbault went up to his daughter's room, with a gratified air, and rubbing his hands—a sign of satisfaction common to all nations. Why? No one has ever been able to find out.

"Well, father?" murmured Adolphine, in a voice which betrayed some slight emotion; "did both of them come?"

"Yes, my dear girl. Oh! they were very prompt; indeed the count was a little ahead of time; that's easily understood: the oldest are always in the greatest hurry."

"And what did they say to you? must you keep it secret?"

"No, indeed; since you were the sole subject of both interviews."

"I?"

"Yes; and, frankly, I had some suspicion.—And you?"

"I—why—— Oh! I beg you, my dear father, tell me at once what they wanted to say to you?"

"Well, my dear, the same motive brought them both; they both came to ask me for your hand."

"My hand?"

"In the first place, young De Raincy said: 'I love mademoiselle your daughter, she is an excellent musician, I adore music, we will sing together all day; I have no profession, but I have fifteen thousand francs a year in government securities, and with that one can live comfortably when one isn't ambitious; and music is a pleasure which necessitates very small expense. It has seemed to me that Mademoiselle Adolphine does not care for balls and great parties, like her sister; so I may hope that she will be happy with me. You will give her a *dot* of twenty thousand francs; I know it, and it's enough for me; I don't ask for any more.'—So much for number one.—Monsieur de la Bérinière was more eager, more impetuous, in his suit. 'I adore Mademoiselle Adolphine,' he said, 'I am mad over her; her delightful voice has turned my head, and I renounce my liberty for her. Indeed, I believe I am destined to enter your family, for I will not conceal from you that I was deeply in love with your other daughter; but Monléard was quicker than I, and stole her away from me.—So, this time I declare myself promptly, because I don't propose that your younger daughter shall escape me as her sister did; unless, of course, she will have none of me; but I venture to hope the contrary; I am no longer in my first youth, but my heart is as easily touched as it was at twenty. In short, I offer your daughter thirty thousand francs a year, and the title of countess—which always flatters a young woman's ear; I lay these at her feet, with the most ardent love. Be good enough to communicate my offer to her, and I will come to-morrow for your answer.'"

"Oh! mon Dieu! And what answer did you make to all that, father?"

"My dear child, the only answer that a father should make to honorable men, of good standing in society, who ask him for his daughter's hand: 'Your offer flatters me, does me honor, and, for my part, I will interpose no obstacle to the fulfilment of your wishes; but, as marriage is an act which has a decisive influence upon the happiness of one's whole life, I have determined to allow my daughters absolute freedom in the matter of choosing a husband, and never to enforce my wishes in opposition to theirs.'"

"Oh! my dear, good father! how good it is of you, not to force your children to marry!"

"Now, my dear love, it is for you to choose. These two offers are equally advantageous. Monsieur de la Bérinière makes you a countess, with thirty thousand francs a year—that is very attractive. To be sure, he is sixty years old, which lessens the attraction. Monsieur Anatole de Raincy is not a count; but he is of a very old family; he has only fifteen thousand francs a year, but he is only twenty-seven, and that's a valuable asset. Now, you are fully posted as to these two aspirants to your hand. Reflect and choose."

"Oh! the reflecting is all done, father! I want neither of them."

"What! you refuse?"

"I refuse them both."

"But you are unreasonable, my child!—Either of the two marriages would be honorable; it would be hard to find a better match in respect to fortune; indeed, I am afraid that you'll never do so well."

"You know, don't you, father, that I care nothing about money?"

"My dear girl, it isn't well, perhaps, to love money as your sister loves it; but it isn't well to despise it, either. It is a great help to happiness. Come, between ourselves, why do you refuse both of these two offers? The count, I can understand; he's too old for you; but Monsieur Anatole is young, not a bad-looking fellow ——"

"I refuse them, father, because I want to love my husband, and I shall never love Monsieur de la Bérinière or Monsieur de Raincy."

"So you are quite determined, are you?"

"Absolutely. You can tell them that I don't want to marry now. A well-bred man understands that that's a polite way of refusing."

"Very good, since you have made up your mind. Gad! you're not much like your sister! You see, she is rich, and happy! always at some festivity, always enjoying herself!"

"I don't envy her happiness; I should not be happy in the life she leads."

"Well, let's say no more about it."

Monsieur Gerbault left his daughter; but she could read in his eyes that he was not pleased that she had refused the two eligible husbands who had offered themselves. As for Adolphine, she said to herself:

"I cannot marry either of those men, for I love someone else. The man I love will never marry me,—I know that,—for he never thinks of me! But I choose to have the right to think of him always."

XXV

GUSTAVE'S UNCLE

After his duel with Auguste Monléard, Cherami returned to his lodgings, whistling a polka. He found his hostess where he had left her, standing in her doorway.

Madame Louchard was very inquisitive; it had stirred her curiosity to the highest pitch to see her tenant go away with the young exquisite who owned a cabriolet; and when the former returned alone, she cried:

"Well! what have you done with him?"

"With whom? with what?"

"Why, with that elegant gentleman who went away with you on foot,—a strange thing to do when he has a cabriolet at his command. You might just as well have got into it, both of you, as it followed you."

"It wasn't worth while to ride; we only went a little way."

"Oho! where did you go?"

"To that vacant lot over yonder, by the theatre."

"What in the world did you go there for? Does your friend think of buying the lot?"

"Not at all. We went there to fight. It's a very convenient place for that."

"To fight? Is it possible!"

"As I have the honor to tell you."

"With your fists?"

"Madame Louchard, you always imagine that you are talking to the clowns who are your usual associates. Understand, pray, that a man like me doesn't fight with his fists! I sometimes send the toe of my boot into the fleshy part of an upstart who bores me—but when it's a question of a duel, that's another affair."

"What did you fight with, then?"

"With swords."

"You didn't have any."

"That gentleman had a whole arsenal in his carriage."

"Mon Dieu! And which of you was killed?"

"Why, your question is rather beside the mark. Do I look like a dead man?"

"Ah! that's so. It was the other man, then? Poor young man!"

"Don't be alarmed; he isn't dead, and he won't die. A simple wound—and I warned him, too; I said: 'You strike down too much!'—He fences rather well, but he isn't in my class yet."

"You villain! always in trouble—fighting duels. But what if he had killed you, eh?"

"In that case, superb Louchard, I should not, at this moment, have the pleasure of gazing upon your strongly-marked features."

"And the cause of your duel?"

"A trifle—a mere nothing—a jest. But that young man's coming prevented me from breakfasting, and I feel the need of attending to that important function. I go to my room to get my pretty cane with the agate head, and I fly to the Véfour of the Quarter. But, no; there isn't one here, and, as I wish to breakfast very well indeed, I will go as far as Passoir's."

"Anyone can see that you're in funds."

"Indeed, it is true, divine hostess."

"And you don't leave me a little on account."

"We will talk of that later."

Cherami took his new cane, placed his new hat on the side of his head, and with his pockets lined with the money he had won at écarté the night before, left the house, saying:

"I have my cue!"

According to his custom, Cherami spent his gold pieces freely. But it seemed that that money had brought him luck. Being a great lover of the game of billiards, he did not fail, after dinner, to go and play pool at a café where he knew that there was always a game in progress in the evening; and for some days fortune favored him so persistently, that all the frequenters of the café frowned when he appeared, muttering:

"Here comes the pool-shark!"

But one evening the luck turned; Cherami left the café with empty pockets.

"Palsambleu!" he said to himself; "here I am reduced to extremities again!—For I shall not receive my quarterly income for a fortnight, and that stingy Bernardin wouldn't pay me a single day in advance. But why wouldn't this be a good time to pay a little visit to our young friend Gustave, in whose behalf I fought a duel, and who has not even come to thank me? By the way, I think I didn't give him my address, and, on the other hand, he didn't give me his. But he lives with his Uncle Grandcourt; he's a banker, or a merchant, no matter which; I ought to find his address in the *Almanack du Commerce.* To-morrow I will obtain it, and I will go and bid friend Gustave good-day. And if he is still in the depths, I'll dine with him again. He will tell me his woes, and I will order the dinner. And at dessert he certainly will lend me a hundred francs to carry me to my next quarterly payment—that will be easy to manage. Indeed, I am convinced that dear Gustave is surprised at my non-appearance, and that he is looking for me everywhere.—But, to make up for my neglect, I'll not leave him for a fortnight."

The next day, Cherami found Monsieur Grandcourt's address, and lost no time in betaking himself thither. Having arrived at a handsome house in Faubourg Montmartre, he tapped on the concierge's window with his pretty cane.

"Monsieur Grandcourt, the banker?"

"His offices are on the ground floor, at the rear, right-hand door."

"Very good. Shall I find Monsieur Gustave Darlemont in the office?"

"Monsieur Gustave?"

"Yes, the banker's nephew, who is employed by his uncle."

"Faith! monsieur, I don't know; there are several clerks; I don't know their names."

"You don't seem very well posted, that's a fact. All right; I'll go to the office, and it's to be hoped that someone will be able to answer me there."

Cherami walked to the rear of the building, and entered a room where an elderly clerk, half reclining on a ledger, was adding columns of figures.

"Will you kindly tell me where I can find my friend Gustave?"

The clerk made no reply, but continued to mutter:

"Forty-five, fifty-two, four, six, sixty."

"Is this old fossil afflicted with deafness, I wonder?" said Cherami to himself.—"I ask you, monsieur," he added aloud, "to direct me to the desk—the office—the chamber of my friend Gustave; don't you hear me?"

"Eight and eight are sixteen—and sixteen, thirty-two."

"Sacrebleu! we've known for a long while that eight and eight are sixteen! Is it such nonsense as that that keeps you from answering me?"

As he spoke, Cherami seized the old clerk's collar and shook him roughly. He turned upon his assailant in a rage, exclaiming:

"I am adding my balances, monsieur; and when I am adding, no one has any right to disturb me—do you hear?"

"Well, well! you are another pretty specimen, you are! They ought to frame you and hang you up in the water-closet!"

"Monsieur! What do you mean?"

"There, there, my old mummy; let's not lose our temper. Where is Monsieur Grandcourt's nephew?"

"As if I knew, monsieur! I keep accounts, and nothing else, and I can't talk. You have put me out; I must begin all over again!"

"Very well, you shall begin again; nothing trains the youthful mind like addition. But you must answer my question first."

"Monsieur Grandcourt's private office is at the end of this passage, monsieur. Go and tell him what you want, and leave me to my accounts."

"All right! Do you know, I believe that excessive adding has hindered you sadly in your growth."

Cherami followed the passage, and, upon turning the knob of a door at the end, found himself in the banker's office. Monsieur Grandcourt was writing at his desk; being accustomed to the frequent coming and going of his clerks, he went on writing without looking up.

Cherami closed the door, examined Monsieur Grandcourt for a moment, and said to himself:

"That's our uncle—I recognize him. I never saw him but once, but that's enough. Besides, he has one of those peppery faces which have a certain *chic*."

He walked to the desk and removed his hat, saying:

"Good-morning, dear uncle! You are at work, I see. Bigre! it seems that dig's the word in your shop; for I found outside here an old pensioner so buried in his figures that I couldn't see the end of his nose.—Well, how does it go?—Don't you know me? I am Arthur Cherami."

Monsieur Grandcourt raised his head, and stared in utter amazement at the individual before him.

"Might I know, monsieur," he rejoined, "what you want, what brings you here? for I probably didn't understand what you said."

"Ah! you didn't understand, eh? Are you adding figures, too? That occupation seems to deaden the intellect. But, never mind about that! So you don't recognize me, dear uncle?"

"No, monsieur, no; and I confess that I fail to understand this title of *uncle* which you persist in giving me."

"That is a title of affection, because I am a friend of your nephew—dear Gustave—who was so desperate on the day that his faithless Fanny married another. And on that same day, I dined with him at Deffieux's. He was absolutely determined to speak to the lovely bride, when you fell into our private room like a bombshell, and dragged the poor fellow away."

"Ah! very good, monsieur! now I understand, and I recognize you. Yes, it was you who were at the restaurant with my nephew—and you attempted to interfere with my taking him away."

"*Dame!* he was so anxious to see his Fanny! I have always protected love affairs."

"And do you realize, monsieur, all that might have resulted from an interview between Gustave and that young woman?"

"Why, no more, I fancy, than did actually happen—a duel, that's all!"

"What do you mean, monsieur? My nephew fought no duel; that I know; I didn't leave him until the very moment of his departure."

"Well, I don't say that it was he who fought; it was I; but it amounts to the same thing."

"What! you fought a duel—you?"

"Just a little, nephew—I mean, uncle. Indeed, I administered to the young husband a very neat sword-thrust in the arm. However, he's a stout fellow; but he holds himself back too much in fencing; that's very dangerous."

"You fought with Monsieur Monléard?"

"Why, yes! what of it? You open your eyes like porte cochères! One would say that it was a most extraordinary thing!"

"But, monsieur, it's a horrible thing for you to have done! You have compromised that young woman, you have compromised my nephew, you have——"

"Sacrebleu! do you know that you make me tired! Where the devil did I get an uncle like this, who doesn't appreciate the services I have rendered his nephew?"

"A little less noise, monsieur, if you please!"

"Ah! you don't like that! Very good! but, no! You are Gustave's uncle; I cannot fight with you; it would grieve him. After all, my business isn't with you; and if that old baked apple out yonder had told me where I could find your nephew, you wouldn't have had a call from me. Tell me at once, and I'll make my bow."

"You want to see Gustave?"

"That was my only reason for coming here."

"My nephew is not now in France, monsieur; he is in Spain."

"In Spain? Do you mean it? it isn't a sell?"

Monsieur Grandcourt made a gesture of impatience, whereupon Cherami continued:

"Don't you like the word? You surprise me! It is adopted now in the best society. It's like *balancé.* You say: 'I have *balancé* So-and-so,' which means: 'I have sent him about his business.' We have enriched the French language with a lot of such locutions, more or less picturesque. Ah! the Latin tongue is much more forcible, much more complete. You can say things in Latin that you'd never dare to say in French. Look you, for example, Plautus, in his comedies,—in *Casina*, I believe,—makes an amorous old man say, when he thinks of his mistress:

"'Jam, Hercle, amplexari, jam osculari gestio!'

Ah! they were great jokers, those Latin and Greek authors! Write comedies now like those of Aristophanes—you'd have a warm reception! They are beginning already to find Molière too free! We are becoming very refined, very severe, in the matter of language! Does that mean that we are growing more virtuous? Frankly, I don't think it. Habits, customs, and manners change; but passions, vices, absurdities, are always the same!"

The banker's brow lost some of its wrinkles as he listened to Cherami. He scrutinized him more carefully, and said:

"How does it happen, monsieur, that, having received a good education, knowing your classics as you do, in short, being a well-informed man, you do not make use of your knowledge, to——"

"To do what? To buy a coat? Is that what you mean?"

"Faith! something like it."

"I love independence, liberty, monsieur."

"Those words have been sadly abused of late, monsieur. And if your love of liberty compels you to go abroad in shabby clothes, it seems to me that you would do well to prefer love of work to it."

"Look you, my dear monsieur, I believe that you are undertaking to preach to me—and I have never stood that from anybody!"

"Perhaps that is the great mistake you have made."

"Corbleu! you are lucky to be the uncle of a young man for whom I felt at once a sincere affection.—Let us say no more. Gustave is in Spain?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"For a long time?"

"I cannot tell exactly."

"That's as good a way as any of not telling me. But when he is in Paris, I promise you that I shall not fail to find him."

"Have you anything important to say to him, monsieur? if so, tell it to me, and I will transmit it."

Cherami reflected a moment, then pulled his hat over his eyes, and said:

"No, I simply wanted to shake hands with him, to inquire for his health, and to find out whether he is finally cured of his love for the faithless Fanny."

"His letters tell me that his health is good. As for his foolish passion for a woman who never loved him, I like to believe that it has succumbed to absence."

"Say rather to the glances of the Andalusians; for they have terrible eyes, those Spanish women! I know something of them. I have known three, who——"

"Pardon me, monsieur; but I am very busy, and, if you have nothing else to say to me——"

"Ah! you dismiss me?—Very good; that's very polite. I have my cue!"

"You have your cue? What do you mean by that?"

"Oh! it's of no consequence. It's a little phrase which I often use; it's as if I said: 'I see where I stand.'"

"That makes a difference, monsieur. I wish you good-morning!"

"And I wish you nothing at all!"

Thereupon Cherami left the banker's office, saying to himself:

"There's a tough old uncle for you! I think I won't borrow money of him—I won't do him that honor. No, never! especially as he wouldn't lend me any."

XXVI

A CAFÉ ACQUAINTANCE

Cherami strolled about at random for some time, seeking some person of his acquaintance with whom he could negotiate a small loan. But he saw few save unfamiliar faces, and if by chance he did espy some former friend, that friend turned away to avoid meeting him.

"The devil!" said Cherami to himself; "the day opens badly! I counted on Gustave for breakfast, and now it's after twelve o'clock, and I'm as hungry as a cannibal. However, if I must, I will dispose of my new cane. I shall be sorry to do it, for it's a pretty one—a genuine rattan. But I should be still more sorry to go without breakfast. It must have cost at least thirty francs. A dealer will give me six for it,—they have all the cheek they need, those fellows,—and he'll act as if he were doing me a favor! I prefer to leave it in pawn for a beefsteak and its accessories. Come, let us look for a café where we can get a good breakfast."

Cherami was then on the boulevard, where there is no lack of cafés; for one cannot walk thirty feet without passing one. The ex-Beau Arthur entered the establishment which had the most modern show-front, seated himself at a table, hung up his hat, laid his cane on the seat, and summoned the waiter with that resounding

voice and in that arrogant tone which never fail to produce their effect on the waiters in a café.

"What does monsieur wish?"

"Radishes, sardines, and butter; then a beefsteak-châteaubriand, rare, with roquefort and a bottle of bordeaux. After that, we will see. Go!—That cane is certainly worth all that I have ordered," he said to himself; "yes, and I can safely add a cup of coffee and a *petit verre.* At all events, if they are not satisfied, I will do like Bilboquet in *Les Saltimbanques*, I will pledge my signature.—I am annoyed, all the same, to find that my young friend Gustave is in Spain. But is he really in Spain? That is what I must find out."

Cherami had eaten his hors-d'œuvre, and was about to attack his beefsteak-châteaubriand, when a short man, dressed with some pretension, with a stupid face and a bald head which seemed to beg for a wig, took his place at the table next to his, and sat down on the cane which Cherami had laid on the bench.

The new-comer jumped to his feet, putting his hand to his posterior, and exclaiming:

"Great heaven! what am I sitting on?"

Cherami picked up his cane and stood it on the floor, between himself and his neighbor.

"It's lucky for you that you didn't break it," he said; "for it would have cost you a pretty penny!"

"I didn't do it purposely, monsieur."

"No matter! if you had broken it, you'd have paid for it!"

"And I hurt myself, too."

"If it had been a blackthorn stick, it would have hurt you much more."

The gentleman did not seem to be consoled by that reflection; he paid no attention to the cane, but was intent only upon rubbing the wounded part of his anatomy. Then he ordered a glass of grog, picked up a newspaper, and began to read, in evident ill-humor. But Cherami, who loved to converse, kept on talking while he ate.

"I went into a public house one day," he said; "I had ridden horseback six leagues without dismounting, and was naturally very tired. I walked into the common-room, and threw myself into an easy-chair near the fireplace. But as I sat down, a piercing shriek escaped me. Everybody crowded around me: 'What is it, monsieur? what's the matter? what has happened to you?'—But I could only point to my posterior, saying: 'I don't know what I sat down on, but I am wounded—badly wounded!'—The hostess wanted to look and see what it was—she wanted to dress the wound. She was a bright-eyed hussy, with a buxom figure. I would gladly have done as much for her, if she had been wounded. But the husband interposed, considering the location of the wound. He declared that he was the only one of the family who ought to meddle with it. Well, they investigated.—I had sat down on a nail, a huge carpenter's nail. How did it happen to be there—with the point up? That is something nobody could explain. But the important thing was to remove it. The landlord couldn't do it. He sent for a locksmith with his pincers, and he had such hard work pulling the infernal spike out of my rump, that, when he did get it out, it looked more like a corkscrew than a nail!"

The bald party made no other comment on this story than a low grunt, and continued to read his newspaper.

Cherami scrutinized him for some minutes, saying to himself: "Where in the devil have I seen that phiz? I can't remember, but this certainly isn't the first time that I have had the misfortune to meet this bald-headed boor.—It seems that the story of my nail didn't affect you, monsieur?" he said aloud to his neighbor, who was stirring his grog.

"I paid very little attention to it, monsieur. When I am reading the paper, I am engrossed by my reading."

"And you believe everything you find in it, I suppose?"

"Why not, monsieur?"

"Ah! I should judge that you were quite capable of it!—But you don't know how to fix your grog, monsieur."

"What! I don't know how to fix my grog?"

"No, not at all. You keep stirring and stirring; but you don't crush the piece of lemon-peel with your spoon and squeeze out the juice."

"How does it concern you, monsieur, whether I crush my lemon-peel or not? If it suits me to drink my grog like this, am I not at liberty to do it?"

"Oh! to be sure! I give you good advice—you don't want it. As you please! I'll bet that you're looking through the advertisements in the paper to find something to make the hair grow?"

"No, monsieur. Let me tell you that if I wanted hair, I could have as much as anybody."

"I don't doubt it, with your money; you could wear three wigs, one on top of another; that would give you a superb head of hair!"

"But I don't like artificial things, monsieur; I detest what is false! The truth before everything!"

"Ah! I understand, then, why you parade your skull. But if you propose always to show us the truth, that may carry you rather far! That goddess's costume is a little scanty, or rather she has none at all. She appears to the world quite naked! I would like to see you go out in the street in that condition, for love of the truth. I fancy that a police officer wouldn't listen to that excuse. Look you, monsieur, it has often been said that it isn't always well to tell the truth; we might add that it isn't always well to see it. In general, a man is wise to conceal his infirmities, his deformities, and whatever he may have that is unpleasant to look at; he does well to make himself as attractive, or as little unattractive, as possible. To embellish, to seek to please, such seems to be the purpose of nature, everywhere and in everything. Look at a mother with her child: her first care is to dress it up, to try to embellish it. Women are born with the instinct of coquetry; men have it, too, although the rush and hurry of business compels them to pay less heed to their persons. When you take lodgings, your first care is to make them attractive; if you have a garden, you embellish it by planting flowers in it; if you give a dinner party, you want it to be stylish, sumptuous, enriched by handsome plate.—For instance, see this thin glass from which I am drinking my claret: it improves the wine, monsieur; it makes it taste better—for the wine would seem much less delicious to me if it were served in a preserve-jar. And take your own case—

would you have liked it if they had brought you your grog in a wash-basin, eh?—Deuce take me! I believe the little fellow isn't listening!" exclaimed Cherami, suddenly interrupting his dissertation. "Where in the world have I seen that face?—Waiter! my coffee!"

As he threw himself back on the bench, Cherami knocked his cane against his neighbor. Whereupon the latter turned, and pushed the cane away, muttering:

"Have you made a wager to annoy me?"

"What's that! a wager—just because my cane slipped against you? I say, my dear monsieur, who are so attached to the truth, you're very touchy, aren't you?"

The bald man made no reply; as he pushed the cane away, he had glanced at it, and from that moment he kept his eyes fixed upon it.

"Ah! you are admiring my cane now?" said Arthur; "you begin to understand that it would have been a pity to break it!—It's very neat."

Still the bald man made no reply, but raised his eyes and examined the hat which its owner had hung on a hook. He scrutinized it so carefully that Cherami lost patience, and said to himself:

"Well, well! what's the matter with this creature! How much longer is he going to stare at my hat and cane? He's beginning to make me very weary."

XXVII

THE CANE AND THE HAT

At last, the little man made up his mind to speak:

"That cane, monsieur—with that agate head; it's very singular!"

"You find that my cane has a singular look? Distinguished, you mean, I doubt not?"

"Why, monsieur, the fact is, that that cane—the more I look at it—a rattan—exactly!—and the hat, too—the same kind of a band—very broad——"

"Tell me, monsieur—when you have finished, will you very kindly explain yourself?" said Cherami. He began to suspect who his companion was, but he did not choose to let it appear.

"This is how it is, monsieur: I had a cane exactly like this one—so much like it that I could swear it was the same one."

"We see canes that look just alike, every day, monsieur; there's nothing extraordinary in that; there are many men who are mistaken for one another, and yet there is an expression, an animation, on a man's face which you would seek in vain on the head of a cane."

"Excuse me, monsieur; but all canes haven't an agate head cut like this one."

"If they had, they would be too common, and I wouldn't want one."

"Well, monsieur, I lost my cane and my hat at a wedding party which I attended about two months ago; that is to say, I didn't positively lose them, but they were exchanged—and I didn't gain by the change! In place of my hat, which had a band exactly like this—very broad—and the same shape—they left a pitiful, disgraceful thing; and I was obliged to buy a new one the next day; and in place of my cane I found a sort of switch, of the kind they beat clothes with—not worth six sous!"

"Corbleu! monsieur, what do you mean to imply by all this? This cane that you lost, with an agate head—and your hat with a band like this—do you know that I am beginning to lose my temper? Do you mean to say that I stole your cane?"

"No, monsieur—but——"

"Then you insult me, and I will not brook an insult!—When we leave this café, we will go and cut each other's throats, like a couple of young dandies!"

"Never, monsieur; not by any means! I am mistaken, monsieur; I am wrong. No, no, it isn't my cane—let it be as if I had said nothing; I beg your pardon."

The little bald man, trembling like a leaf, seemed inclined to disappear under the table at which he was seated. Cherami, having reflected two or three minutes, looked at him with an affable expression, and said:

"Didn't you lose something else at the party you mentioned just now."

"Something else? yes, I did, monsieur; I was in bad luck that night! When I arrived at the ball, I had lost one of my gloves—a yellow glove. To be sure, it was returned to me later—but in such a state!"

"Ah! now I understand! I recognize you now!"

"You recognize me?"

"To be sure—you are Monsieur Courbichon."

"That's my name, sure enough! But how——?"

"Pardieu! we met at our friend Blanquette's little party. Dear Monsieur Courbichon! I have been looking for you a long while!"

"You have been looking for me, monsieur? For what, pray?"

"For what? Why, to return your cane."

"But, monsieur, I don't know whether——"

"And your hat too, if you insist upon it; but, as the one you have now is newer, you would lose again by the change. But the cane is certainly yours; do you consider me capable of keeping something that doesn't belong to me,—that is in my possession only as the result of a mistake?"

"Ah! monsieur, I am sensible——"

"You understand, of course, that before returning this cane, which I carried away by mistake from my friend Blanquette's party, I wished to be sure of returning it to its owner and no one else. Have you my switch?"

"No, monsieur; I haven't it—I don't even know what has become of it."

"Bigre! I am very sorry for that. You thought, I suppose, that it was just a common switch; you didn't see that it was a *nerf de bœuf*, which came from China, where they make a great many canes of that material, because it bends and never breaks. You value it at six sous, but it was worth forty francs."

"Oh! if I had known that——"

"You'd have taken more care of it. However, that's a trifling mishap. You pay for what I have eaten, and we will dine together; then we shall be quits."

"What, monsieur, you propose——"

"Pray take your cane; it's a fascinating thing! Everybody stared at it. Dear Courbichon! I am delighted to have returned it to you; but I greatly regret my Chinese switch! Such is very rare in Paris. Very few like it come here from China.—I say, waiter, how much do I owe?"

"Seven francs fifty, monsieur."

"Very good. Monsieur here will attend to it."

Monsieur Courbichon did not seem overjoyed to pay for his neighbor's breakfast; however, he did it. They left the café together, and, when they were on the boulevard, Cherami passed his arm through that of the owner of the cane, saying:

"Where shall we go now?"

"Faith! monsieur, I had intended to go for a stroll on the Champs-Élysées. It's a fine day, and near the end of September; we must make the most of these last good days. And then, I am very fond of watching them play bowls."

"Very good! that suits me—that suits me to the very tick: let us go to the Champs-Élysées, and see them play bowls. Walking helps the digestion; it gives one an appetite. We will dine there; I know all the good restaurants on the Champs-Élysées. Oh! never fear, Papa Courbichon, you are with a buck who knows what good living is!"

"I don't doubt it, monsieur, but——"

"Sapristi! what a pretty cane! everybody admires it as they pass. It must have cost a lot?"

"I cannot tell you, monsieur; it's a present from my nephew."

"Ah, indeed! I was just saying to myself, that it's a surprising thing that Monsieur Courbichon should have bought a cane like that. Your nephew's a man of taste. What does he do?"

"He's in business. He has gone to America. This was his cane; he gave it to me, because, as he said, he was going to a country where there are plenty of canes, and it was useless for him to carry this one."

"Do you mean that he carries a piece of sugar-cane in his hand when he goes out to walk?"

"I can't tell you, I don't know. The cane suited me, because at need I could use it to defend myself."

"My Chinese switch was a famous weapon of defence, too."

"What! a switch?"

"Remember that it was a *nerf de bœuf.* I could have killed a calf with it."

"What a curious idea of those Chinese to make canes with *nerfs de bœuf!*"

"An additional proof, my dear Monsieur Courbichon, that the Chinese are much more advanced than we are—much more progressive! They build houses of india-rubber."

"Hard rubber, of course?"

"I don't know whether it's hard or not—it makes no difference. Pardieu! Monsieur Courbichon, you must agree that there are lucky chances, and that we were both happily inspired when we went to that café to-day!"

"It is certain, monsieur, that otherwise——"

"You would never have seen your charming cane again. Are you married, Monsieur Courbichon?"

"I have been married, monsieur, but I am a widower."

"A superb position for a man still young and made to please the ladies."

"Oh! monsieur, I am fifty-five."

"That is the very prime of life, the age at which a man makes most conquests, because he knows better how to go about it. Ah! I would like to be fifty-five! I hope to get there, but I haven't yet. You have some means?"

"Five or six thousand francs a year, which I made in dried fruit."

"A very pretty business!—That isn't a magnificent fortune, but it is that pleasant mediocrity so highly praised by Horace. Do you know Horace?"

"Yes, I have seen it played at the Théâtre-Français."

"Ah! I guess we will stop there! Have you children, excellent Courbichon?"

"I have a daughter, monsieur,—a married daughter; I have set her up in business."

"In dried fruit?"

"No, monsieur; she is in olive oil."

"Oh! the deuce! that's very different! But it will preserve her longer. You have no other daughter?"

"No, monsieur."

"What a pity!"

"Why so, monsieur?"

"Because I feel so strongly attracted to you that I would have asked her hand in marriage. Faith! yes, I would have renounced my liberty, which I have never done yet—but there's an end to everything. Does your son-in-law enjoy good health?"

"Yes, monsieur, excellent!"

"So much the worse!"

"Why so much the worse?"

"Because, if he should die soon, I might marry his widow."

"Oh! what an idea, monsieur!"

"He is in good health, so there's an end of that; let us say no more about it. Don't be alarmed; I have no idea of killing him. If he had insulted me, I don't say——"

"A thousand pardons, monsieur; but I should be very glad to know your name."

"My name? So you have forgotten it, have you? But I was called by name often enough at young Blanquette's wedding party—while I was dancing with Aunt Merlin."

"I don't remember it."

"My name is Arthur Cherami."

Courbichon, thinking that his companion was addressing him as his dear friend (*cher ami*), replied:

"Oh! yes, your name is Arthur—— Nothing more?"

"What do you say? nothing more? Why, I have just told you—Arthur Cherami."

"Yes, I understand—Arthur; that's a very pretty name. Are you in business?"

"I don't do anything; I live on my income, like you."

"Oh! that's different! When one has enough to live on, one certainly has the right to loaf as much as he pleases."

"That's so, isn't it, my dear Courbichon? Ah! I am delighted to see that we agree. We were destined to become close friends; it was written, as the Arabs say."

While conversing thus,—that is to say, while Cherami conversed and his companion listened, with difficulty finding a chance to put in a word or two from time to time,—they had reached the Champs-Élysées. They sauntered toward a spot where a game of bowls was in progress, and looked on for a while. According to his habit, Cherami made his reflections aloud and gave his opinion on the strokes. He did not hesitate to say: "That was wretchedly played!" to the face of the player. The latter, a youngster of sixteen years, came up to him with an irritated air, crying:

"What business is it of yours? Perhaps you wouldn't do as well!"

"No, I flatter myself that I wouldn't do as well, for I would do much better. And if you don't like what I say, my boy, just come with me. There's a shooting-gallery yonder. I will take you for my target, and you take me; we'll see which of us will bring the other down."

The bowler retired without making any reply.

"You are too quick, my dear Monsieur Arthur," said Courbichon, putting his hand on Cherami's shoulder; "you take fire like saltpetre."

"Ah! that's the way I was made, my dear Courbichon. What would you have—a man can't make himself over!—But just let anyone presume to insult you, when you're with me! Bigre! a dwarf, a giant, a colossus—it's all one to me; I would grind him to powder on the spot, and it wouldn't take long!"

Meanwhile, the young bowler, who had returned to his game boiling with rage, had formed a plan to revenge himself upon the person who had said that he bowled badly; and when it was his turn to bowl, he threw the ball with all his force in Cherami's direction, hoping that it would strike his legs. But a small stone caused it to deviate slightly, and, instead of striking Beau Arthur, it came in contact with Monsieur Courbichon's legs. That gentleman staggered, and uttered a piercing shriek. Cherami saw plainly whence the ball came, and saw the bowler laughing uproariously. Instantly, snatching the cane from his companion's hand, he ran toward the author of the assault, shouting:

"Never fear, my poor Courbichon; I will avenge you, and I'll do it thoroughly, too. He'll have his rabbit, the villain!"

The youngster who had thrown the ball fled when he saw Cherami running toward him. But Cherami pursued him; while Monsieur Courbichon rubbed his legs, saying:

"This is the first time such a thing ever happened to me while I was watching the game; and it's the more surprising, because I wasn't in line with the pins. So it must have been done on purpose; but why should the fellow aim at my legs? I didn't make any comment on his play—I didn't have any dispute with him.—This will certainly leave a mark on my legs.—Where in the deuce has Monsieur Arthur gone? That man is too quick-tempered."

In a few minutes, Cherami returned, flushed and triumphant, crying:

"You are avenged, my dear Courbichon! yes, what anyone would call thoroughly avenged; the rascal has had what he deserved; and here's the proof."

As he spoke, he handed his new friend his beautiful cane broken in two.

Monsieur Courbichon was dumfounded, and gazed with an air of consternation at the pieces of the cane.

"Ah! mon Dieu!" he faltered; "it is broken!"

"True—it is broken; but I broke it on the back of the ragamuffin who threw his ball at your skittles—I mean, your legs."

"What a pity! You struck him too hard."

"One cannot strike an enemy too hard."

"Such a pretty cane!"

"You still have the pieces—or, at all events, the head; you can have it put on another stick."

"It was a genuine rattan."

"Pardieu! it was genuine enough; the fact that it broke so soon proves that. But there are other rattans in the shops."

"I'm very sorry that you broke my cane."

"If you hadn't lost my Chinese switch, I would have beaten him with that; and that wouldn't have broken, I promise you!"

"It makes me feel very bad—my beautiful cane!"

"Saperlotte! are you going to cry over it? Oughtn't you rather to thank me for avenging the insult to your legs? Come, take your cane, and let us go and dine; the walk has given me an appetite."

Poor Courbichon, with a lachrymose expression, took the pieces of his cane, and submitted to be led away by Cherami, who took his arm and conducted him to one of the best restaurants on the Champs-Élysées. They took their seats out-of-doors, at one of the tables surrounded by hedges in such wise as to form private rooms with walls of verdure. Courbichon placed the fragments of his cane on a chair by his side, heaving a profound sigh; for his new friend intimidated him so that he no longer dared, in his presence, to betray the chagrin caused by the spectacle of his broken treasure.

Cherami ordered the dinner, saying:

"Rely on me; I will order the dinner; and as we are sensible men and have no women with us, there's no need of our making fools of ourselves. We don't want to have a magnificent feast, but simply to dine comfortably. Is that your idea?"

"Exactly; still——"

"You have just the disposition I like! I shall mark with a white cross—*album dies!*—the day which brought us together and enabled me to return your cane. I regret that you lost my Chinese switch! but you have your cane; that's the main thing!"

Whenever his new friend mentioned his cane, Monsieur Courbichon made a wry face, but he did not venture to make any complaint. They proceeded to dine: one, talking constantly as he ate; the other, eating almost without speaking; and, although Cherami had informed his host that they would dine like sensible men, when the bill was brought, it amounted to twenty-two francs.

"That is not too much," said Cherami, passing the check to his companion; "for we have had a good dinner and punished our three bottles."

The little bald man seemed to be of a different opinion; he turned the paper over and over in his hand, muttering:

"Twenty-two francs! twenty-two francs!"

"Well, my good Courbichon, that won't drain the sea dry! How many times I have spent ten times as much on a dainty dinner, tête-à-tête with a pretty woman! To be sure, we used to have all the delicacies of the season—asparagus at thirty francs the bunch, strawberries at fifteen francs, pineapples, wine of Constance.—The women adore that wine! they delight in getting tipsy on Constance—in the bottle!—Have you ever indulged in that sort of affair, amiable Courbichon? Oh! you must have done it, many a time! That's where you lost your hair; eh, old boy?"

"Twenty-two francs! twenty-two francs!"

"Those figures seem to worry you! Do you find a mistake in the addition?"

"No, it isn't that; but I am afraid I haven't enough money with me. I paid quite a large amount at the café, this morning. I didn't expect to spend so much to-day. Would you be kind enough to lend me what I need?"

"I would do so with the most lively satisfaction, my estimable friend; but, as I was feeling in my pocket just now, I discovered that I have forgotten my purse; which, by the way, happens quite often, for I am very absent-minded. I may add that, when I made that discovery, I intended to borrow a few francs of you—as is often done between good friends; for what's the use of friendship, if not to oblige? O divine friendship! gift of the gods!"

"Mon Dieu! what are we going to do, if we haven't enough money between us to pay for our dinner?"

"Don't you be alarmed! I have found myself in that position more than once. You can leave your cane in pawn."

"My cane! When it was whole, that might have been—but now I can only offer some pieces of a cane as a pledge."

"Then leave your watch, my friend."

"I haven't worn it since my last one was stolen."

"But don't worry! They will give us credit on our respectable appearance."

"Let me see; with every sou I can find—— Search your pockets, too."

"Oh! that's useless; I never carry money loose in my pockets. I have my purse, or I haven't it."

Monsieur Courbichon, having collected all that he had in his pockets, could find only twelve francs and two sous. But suddenly, upon renewing his search, he produced something carefully wrapped in paper, and that something proved to be a gold piece of ten francs. The bald man's face lightened.

"Ah!" he cried; "the ten francs that I loaned to Mathieu, and that he paid back this morning; I had forgotten them. That makes up the amount and two sous over—for the waiter."

"If I were in your place," said Cherami, "I would keep Mathieu's ten francs, so that we might have something to refresh ourselves with when we go back; and I would leave my cane for the balance."

"What! you want me to ask for credit when I have enough money to pay the bill?"

"You haven't enough; for with a bill of twenty-two francs, you can't think of giving the waiter less than twenty sous; if you offer him two, he'll throw them in your face."

"If he refuses them, he'll get nothing at all—so much the worse for him! but I shall pay my bill."

"And suppose you feel the need of something while we are walking back?"

"We have dined so well that I shall not want anything."

"On the contrary, you may have an attack of indigestion—you are very red already—and then you'll want a glass of sugar and water."

"I can do without it; I am not in the habit of being sick."

"There are lots of things we're not in the habit of having, and yet they come—as, sudden death, for example; certainly one hasn't the habit of it, and it takes you all of a sudden."

Cherami's arguments were of no avail; Monsieur Courbichon held his ground. He called the waiter, paid for his dinner, and told him that he gave him only two sous because he had nothing but banknotes which he did not wish to change.

They left the restaurant. The little bald man carried the pieces of his cane, but his face wore a very unamiable expression. Cherami, who had ceased to enjoy his society, soon left him, saying:

"Give me your address, my dear friend. I will come soon and bid you good-morning."

"It is useless, monsieur; I start to-morrow for Touraine, where I expect to settle."

"What! you are leaving Paris, too? Very well; if you go to Tours, send me some plums—Rue de l'Orillon, Belleville, Hôtel du Bel-Air; but prepay the freight!"

Monsieur Courbichon saluted Cherami, and hurried off as fast as his little legs would carry him, thrusting a fragment of his cane into each pocket.

XXVIII

A CONSTANT LOVER

Monsieur Gerbault transmitted his daughter's reply to the two suitors who had asked for her hand. Young Anatole took his rebuff without any indication of emotion. He said simply:

"I am very thorry, becauth our two voitheth went very well together. I am thure that we would have thung beautifully, and I am tho fond of muthic that we thould have been very happy."

The Comte de la Bérinière did not accept Adolphine's refusal of his offer so philosophically.

"Upon my word, my dear Gerbault," he exclaimed, "I have bad luck with your daughters! One marries just when I am about to ask for her hand. This one will have none of me; for I understand perfectly that her reply is simply a courteously disguised refusal. Well, I must make the best of it! I will take a trip into Italy, and try to console myself. The Italian women are not the equals of your daughters, but, at all events, they will distract my thoughts."

And, a few days later, the Comte de la Bérinière did, in fact, leave Paris.

But there was one person who was entirely unable to understand Adolphine's conduct: that was her sister Fanny. Learning that she had refused to marry either Monsieur de Raincy or the count, she went to see her one morning.

"Can what father tells me be true? You have refused to marry, when two magnificent *partis* have offered themselves? But, no, it can't be true; you haven't done that! or else you were sick at the time. Surely you didn't realize what you said, when you gave father that answer?"

"Indeed I did, my dear love," Adolphine replied, with a smile; "I knew perfectly well what I was saying; I had considered the matter fully when I refused to marry those gentlemen."

"Upon my word, I don't understand you! What reason, what motives, can have prompted your refusal? The Comte de la Bérinière has thirty thousand francs a year; and he would make you a countess. Just think of it—a countess! Isn't it perfectly bewildering to think of being called Madame la Comtesse?"

"It tempts me very little."

"To be sure, the count is no longer young; but, once married, if you knew, my dear girl, how little you think about your husband's age! Auguste might be sixty years old, now, and it would be all the same to me."

"My ideas are not at all the same as yours, as I have already told you."

"But I have had experience now, and you ought to listen to me. Come, let us admit that you refused the count because you thought he was too old, which is the merest childishness—that reason doesn't apply in the case of Monsieur de Raincy; he is young, good-looking——"

"He has a stupid, self-sufficient manner."

"But what difference does that make? I have always heard it said that a stupid man makes an excellent husband. I should be glad enough if my husband was stupid! Then he wouldn't keep flinging little sarcastic remarks at me when I talk about the state of the market—of the rise or fall in railway shares. Auguste is clever—yes, very clever. But what good does it do me to have him clever and agreeable in society? In his own home, a husband never uses his wit except to make sport of his wife. Monsieur Anatole de Raincy isn't as rich as the count, but he has a very good position in society. Where do you expect to find a better match?"

"I expect nothing."

"Why do you refuse these offers, then?"

"Because I do not love either of them."

"Ah! an excellent reason! How absurd you are, my poor Adolphine! Happiness in wedlock does not consist in love, but in wealth, in luxury, in the power to buy whatever we please, to have magnificent dresses which drive other women mad, to go to balls and parties every day, to have the best boxes at the theatre; not in having to sit sighing by your husband while you watch the soup-kettle."

"I have told you before that my tastes aren't the same as yours."

"Oh! you say that, but, in reality, you would be very glad to cut as fine a figure yourself. But you are romantic! perhaps you have a passion hidden away in your heart. Oh! yes, to refuse two such chances as you have had, you must be in love with somebody!"

Adolphine blushed, but made haste to reply:

"No, you are mistaken. I never think of any man; it is not right of you to say that."

"Very well! then, my dear girl, I say again that it was perfectly absurd of you to refuse those two! Adieu! I am going to select some flowers for my head, for I am going to a large party to-night, and I propose to eclipse all the other women."

Some little time after this interview, Adolphine was alone, thinking of him whose image was always present in her mind; for she had not told her sister the truth when she said that she never thought of any man; but there are passions which one does not choose to confide except to a heart capable of understanding them, and she was well aware that Fanny would not understand hers.

Madeleine suddenly entered her mistress's room, and said:

"Mamzelle, a young man wants to speak to you."

"To me? He probably has business with my father."

"No, mamzelle; it was you he asked to see—and monsieur your father isn't at home, either."

"Very well! show him in."

Soon the door opened anew, and Gustave appeared before Adolphine. The girl uttered an exclamation, for she recognized him at once; and she was so disturbed that she had to lean upon a chair.

"What! is it you, Monsieur Gustave?" she murmured.

Madeleine retired, for she read in her mistress's eyes that the visit caused her no displeasure.

"Yes, Mademoiselle Adolphine," Gustave replied; "yes, my dear sister. Ah! allow me to call you by that name still, as I used, for we have had no falling-out; you have not spurned me, and I venture to hope that you still feel for me a little of that sweet friendship which you seemed to feel in the old days."

Adolphine was so perturbed that she could hardly stammer:

"Of course—yes—I have no reason not to be the same as always with you. But do sit down, Monsieur Gustave. Mon Dieu!—how strange it is!—it's only five months since we saw each other—and you seem changed—— Oh! not for the worse—on the contrary—you have a more serious, more thoughtful, air than before. Is it the result of your travels?"

Adolphine was right; the five months which Gustave had passed away from France had wrought a very considerable change in him, to his advantage; he had lost that bewildered, hare-brained look which people used to criticise in him; now he was a man—young, no doubt, but whose serious, sedate, sensible aspect indicated a person who was accustomed to think before speaking, and to reflect before acting. His face had gained vastly by the change; his manner was colder, perhaps, but you realized that you could rely on what he said. Lastly, the faintest shadow of melancholy that could still be detected on his brow gave an added charm to the gentle expression of his eyes and to the tone of his voice.

Adolphine saw all this at a glance: that is all a woman needs to draw a man's portrait. With trembling hand she pointed to a chair, and Gustave sat down beside her with an ease of manner which covered no hidden motive.

"I don't know whether my travels have changed me," said the young man; "they may, perhaps, have matured my mind somewhat; they have made me a better business man. I realize fully now that I did some things which lacked common-sense, and I shall not make such a fool of myself again!"

"Oh! you are cured of your love for Fanny?" cried Adolphine, with an expression of delight which she could not restrain.

"No, dear Adolphine, no, that is not what I meant!" replied Gustave, sadly; "do what I will, I haven't yet been able to drive that love from my heart. But I meant simply that that unhappy passion will not lead me into doing any more such absurd, unreasonable things as I once did. I have become a man; if I suffer, I can at least conceal my suffering. I have learned to respect the happiness of other people—the desire to disturb it is very far from my thoughts! I realize, in short, that I ought, above all things, to avoid the presence of her who cannot, should not, sympathize with the pain she causes me."

Adolphine turned her head away to conceal the tears which filled her eyes, murmuring:

"Mon Dieu! do you still love her as dearly as ever?"

"I don't know whether it is less or more—I don't know how much I love her; and I would give anything in the world to cease thinking of her! But I cannot—do what I will, her image is always here. I forget that she flirted with me—that she pretended to love me, only to throw me over the next minute. I say to myself that all women try to please, and that they cannot love all the men they have fascinated. I say to myself that this Monsieur Auguste Monléard offered her a brilliant fortune, and all the pleasures, all the enjoyment, all the luxury, in which, to a young woman, the happiness of life consists.—I say all this to myself, and I understand perfectly how she could have refused the poor clerk's hand to accept that of the man who was wealthy and distinguished. So that, if I am unhappy, I can blame nothing but fortune—and Fanny is so pretty, so fascinating, so well worthy to shine in society! She will never be mine, and yet I love her—yes, I still love her! They say that men don't know the meaning of constancy; but you see that that isn't true, Adolphine; you see that there are some who can love faithfully—and, unluckily, they are the ones who are not loved."

Adolphine did not reply for some time; she was suffocating, she could not keep back the tears which dimmed her sight. Gustave saw them; he seized her hand and pressed it, crying:

"You weep—dear sister!—my unhappiness makes you shed tears. Oh! forgive me for coming here and grieving you by the story of my suffering."

"Yes—it does grieve me to know that you are unhappy! But, after all, it seems to me that you ought to try—

that you do not make enough effort to divert your thoughts; you see, when one has no hope, one ought to forget."

"Oh! that makes no difference at all."

"Yes, it is possible.—How long since you returned to Paris?"

"Only last evening; and, as you see, I came to you at once this morning."

"Yes—to talk to me about her!"

"I admit it—but to see you, too,—you who have always shown me so much affection, and whom I am so happy to call my sister still!"

"Oh! of course—because that was the name you gave me when you were to marry Fanny! But you don't know—I have not dared to tell you that father says that you must not come to our house any more!"

"Not come here any more! Why not, pray?"

"Why, because of that unfortunate duel——"

"Duel! What do you mean? What duel?"

"What! you don't know? Hasn't your uncle told you about it?"

"I told you that I only arrived last night; my uncle talked about nothing but matters of business, which are of much more importance in his eyes than anything else. Tell me what duel you are talking about?"

"Do you remember the man who dined with you on the day of my sister's wedding?"

"Yes, a curious creature whom I happened to meet—and who took pity on the state of frenzy I was in at that time."

"Was he a friend of yours?"

"As I tell you, I had known him only a few hours; but I had lost my head that day; you know that better than anybody, dear Adolphine, for you found time, even on that day, to come to me and say a few comforting words.—But what about that man?"

"Well, at night, when my sister went away from the ball with her husband, he was standing near, just as they were entering their carriage. That man—he was drunk, no doubt, but still he insulted my sister."

"The villain! He dared——"

"Yes, he said: 'There goes the faithless Fanny!'—My sister, who heard the words plainly, told me herself. Was that an insult? Tell me frankly, Monsieur Gustave, hadn't you yourself applied that name to my sister more than once that day?"

"It is quite possible; but I was out of my head, I didn't know what I was saying. That did not give that fellow, whose very name I don't remember, the right to repeat my words."

"Auguste heard him, and the next day he fought a duel with the man."

"And what was the result?"

"A sword-thrust in my brother-in-law's forearm, which forced him to carry his arm in a sling at least six weeks."

"Mon Dieu! that incident may well have occasioned unfortunate scenes between the husband and wife; it may have disturbed the domestic happiness of—your sister. She probably accused me of being the original cause of the duel! This is maddening!"

"Don't be alarmed, Monsieur Gustave! you don't know Fanny! The affair affected her very little, her happiness wasn't disturbed by it for a single minute. She goes to some festivity, amuses herself in some way, every day! Oh! she is happy."

"So much the better! And her husband—he adores her still, I fancy?"

"As to that, I can't answer. If they adore each other, it hardly appears on the surface!"

"What! Fanny doesn't love her husband?"

"I don't say that she doesn't love him! but my sister isn't capable of loving like us—like you, I mean. She has so much to take up her time in the way of gowns, head-dresses, new styles, and so forth! How do you suppose she can find time to love her husband?"

"However, I am entirely innocent in this matter of the duel."

"Oh! that is what I have always told father, who has only known it a few days, by the way. For, as you can imagine, they didn't publish it. Monsieur Monléard's injury was supposed to have been caused by a fall on the stairs."

"But why doesn't your father want me to come here? It wasn't a crime to love his elder daughter and to aspire to her hand! It is true, I was very poor, then; to-day, I could offer her more; my uncle, who is very well satisfied with the way I attend to business now, said to me at breakfast this morning: 'From to-day, I give you an interest in my business, and I guarantee you not less than ten thousand francs a year, whether there are any profits or not.'"

"Ah! that is very nice, Monsieur Gustave; I am very glad for you."

"Dear little sister! If you knew how indifferently I received the news of this increase in my income! Ah! that isn't what I look to for happiness!"

"Nor I, either! But, as so many people think differently, probably we are wrong."

"I am thinking about your father, who doesn't want me to come here any more."

"In the first place, he was convinced that there would be no need to say anything to you about it; that you would never have any desire to come to our house again."

"Why so, pray?"

"I don't know why; for my part, I didn't think as he did. Something told me that you would come—to hear about Fanny—to talk about her. I guessed right, did I not?"

"Yes, yes! you read my heart."

"For I know very well that that was the only reason it occurred to you to come here."

"Do you think that I am not fond of you—of you and your father?"

"Oh! I don't say that; but my father fears—suppose you should meet my sister here?"

"I should be able to act with her as with a person who was a total stranger to me. Does she come to see you often?"

"No, not often. She has so many other calls to make! She knows so many people now!"

At that moment the bell rang.

"Mon Dieu!" said Adolphine; "if it should be my father!"

"Why, I will go and offer him my hand, and I am sure that he won't refuse it."

"But if it should be——"

Adolphine had not time to finish her sentence. The door of her chamber was hastily thrown open, and her sister entered.

XXIX

A WOMAN OF FASHION

Fanny was resplendent in costume, jewels, and style; and it must be said that, like all women with whom personal adornment is a special study, she carried her splendor well, and that it added materially to the attractions she had received from nature.

The young woman was nowise perturbed at sight of Gustave Darlemont; she honored him with an affable smile, and her vanity seemed flattered that he whose hand she had refused should see her now in all the glory of her good-fortune and her magnificent toilet. Adolphine, on the contrary, was pale and trembling. As for Gustave, he could not conceal the emotion he felt on seeing Fanny again, and especially in such seductive guise.

"Bonjour, little sister!" said Fanny, kissing Adolphine.—"But, I cannot be mistaken—this is Monsieur Gustave. I am delighted to see you, monsieur."

Gustave barely managed to stammer:

"Madame—I confess that I did not expect—to meet you here."

"Why, it seems to me quite natural that I should come to my father's house. To be sure, it doesn't happen very often: I have so little time to myself! When one goes much into society, one must make and receive so many calls, dress, give orders when one entertains. And, by the way, we give a large party in six days, to inaugurate our winter evenings.—I came to tell you, Adolphine, so that you may have time to prepare a bewitching costume, do you hear? I will advise you, of course, for you don't keep very well abreast of the fashions.—But I thought that you were abroad, Monsieur Gustave?"

"I have just come from Spain, mademoiselle—I beg your pardon—madame. I have been away about five months."

"Indeed! then that is why you look so brown; but that doesn't do you any harm—far from it. Did you enjoy yourself?"

"Enjoy myself? not exactly that, madame; but that wasn't what I went for."

"They say that the women are very pretty in Spain; that their eyes, especially, are dazzlingly bright. Is it true, Monsieur Gustave? Did you see any eyes in that country that excel those of us Frenchwomen?"

"I saw none, madame, which could be compared to——"

The young man checked himself, and added:

"I saw none which made me forget those of the Parisian women."

"Good! that is very polite! And you are settled in Paris now?"

"I do not know, madame; that will depend on—my uncle."

"Well, monsieur, while you are here, if it will afford you any pleasure to come to our evenings at home, Monsieur Monléard, I am sure, will be delighted to see you. At all events, he allows me to invite whom I choose—and he does the same. I greet his friends courteously, he does as much for mine; in that way, we always agree. Stay! next Thursday, as I was saying to my sister, we give a large party; there will be everything: music, dancing, cards, and supper; it will last all night, and we shall have lots of fun. You must come. We shall have all Paris—that is to say, all the best artists, all the celebrities. Will you come?"

Gustave was struck dumb by this invitation, and especially by the light, careless tone in which it was offered; he was more distressed than gratified, and answered, with a low bow:

"No, madame; I shall not have the honor of accepting your invitation."

"Indeed! And why not, may I ask, monsieur?"

"Why, because—at this party—in your husband's house—it seems to me, madame, that I should be out of place; and I am sure beforehand that I should take no pleasure in it. Pray receive, madame, my thanks and my adieux."

Thereupon Gustave went up to Adolphine, who had listened without a word, and pressed her hand, saying in an undertone:

"Adieu, my only friend! Ah! your father is right: it is much better that I should not come here again."

Gustave left the room. Adolphine had difficulty in concealing her grief. Fanny, meanwhile, looked at herself in a mirror, saying:

"What is the matter with Monsieur Gustave, I wonder? He had a very tragic air as he left us. It wasn't polite of him to refuse my invitation. And I fancied that it would give him the greatest pleasure! There are so many young men who would be overjoyed to have the opportunity to come to my evenings!"

"In your eyes, Monsieur Gustave ought not to be like other young men. And I cannot conceive how you could have dreamed of urging him to come to see you," rejoined Adolphine, in a trembling voice.

"Why not, I should like to know? You seem to be surprised at everything!"

"But after all that happened between you before you were married——"

"All what? Monsieur Gustave was in love with me. Ah! there are many others who are in love with me to-day—yes, and who pay court to me, too. But that won't keep them from coming to dance at our ball—quite the contrary; and they have engaged me beforehand for I don't know how many contra-dances. But I shall take only those whom I like. I would have done as much for Gustave; or, rather, I would have given him the preference—I would have let him have more dances."

"But don't you see that Gustave still loves you? that he can't accustom himself to seeing you as another man's wife, and that it would be impossible for him to meet your husband?"

"Do you think that that young man still loves me so much as that?"

"To be sure; he was just telling me so himself when you came."

"Ah! the poor boy! I am sorry for him, but I thought he had grown reasonable! A constant lover! Why, the fellow is a perfect phœnix!"

"A phœnix that you would have none of!"

"I don't repent. My husband is not a phœnix in love, I admit. At first, he adored me; then, it suddenly passed away. But I wasn't silly enough to groan over it. He has continued to lavish on me all the pleasures and amusements that wealth can procure. What more could I ask? I consider myself the luckiest woman in Paris. Whereas with that poor Gustave—that phœnix of constancy!—I should have vegetated; I should have gone to the play on Sunday, as a treat!"

"Monsieur Gustave is already in a much better position. His uncle is so well satisfied with him that he gives him ten thousand francs a year now."

"Ten thousand francs! Well, yes, that is something. One can manage to live with that. But how far he is still from Auguste's position!"

"And then, too, Fanny, when you invite Monsieur Gustave to your house, you seem to forget that duel. Your husband knows that it was he who was in such despair on account of your marriage, and that that was the cause——"

"Oh! for heaven's sake, let me alone, Adolphine! My husband has forgotten all about that. He has much more important things in his head. When a man is intent on making millions, do you suppose he wastes any time on trifles of that sort? Oh! mon Dieu! chattering here with you, I forgot that I have to call on my broker."

"You have a broker, Fanny?"

"To be sure. I speculate on the Bourse, too—just to amuse myself a little, you know. But I do not intrust my affairs to my husband, because he would ridicule me. Adieu, little sister! Make your preparations for our grand party on Thursday. Oh! we shall have much sport. I am going to have a ravishing gown."

Madame Monléard took her leave; whereupon Adolphine sank into a chair, saying to herself:

"Now I can cry at my ease, for he said that he should not come here any more!"

XXX

THE SECOND MEETING

On leaving Monsieur Gerbault's house, Gustave did not return at once to his uncle's office; he felt that he must be by himself, in the open air, and, although it was winter, he had no fear of the cold; on the contrary, it seemed to him that the keen north wind would cool his blood and tranquillize his mind, which the sight of Fanny had overturned anew.

Having her before his eyes, more bewitching than ever, Gustave had realized how dearly he still loved her who had refused to be his wife. And he had already found, in the depths of his heart, innumerable reasons to excuse her conduct; in his eyes, she was rather frivolous than guilty.

Now that he had seen Fanny again, that she had talked with him as pleasantly as before her marriage, and had urged him to call upon her, Gustave did not know what to believe, what to think, what to conjecture, from it all. He asked himself why she wanted to see him. Whether it was because she still felt some affection for him, whether she derived any pleasure from his presence, whether she sympathized secretly with his grief; or was it simply for the purpose of flaunting in his face her brilliant social position, her superb gowns, and the homage that was paid to her?

Gustave walked a long time at random on the boulevard, where he met very few people, on account of the cold.

"No," he said to himself; "I will not go to her house! Have I courage to be a witness of her husband's happiness? Moreover, her husband hasn't invited me; it seems to me that he is sure to receive me very coldly. That's what I would do in his place. But Fanny didn't think of what she was saying; she invited me thoughtlessly—or else from simple courtesy. Ah! she is very pretty still; she's a hundred times more fascinating than ever! I did very wrong to go to Monsieur Gerbault's!"

Suddenly the melancholy lover was roused from his reflections by someone who threw his arms about him, embraced him, and kissed him on the cheek, crying:

"Ah! here he is! it is he! At last I have found him—my dear, good Gustave! Victory! Castor has found Pollux!

I have my cue!

"'And since I've found my faithful friend,
My luck will take a different trend!'"

Gustave struggled to free himself, in order to see the face of the individual who was so lavish of tokens of affection, and he finally recognized his impromptu friend of Fanny's wedding day, the man with whom he had dined at Deffieux's.

Cherami was the same as always. But his costume seemed even shabbier in the cold weather then prevailing than in summer; for his frock-coat, more threadbare than ever, was drawn so tightly across his shoulders that one could see that there was nothing under it; his plaid trousers, worn thinner than ever, evidently afforded his legs very little protection against the sharp north wind; and the Courbichon hat, by dint of being planted on the side of his head, was beginning to resemble the one it had replaced. But all this did not prevent the ci-devant Beau Arthur from holding himself erect and eying everybody he met from top to toe.

"Why, it is Monsieur——"

"Arthur Cherami. Yes, my dear fellow; it is I, your faithful friend, your Pylades, who has been seeking you over hill and dale, and who even called to inquire for you at your uncle's,—Grandcourt, the banker,—who, I am bound to say, did not receive me with all the consideration I deserve! But uncles are not very amiable, as a general rule. He told me that you were in Spain."

"He told the truth; I returned only last night."

"And I have been scouring the four quarters of Paris every day, saying to myself: 'If Gustave has returned, I cannot help meeting him.'—And here you are, my dear friend, whose absence seemed so long! Well! don't we propose to shake hands with our intimate friend, on whose bosom we poured out our woes?"

But Gustave hesitated to give his hand to Cherami, and replied in a serious tone:

"Before shaking hands with you, monsieur, I must have an explanation with you. You fought a duel with Monsieur Auguste Monléard, and you made that duel inevitable by addressing an insulting remark to his bride. By what right did you take that step? Why did you do it? for what object? Come, answer me."

"Ah! par la sambleu! this is a cross-examination which I was far from expecting! I fight in a friend's cause, I wound his fortunate rival—I didn't kill him, to be sure; but still, I might have killed him. Then, your charmer would have been a widow, and you would have married her!"

"Ah! I thank heaven that Monsieur Monléard got off with a wound in the arm! If you had killed him, I should have been accused of the murder!"

"What's that? you? Everybody knows that it wasn't you who fought with him. I see a young man, miserable, desperate, because the woman he loves marries another. That young man interests me. I dine with him, and he pours his sorrows into my bosom. Every instant, he complains of the perfidy of the woman who has deceived him; and, that same day, when I chance to meet that faithless creature on her conqueror's arm, you would not have me try to avenge my friend's wrongs? Damnation! what the devil do you understand by friendship, I wonder? If that's your idea of it, why, adieu, bonjour, let's say no more about it! Go and look elsewhere for friends; but you won't find my sort lying around by the dozen!"

Gustave detained Cherami as he turned away, and offered him his hand, saying:

"Come, come, don't get excited, hot-head! I see that one cannot bear you a grudge; give me your hand!"

"This is very fortunate. He realizes at last that I am entirely devoted to him, and that his happiness alone is my object."

"My dear monsieur——"

"Don't call me *monsieur*, or it will be my turn to be angry!"

"Very well! my dear Arthur, that duel of yours annoyed me very much, because I was afraid that it would have set Fanny against me altogether. But, thank heaven! it did nothing of the kind."

"As if women were ever angry because a man fights for them! You evidently don't know them; on the contrary, it flatters their self-esteem—it serves to set them off a little."

"I have just seen Fanny, I met her at her sister's. I didn't expect to see her there. Ah! if you knew—I am still all upset by that meeting."

"Do you mean that you still love that young woman?"

"Do I love her! Alas! yes, I love her still, and I feel that my passion will make my whole life miserable."

"Did the little lady receive you coldly?"

"Why, no; on the contrary, she gave me a most delicious smile, and talked to me just as she used to before her marriage. In fact,—can you believe it?—she invited me to a large party that she gives next Thursday."

"And still you have a sad, woe-begone air! why, I should say that you have every reason to rejoice!"

"Why so?"

"Because when this lady, who knows that you once adored her, and who must have seen that you love her still—when, I say, she asks you to come and see her, it means that she proposes to reward you for your constancy—to crown your passion. Pardieu! that's not hard to understand. Go to her party, my dear friend, and I'll stake my head that within six weeks the husband has rooms at the sign of the Stag or the Crescent, as long as you choose."

"Ah! what do you presume to imply? You imagine that Fanny is capable of betraying her husband, of forgetting her duty? No, no! she may be fickle, coquettish, if you please, but she will never be guilty. And I myself—oh! that is not my conception of love. A woman who shares her favors—who pretends to feel for one man the love which she really feels for another—oh! I should soon cease to love such a woman!"

Cherami shook his head, as he muttered:

"You are young, my dear Gustave; you are very young! You don't know the world as I do. You say that you still adore your Fanny, and that you wouldn't have her deceive her husband for you?"

"In the first place, she wouldn't do it!"

"I am strongly inclined to believe the contrary; but let us admit that you are right. I see but one means of making you happy, and that is to carry the young woman off. Do you want me to do that? I'll undertake it, if you do."

"No, my dear Arthur; I have never had such a thought. Fanny has all that she wants—she is happy; I shall be very careful to avoid disturbing her happiness; I have neither the right nor the desire to do so. But, as I feel that the sight of her intensifies my suffering, by reviving the passion which I am trying to extinguish; as I do not wish to expose myself—for some time, at least—to the chance of meeting her at the theatre or in society, why, I shall leave Paris, and travel once more. My uncle always has business in other countries, and he will not be sorry to employ me in that way again."

"That's a crazy idea of yours! So, if your love happens to hang on, that little woman will make you do the tour of the world?"

"Let us hope that time will cure me."

"There is something that works quicker than time in the cure of love; to wit, another love. You ought to have had ten mistresses in Spain."

"Impossible! I thought of nobody but her."

"You can fairly boast of being a paladin of the good old times. You could have given *Roland* and *Amadis* points. So you are going to leave Paris again! Would you like me to travel with you?"

"Thanks! my company is far from agreeable; my sole pleasure consists in musing by myself—thinking of the happiness to which I looked forward for some time, but which I am never to know."

"We would have sought adventures together, aye, and found them too, I promise you! That would have diverted your thoughts."

"I do not care to divert my thoughts, as my only pleasure is the thought of her."

"Sapristi! yours is a devilishly persistent passion! However, as you're so obstinate——"

Cherami paused, and seemed to reflect upon the best means of changing the subject.

XXXI

A NEW SWITCH

"In that case, it will be another long while before I see you again?" he said at last. "That troubles me—especially as there are times when a friend is very essential!"

Cherami shook his head, rubbed his chin, and added, between his teeth:

"I haven't my cue at this moment—I need it damnably!"

Gustave glanced at the ex-beau, whose piteous expression was even more noticeable against his wretched costume; then he exclaimed:

"Can I do anything for you, my dear friend? If so, tell me, I beg; I should be happy to be of any service to you!"

"Faith! my dear fellow, I will not conceal from you that I am at this moment absolutely cleaned out. I counted on some money that was owing me; my quarterly income isn't due for six weeks."

"You need money? Why, in heaven's name, didn't you tell me? I am entirely at your service. How much do you need?"

"Why, at this moment—it's very cold—my rascal of a tailor broke his word—so—I ought to have—say, a hundred francs, to furbish me up a bit."

"A hundred francs! Why, you couldn't do anything with that. Here, my good friend, here's five hundred! Take it; I can spare it."

Gustave took a banknote from his wallet as he spoke, and handed it to Cherami, who could not restrain a joyful movement when he received that windfall; he seized the young man's hand and pressed it with all his strength, crying:

"Ah! you are the friend I have dreamed about! My dear Gustave, I shall never forget what you do for me at this moment! Henceforth we are friends in life and death! I cannot name the exact day when I shall be able to repay this money——"

"Eh? who said anything about that? I have more money than I need, and, I say again, I am delighted to be able to be of service to you."

"Excellent and worthy friend! You are made on the antique pattern; you have something of Socrates and of Marcus Aurelius about you. So you don't want me to kidnap Fanny?"

"No, I won't have it!"

"Well, if you change your mind, you have only to write me a line at the same address: Cherami, Hôtel du Bel-Air, Rue de l'Orillon, Belleville. By the way, I will call on your uncle's concierge now and then, to find out whether you have returned. Sapristi! it pains me to have you go."

"I shall return—and perhaps I shall be more reasonable."

"Then we will enjoy ourselves, we will laugh and make merry! Au revoir, then, my dear Gustave! If you have any commission for me, write me a line. But prepay your letters, for my hostess has a habit of refusing to take in those that have to be paid for."

"What! even when they are for her tenants?"

"Above all, when they are for her tenants."

Gustave walked away after shaking hands with Cherami, who looked after him with a touched expression,

saying to himself:

"Excellent heart! he reconciles me with mankind; clearly, there still are such things as friends; they are rare, but, still, they do exist, and it's simply a matter of finding them. Now, I must see about getting some comfortable duds; that won't be an extravagance. When anyone brushes against me, I am always afraid he'll carry away a piece of my coat."

Cherami soon found one of the great furnishing shops where you can procure a complete change of raiment, from head to foot. He bought a pair of trousers, very full, a thickly padded waistcoat, and a roomy coat; and he put them all on over the clothes he was wearing.

"I am like Bias, one of the seven sages of Greece," he said; "I carry my whole wardrobe on my back."

Cherami made all these purchases for ninety francs. He left the shop much stouter than he entered, and his double trousers compelled him to walk with a certain gravity. But he was so content, he considered himself so comely in his new clothes, that he smiled benignly on everybody, even on the cabmen who passed him. But something was still lacking: since he had restored Monsieur Courbichon's cane, he had not replaced it, for lack of funds; and that was to him a great privation. Now he could gratify his longing; a man who has four hundred and ten francs in his pocket, after purchasing a new outfit throughout, can well afford to humor his fancy for a cane.

Cherami spied a shop where canes of all sorts were for sale; he examined a score, among which there were some very expensive ones. After hesitating for some time between a superb Malacca joint at seventy-five francs, and a light switch at a hundred sous, he finally decided upon the latter. "For, after all," he reflected, "I don't need a cane to lean on! Thank God, I haven't the gout! I will take the switch; it can be used as a crop when I ride; and then, I like something that bends—one can play with it."

Armed with his switch, with which he beat the air in a very unpleasant fashion for those who passed him, Cherami betook himself to the Palais-Royal, saying to himself:

"I think I will dine at Les Frères Provençaux. I like that old-fashioned house; you are always treated well there. It's a little dear, perhaps, but one can't pay too much for what is good."

"Pray be careful, monsieur! you hit me with your cane!"

"What's the matter, monsieur? what are you complaining about?"

"You hit me with your cane, I tell you."

"In the first place, monsieur, it isn't a cane; it's a switch; in the second place, you have only to walk farther away from me."

"Monsieur, I am on the sidewalk, as you are. I have a right to be here, I fancy."

"What's all this?—Cheap talk? impertinence? If you're not satisfied, monsieur, say so at once; I'm your man; I won't run away!"

His interlocutor, who had not left home with the intention of fighting a duel, quickened his pace and disappeared without making any further reply.

Cherami began to wave his switch about as before.

"These fellows are amazing, on my word!" he muttered. "They want to frighten me out of playing with this little stick. As if I would put myself out—as if——"

But this time he concluded to stop, hearing the crash of broken glass; he had shattered with his switch a beautiful mirror which formed part of the show-window of a perfumer's shop. The mistress of the establishment was already in her doorway, where she said to Cherami in an angry tone:

"You broke that mirror, monsieur; you broke it!"

Beau Arthur, with no outward indication of excitement, smiled at the perfumeress as he rejoined:

"Very good! my dear woman, if I broke your mirror, I'll pay for it. You shouldn't lose your temper for a little thing like that. How much will it cost to replace it?"

"Twenty francs, monsieur."

"Twenty francs! here's your money! a mere bagatelle!—I am not sorry to have christened my switch," he added, as he walked away.

XXXII

THE FAREWELLS

When he learned that his nephew wished to leave Paris again, Monsieur Grandcourt did not conceal the regret which he felt at the thought of another separation; but when he realized that Gustave still loved Madame Monléard, he placed no obstacle in the way of his departure, and it was decided that the young man should go to Germany.

"During your absence," said the banker, "an individual came here to inquire for you—I say an *individual*, for I don't know how else to describe the man, whose whole aspect was more than questionable. His name, I believe, is Arthur Cherami, and he claims to be an intimate friend of yours, because you paid for his dinner the day Mademoiselle Fanny was married."

"Ah! yes, I know whom you mean, uncle; I have seen him; I met him a couple of days ago."

"I trust, my dear Gustave, that you will not affect that gentleman's society. You don't know, perhaps, what he did? He fought a duel with Monsieur Monléard, after making an insulting remark to his wife."

"I know it, uncle. But, in the first place, that day, or rather that night, the poor devil was a little tipsy—he lost his head—he thought he was avenging me; after all, it only goes to prove that he's a brave fellow."

"My dear boy, the gentry who stop public conveyances on the highroad are generally brave fellows, too, but

that doesn't prevent their being brigands."

"Oh! uncle, do you mean that you think that that poor Arthur——"

"I don't say that he's a thief; but I don't advise you to make a companion of him."

"He's no fool; he has had a good education, and he knows the world."

"He is all the more reprehensible for having allowed himself to sink so low! For he seems to me to be always in search of a dinner. However, as you are going away again for some time, I trust that your relations with the fellow will be entirely broken off."

Gustave hastened the preparations for his journey; but, being obliged to wait for certain letters which his uncle desired to give him for his correspondents, he was not ready to leave Paris until the following Thursday evening. He desired to see Adolphine once more before he went; she had always been so kind and affectionate to him, that it seemed to him that it would be ungracious to leave Paris again without bidding her adieu. But the fear of another meeting with Fanny held him back. He suddenly remembered, however, that that was the day of the grand affair to which Madame Monléard had invited him.

"Surely," he said to himself, "Fanny has too much to do at home to-day, to find time to go to her sister's. So that I can call on Adolphine with no fear of meeting her whose presence causes me more pain than pleasure now."

Adolphine was at home, engaged in preparations for the ball; for although she anticipated no pleasure at her sister's magnificent function, she could not do otherwise than go. She was looking with an indifferent air at a lovely ball gown which her father had given her, and which would have delighted most young women of her age beyond measure.

"But," thought Adolphine, "what do I care whether people think me pretty? There will be nobody at the ball whom I care to please. Ah! if he were going! But he was wise to refuse; he could not, ought not to go."

Madeleine noiselessly opened the door, and said:

"Mamzelle, here's the young man who came the other day—the one who's so good-looking, and seems so sad-like."

"Monsieur Gustave?"

"Yes, that Monsieur Gustave, who was so scared by your sister the other time, that he went right away."

"Mon Dieu! Is father at home?"

"Yes, mamzelle; but he's in his room with Monsieur Batonnin, who came just a minute ago. They'll probably have a lot to talk about, and you know your father hardly ever comes into your room. And, to-day, he knows that you're getting your dress ready."

"Show Gustave in, quickly."

Trimmings, flowers, ribbons, all were thrown aside; Adolphine was so happy at the thought of seeing Gustave. In a moment, he entered the room, ran to her side, and pressed her hand affectionately.

"Will you forgive me for disturbing you again, dear Adolphine?" he asked.

"Will I forgive you! Why, I am very glad to see you; for, when you went away the other day, you said that you wouldn't come again, and that grieved me much."

"That was because I was so unprepared to meet your sister. I didn't expect to see her, and I confess that it affected me so deeply that it revived all my suffering."

"Oh! I saw that; but it was by the merest chance that you met her; she comes here very seldom."

"No matter; I would not have run the risk of a second meeting; but I remembered that this is the day of her grand ball, and I thought that she would have no leisure to come here this morning."

"But I should have said that Fanny was glad to see you."

"Oh! that makes no difference, my good little sister; her glances, her voice, her smile, all made my heart ache! You can't imagine what agony it is to be with a person you love, and who doesn't love you!"

"Yes, yes, I understand."

"Especially when you have imagined for some time that you possessed that person's heart; when you have flattered yourself with the prospect of passing your life with her! To see that woman again, when she belongs to another, is the most frightful torture. Fanny smiled at me, she asked me to call on her. But I would have preferred a cold, harsh greeting a hundred times over; I would have liked her to avoid my presence as I meant to avoid hers; for then I would have thought: 'I am not utterly indifferent to her.'—However, that won't happen again, for I am going away, and I have come to say good-bye."

"You are going away again! Mon Dieu! you have only just returned!"

"Ah! I should have done better not to return so soon. Living in Paris weighs on me, it recalls the past too vividly."

"And where are you going now?"

"To Germany, Austria—as far away as possible!"

"For a long time?"

"Oh! yes, for I don't propose to return until I am thoroughly cured of my unhappy passion."

Adolphine put her handkerchief to her eyes.

"But it's not our fault," she stammered,—"if my sister doesn't love you—and yet, because she doesn't, we—must lose a friend."

"Dear Adolphine, such woe-begone friends as I am are hardly worth regretting."

"Do you think so? But suppose I like them so?"

"When I return, I shall probably find you married, too."

"No, no! I shall not be married, I—I am sure of it."

"What do you know about it? There are certain to be plenty of aspirants to your hand."

"I refused two, not long ago. They were both rich, but I am not like my sister; I want to love my husband!"

"Do you think, pray, that Fanny doesn't love hers?"

"Mon Dieu! I know nothing about it. I don't know what I am saying; I am so disappointed!"

At that moment, the door opened. Monsieur Gerbault appeared, with Monsieur Batonnin, who entered first.

"Pray excuse me, mademoiselle," he began; "I come to engage you for the first contra-dance that——"

The soft-spoken gentleman stopped abruptly, seeing a young man seated beside Adolphine; he rolled his eyes in the direction of the father, adding:

"Ah! mademoiselle has a visitor; we disturb her."

Monsieur Gerbault was no less surprised than he at finding a man in his daughter's room, and her with her eyes full of tears. But he soon recognized Gustave, who bowed respectfully to him and said:

"Forgive me, monsieur, for presuming to call upon your daughter; but I came to bid her good-bye, and I hoped to have the honor of paying my respects to you as well before leaving the house."

"Ah! is it you, Monsieur Gustave? I thought that you were in Spain?"

"I returned a week ago, monsieur; and to-night I start for Germany."

"Why, what's the matter, Adolphine? you look as if you had been crying. But I cannot conceive what reason you can have to be unhappy."

Monsieur Batonnin thought it advisable to intervene.

"It always saddens one to say good-bye to one's friends," he murmured. "Life is so short! When we part, we are never sure of meeting again."

"What do you say, monsieur?" cried Adolphine, with a pathetic glance at Gustave.

"I had no purpose to grieve you, mademoiselle, believe me," Batonnin made haste to reply; "on the contrary, I came to solicit the honor of dancing the first contra-dance with you; for you surely have not forgotten that madame your sister gives a ball this evening?"

"No, monsieur."

"I realize," said Gustave, "that I came at a very inopportune moment, and interrupted mademoiselle in her preparations for that festivity, diverting her thoughts to a poor traveller who desired to carry away with him a friendly word or two. Pray forgive my intrusion, mademoiselle. I am an unlucky mortal, for my sadness constantly casts a shadow on the happiness of other people. But I am sure that you will forgive me, in memory of our former friendship.—Monsieur Gerbault, will you allow me to shake hands with you?"

The melancholy and at the same time dignified manner in which Gustave spoke banished the last trace of sternness from Monsieur Gerbault's face; he took the young man's hand and pressed it warmly, saying to him:

"Come, come, my friend, drive away the gloomy thoughts that assail you. At your age, the future is boundless. Don't submit to be crushed by fruitless regrets; you may still be happy, and you will be some day, I am sure. A pleasant journey to you! Study the manners and customs of the countries you visit, and I am convinced that you will return in an infinitely more cheerful frame of mind."

"Thanks for your kind wishes, monsieur; allow me to bid you adieu."

Gustave pressed Adolphine's hand, bowed to the visitor, whom he did not know, and left the room. While the young woman escorted him to the door, Monsieur Batonnin observed to Monsieur Gerbault:

"That young man is in love with Mademoiselle Adolphine, I see, and you have refused him her hand. Doubtless he isn't a suitable match for her; but still it is very good-natured of you to give him encouragement for the future."

"My dear Monsieur Batonnin, you are all off the track. It was not Adolphine, but her sister Fanny, with whom Gustave was in love, and he flattered himself that he was going to marry her, when Auguste Monléard came forward. Faith! he had better luck. He offered her a position which any young woman would have liked, and she accepted him. It was a very hard blow to this young Gustave."

"I understand. Then it was he who fought a duel with your son-in-law, and gave him the wound which made him carry his arm in a sling so long?"

"You are wrong again. It was not Gustave who fought with Monsieur Monléard, for Gustave was a long way from Paris when the duel took place."

"Whom did your son-in-law fight with, then?"

"Faith! you ask me too much!"

Adolphine's return put an end to Monsieur Batonnin's questions. "Mademoiselle," he said, in his most silvery tones, "I beg your pardon if I repeat the same thing again and again, like a parrot, but I should be glad to know if I may obtain from you the favor of the first contra-dance. I present my request thus early, because I am sure that you will be beset, overwhelmed with invitations this evening, and it will be very difficult to obtain a word with you."

Adolphine seemed to make an effort to throw off her preoccupation, and replied:

"But I am not sure yet, monsieur, whether I shall dance at my sister's this evening, for I have a very severe headache, and, unless it gets better, I shall cut a very sad figure in a dance."

"Don't pay any attention to her," said Monsieur Gerbault. "These girls are forever having headaches, which take them all of a sudden when they have the least thought of such a thing; but, have no fear, there never was a headache that didn't surrender at the signal given by the orchestra at a ball. So, as you've delivered your invitation, you are certain of being her first partner. And now, let us leave mademoiselle to her preparations. Come, my dear Monsieur Batonnin."

The soft-spoken gentleman bestowed a superb smile upon Adolphine, accompanied by a respectful bow.

"Mademoiselle," he said, "I rest my hopes upon what your father says, too fortunate if you crown my desires; and if my invitation, albeit a little premature perhaps, and rather unseasonable——"

"Come, Monsieur Batonnin, come."

The maker of compliments, being led away by Monsieur Gerbault, was compelled to complete his sentence in the reception-room; and Adolphine, left alone at last, cursed Monsieur Batonnin for coming, with his invitation, to interrupt her interview with Gustave.

"A ball, indeed!" she murmured, angrily tossing her furbelows about; "I must needs dance this evening, when my heart is full, when I would like to weep undisturbed! Ah! if these are the pleasures which society has to offer, they who are debarred from them are the most fortunate!"

XXXIII

A GRAND AFFAIR

At ten o'clock, Monsieur Monléard's magnificent salons were resplendent with light, flowers, and new draperies, arranged with an artistic skill which did honor to the taste of the organizer of the festivity. At eleven, the guests arrived in swarms. The ladies were superbly dressed, and the flashing of their diamonds dazzled the eye; some—but by no means the larger number—were more simply attired, and were content to attract by the charms of their persons alone. The men admired the beautiful dresses, but preferred to linger by those whose attractions depended less upon their costumes. A fine orchestra played quadrilles, polkas, mazurkas. Its strains seemed to enliven the faces of the guests, which fairly beamed with pleasure—the pleasure which they already enjoyed, and that to which they looked forward: the latter is always the more agreeable.

At midnight, the number of guests was already so great that it was becoming very difficult to pass from one room into another. To do so required an amount of persevering effort which many of the ladies did not choose to put forth, and which, indeed, the enormous dimensions of their skirts made almost impossible.

The ball was at its height. The queen of the fête did the honors with much grace, and everybody agreed in voting her charming. Fanny was, in very truth, most bewitchingly and becomingly dressed; her white moire gown, albeit not overladen with trimming, was studded with bunches of real flowers, and in her hair there were no jewels save a cluster of diamonds; but the satisfaction which her vanity experienced in the giving of such a fête imparted to her eyes an unusual brilliancy, to her smile more expression, to her voice more feeling. She was surrounded by men who contended for the honor of dancing a polka or a quadrille with her, and everyone envied the lucky mortal who was her partner for the time being, especially as she was a beautiful dancer; she was as light as a feather, and her feet seemed hardly to touch the floor.

Auguste Monléard was very far from displaying the same glee and satisfaction which were so apparent on his wife's features; he did the honors of his salons with the exquisite courtesy and refinement of a man in the best society, who is accustomed to party-giving; but there was in his smile a something forced and constrained, which was better adapted to freeze than to provoke gayety; at times, too, a dark cloud passed over his forehead, his eyebrows contracted, his lips tightened, and he seemed utterly oblivious to what was being said to him. But these periods of distraction lasted but a moment. Auguste would suddenly come to himself and struggle to assume a cheerful aspect.

Adolphine, who came early with her father, did not dazzle the beholder by the splendor of her costume; but she was charming by virtue of her natural grace of manner, her perfect figure, the sweet expression of her lovely eyes, and perhaps, too, by virtue of a touch of melancholy, which she strove to overcome, but which added to the charm of her face.

Monsieur Batonnin did not fail to be on hand when the leader of the orchestra gave the signal for the dancing to begin, and the girl had no choice but to accept him for her partner; indeed, it mattered little to her with whom she danced; what she would have liked would have been not to dance at all; but, as she was the hostess's sister, that was impossible; too many people would have inquired the reason for her abstinence, and it would have worried her father and annoyed her sister. On the contrary, she felt that she must act as if she were enjoying herself hugely, and that was very difficult; we can do many things to oblige another, but the eyes never have complaisance enough to hide thoroughly our real feelings.

While dancing with Adolphine, Monsieur Batonnin did not fail to overwhelm her with compliments, scattered among his remarks upon the party.

"It's magnificent! it's enchanting! it's delightful! How elegantly these salons are decorated! and with such taste! Flowers everywhere—to say nothing of those who are dancing; for women and flowers, you know, are very much alike. Others have said that before me, to be sure; but there are things that can't be repeated too often. It must have cost a lot—to give a party like this! but then, when one has the means! Monsieur Monléard doesn't look as cheerful as his wife does; he doesn't seem to be dancing. Still, a host can't dance all the time. I don't suppose he's sick, although he is very pale; but he's almost always pale."

To all this Adolphine replied only by monosyllables, and the gentleman with the doll's face said to himself after the quadrille:

"That young lady is just about as cheerful as her brother-in-law; it's of no use for Papa Gerbault to tell me that that young man I saw there this morning was in love with her sister; that wouldn't make this one cry. There's something else—yes, there certainly is something else."

In a salon set aside for card-players, Messieurs Clairval and Gerbault and young Anatole de Raincy met.

"How's this? you are not dancing?" they said to the last named.

"Oh! dear me, no! I wath never mad over danthing," replied the young dandy, looking at himself in a mirror; "and there'th thuch a crowd! How can one expect to do anything? When I danth, I like to let mythelf go."

"Do you mean that you dance the cancan, De Raincy?" queried a young man with a jovial face, putting his hand on Anatole's shoulder.

"How thtupid you are, Vauflers! Jutht becauth I like to put a little grath into my danthing, it dothn't follow that I danth the cancan."

"Well, you see, I don't dance half lying down, as you do."

"In the firtht plath, I thtoop, not lie down—a very different thing. You ought to know that, to danth properly, you mutht thtoop a little. I learned that from a great danther."

"From Vestris?"

"You tire me! Ever thinth thith fellow hath been eighth clerk to a broker, he maketh fun of everybody."

"What news from the Bourse to-night?" said Monléard, accosting the young man whom Anatole had called Vauflers.

"You know that several firms were sold out this morning. I believe that we haven't seen the end yet. There's need of a thorough weeding-out. There are some fellows who have been playing too high for a long time."

Auguste pressed his lips together and walked away.

"Shan't we have a game of bouillotte?" said the young man.

"Bouillotte ith bad form jutht now, my dear fellow; nobody playth it," replied tall Anatole, gazing admiringly at his gloves.

"Bézique's the proper thing, I suppose?"

"No, lanthquenet thtill."

"Ah, yes! because you can ruin yourself faster at that. Thanks! I think I'll go and dance. I asked the hostess for a dance, and she put my name down; but I was twenty-first on the list."

"In that cath, your turn will come by to-morrow night."

"Oh! Madame Monléard will make an exception in my favor."

"Why tho, pray?"

"Because I am her broker."

"Oho! do you mean that Madame Monléard gambleth on the Bourth?"

"Why, yes—moderately; but she's luckier than her husband."

"Tho he hath been lothing, hath he?"

"I should say so!—immense sums, of late. Indeed, I will admit that I was much surprised at his giving a party—although, to be sure, that is sometimes an excellent way of deceiving people as to one's position and retaining one's credit."

"The deuth! what are you talking about?"

"At this moment, I have an idea that he is staking all to win all, as they say, on a certain deal; but if he loses ——"

"Look out! here comth hith father-in-law. Come thith way."

The two young men, arm in arm, walked into another room.

"Mon Dieu! how beautifully your wife dances!" said Batonnin to Monléard, as Fanny whirled by them, dancing the mazurka with a partner who guided her perfectly and executed some novel steps.

"What! did you say that it's too warm here?"

"No, I never complain of the heat; I'm a genuine African in that respect. I was admiring Madame Monléard's dancing—she's dancing the mazurka at this moment; there they go again! I must say that she has a partner who does himself credit, too; he holds her so firmly, and she trusts herself to his guidance with such abandon! a very pretty fellow that! What is his name? By the way—what! he has gone, and without answering my question! Hum! They may say what they choose, but Monsieur Monléard isn't in his usual form to-night; he's too preoccupied, too distraught. It's a good thing that that doesn't keep his wife from dancing."

About two o'clock, the ladies were invited to repair to a table laden with a magnificent supper; as the company was so large that all could not sup at once, the ladies took their turn first, and the men waited until they had finished, except a few impatient individuals, such as one sees at almost all balls, who found a way to squeeze in at the table with the ladies, where, on the pretext of waiting on them, they did not fail to help themselves abundantly to everything that was most delicate and appetizing. Indeed, it not infrequently happens that, after they have laid hands upon everything within reach, and eaten uninterruptedly, while most of the ladies have done nothing but talk, these same gallant creatures return to the supper table with the men, and fall to anew, as if they had eaten nothing. There are some worthies capable of that; we ourselves have seen it done.

Monsieur Batonnin tried to find a seat at the ladies' table, but, despite his everlasting smile, no one would make room for him. So he decided to remain standing, and naturally stationed himself behind Adolphine, whom he pestered with attentions; for Adolphine had no appetite, and refused almost everything which he ordered for her, and which he did not fail to obtain at once by saying:

"It's for the sister of Madame Monléard, the queen of the fête."

With these magic words, Batonnin was quite sure to obtain all that he could possibly want; but if his courtesy was absolutely wasted, it was not so with the dishes which were refused; for when Adolphine said: "Thanks, monsieur; but I will not eat anything," the soft-spoken gentleman invariably adjudged what happened to be on the plate to himself, saying:

"Well, since you don't care for it, faith! I'll eat it myself."

And, thanks to this clever management, he supped quite as well as, perhaps better than, if he had had a seat among the ladies. To be sure, he had to eat standing.

When the ladies had left the table, and the men came to take their places, Monsieur Batonnin, whether by accident or from absent-mindedness, imitating the worthies of whom we spoke a moment ago, found himself seated beside Monsieur Clairval.

"What! eating another supper?" queried the latter.

"Why another? I haven't supped yet."

"But, unless I am very much mistaken, when I looked in just now to admire the charming picture presented by all the ladies seated at the table, you were behind Mademoiselle Adolphine, with a plate in your hand, and eating what was on the plate."

"That is to say, I was standing behind Mademoiselle Adolphine to wait upon her, and I passed her whatever she wanted."

"I saw that you were eating all the time."

"Tasting, perhaps, but if you call that eating! And then, I was standing up. What one eats standing never counts."

"Well, my dear Monsieur Batonnin, I don't undertake to reprove you for it; on the contrary, you deserve to be congratulated.—Honor to great talents of all varieties! A good stomach is a blessing of Providence. The wealthiest of men, if his liver doesn't work right, is, to my mind, less to be envied than the poor man who can readily digest his bacon-rind and similar delicacies."

Auguste Monléard joined his male guests at supper, to do the honors of his table; he began by pouring down several glasses of champagne; then, like one who is determined to divert his thoughts at any cost, he drank glass after glass of different kinds of wine, in rapid succession. This manœuvre succeeded; in a quarter of an hour his brow had cleared, his eyes sparkled; he talked with all his guests, and challenged them to drink with him; in fact, he was almost gay, and he laughed—a laugh that was a little nervous, a little forced, perhaps, but which produced a most excellent effect toward the end of the supper. When the gentlemen finally left the table, at which they had made quite an extended sojourn, they did not fail to call for a *cotillon*, the dance which has become almost the obligatory conclusion of a ball; and Auguste Monléard proposed to lead it.

The suggestion was received with delight by the dancing contingent. Adolphine, greatly surprised by the animation now exhibited by her brother-in-law, mentioned it to her sister.

"Your husband seems to be in high spirits now," she said; "and I am very glad to see him so."

"Why! did you think that he wasn't in good spirits before?" rejoined Fanny. "You are wrong, my dear girl! Auguste always enjoys himself—only, he doesn't look as if he did; that's his way."

The cotillon came to an end, and the tired dancers began at last to think of retiring. Batonnin, having supped satisfactorily twice over, left the house with Anatole de Raincy, humming:

"'La belle nuit! la belle fête!'"

"I know that! it ith from a comic opera," said the tall young man.

"True; but you must agree that it's apropos: *la belle fête!*"

"Yeth, but I'm afraid—according to what Vauflers thaid——"

"What did he say?"

"That Augutht Monléard had lotht enormouth thumth on the Bourth of late, and that he mutht be in a very bad way."

"Ah! the devil! that's why I found him so distraught, then. At supper, he drank a lot to forget himself, I noticed that."

"After all, he may pull up again—luck may turn. Ah! I thee a cab. Monthieur, I with you good-night, or rather good-day, for here'th the light."

"Your servant, monsieur."

Batonnin returned to his lodgings alone and on foot, saying to himself:

"Well, whether Monléard is ruined or not, I had two suppers, all the same!"

Our friends and acquaintances almost always welcome our misfortunes in such wise.

XXXIV

AUNT DUPONCEAU

Cherami, in accordance with his usual custom, spent very freely the money Gustave had given him; he still possessed a few francs out of the five hundred, however; and his appearance was very decent, too, for he had presented himself with a new hat, and he still had his new switch. One cold but beautiful morning, about ten o'clock, as he strolled in the direction of the Madeleine, to give himself an appetite, the ci-devant Beau Arthur saw coming toward him a woman of enormous size, holding by each hand a small boy, one of whom wore a hat surrounded by feathers, which gave him the look of a trained monkey. The children, as well as their mother, were so enveloped and swaddled in winter garments that they had not the free use of their limbs. These three living bundles rolled along the street, lurching against one another; but when they came face to face with our stroller, they halted, and the stout woman exclaimed:

"I cannot be mistaken; it is certainly Monsieur Cherami, out walking so early!"

Cherami had already recognized Madame Capucine and her sons, and, being by no means overjoyed at the meeting, would gladly have turned back to avoid it, but it was too late; so he courageously made the best of it, and replied, with a courteous salutation:

"Myself, fair lady; and I congratulate myself on the good-fortune which I owe to chance; for you are far from home. Do you happen to be going to Romainville?"

"No, monsieur, no; we are not going to Romainville; this isn't the way there, either," replied Madame Capucine, eying her interlocutor from head to foot; and the great change which had taken place in the

apparel of her debtor was naturally reflected in her manner of speaking to him. As the change was altogether to his advantage, she smiled graciously, and continued:

"Aunt Duponceau don't live at Romainville any more; she has sold the house she used to own there."

"Indeed? why did she do that?"

"Oh! because—because that neighborhood has such a reputation. You know the ballad: That *lovely wood, to lovers——"*

"*Presents a thousand charms!*—Yes, I know it by heart. But there's no wood left, except a little bit which has been bought by a novelist of whom I am very fond, and all surrounded by walls—not the novelist, but his woods; so I don't see what could have frightened your Aunt Duponceau so."

"Mon Dieu! you know how ill-natured people can be! There was always somebody to say: 'Ah! so you live at Romainville; that's the place for grisettes, gin-shops, and low dance-halls! one always meets a lot of drunken people there.'"

"I should say that you find them everywhere."

"It isn't the fashionable drive nowadays."

"The most fashionable resort isn't always the most amusing."

"You don't see the latest styles there."

"Oh, well! if you go into the country to see the styles, you would do better never to go anywhere but the Opéra."

"But the strongest reason, and the one that finally decided my aunt, is that there isn't any railroad to Romainville."

"Surely that must be a great deprivation to a person who, when she is once settled in her country-house, never goes to Paris at all."

"And so my aunt bought a house in the opposite direction—at Passy."

"Passy and Romainville are not exactly side by side, that is true; and they are not much alike, either."

"Oh! they're entirely different!—Aristoloche, do keep still!—Passy's a fashionable, convenient place to live in; you can't go out of the house unless you're dressed up."

"That must be very pleasant when one's in the country."

"The houses all have polished floors from top to bottom. The one my aunt bought—don't jump about so, Narcisse!—the one my aunt bought is smaller than her house at Romainville; but it cost a lot more. There's no fruit in the garden, but it's ever so much smaller."

"What does grow in the garden—ducks?"

"There's a little honeysuckle, and ivy, and grass—oh! it's well kept up."

"If it satisfies all of you, that's the main point.—Are you going to the country on such a cold day as this?"

"Aunt always expects us Saturday, to stay till Monday."

"Ah, yes! it is Saturday, isn't it?—just as it was when I met you waiting for an omnibus at Porte Saint-Martin."

"But, since then—Aristoloche, if you move again, I'll box your ears!—since then, it seems to me, Monsieur Cherami, that things have improved a little with you—judging by your dress?"

"Yes, my dear Madame Capucine; I have collected a little money that was owing me.—Mon Dieu! that reminds me; twenty times I have had it in my mind to look you up and settle that little balance I still owe your husband; but something else has always put it out of my head; it's a mere trifle, to be sure, but I propose to settle it very soon."

"Very good! but if you want to see Capucine, there's a very simple way to do it—that is, unless you are engaged for the day."

"The day? I can do what I choose with it, I am as free as air."

"Then come with us to Passy, to my aunt's; she expects us to breakfast, in fact; we're a little late, and—Narcisse, will you please not pull the feathers of your beautiful Henri IV hat like that; you'll spoil them!"

"The old hat makes me squint; it puts my eyes out."

"What a bad boy! A hat that your aunt gave you!"

"You were saying, my dear Madame Capucine?"

"I was asking you to come with us to Aunt Duponceau's; you know her; and to-night, at six o'clock, Capucine will join us there, and you can settle your little account with him. What do you think of my scheme?"

Cherami reflected a moment, then replied:

"Your scheme hits me—I mean, it suits me perfectly. The company of a charming woman—an improvised trip to the country—this breakfast, which will not detract from the pleasure of the occasion—I am at your service. Let's be off."

"Ah! that's very good of you!"

And the stout lady smiled a smile of lingering sweetness at Cherami, who was in her eyes a very handsome fellow now that he was well dressed. He had already formed his plan, into which the payment of his debt did not enter; but he was certain of a good breakfast, and probably of being invited to dine as well, with Aunt Duponceau; after dinner, he would readily find some pretext for escaping from the Capucine family.

"Here comes the Passy omnibus," said Madame Capucine; "let's not miss it."

They entered the omnibus; Madame Capucine took Master Aristoloche on her lap, in order to avoid paying for a seat for him; she requested Cherami to do as much for Narcisse, a suggestion which did not seem to tempt the ex-beau. Luckily for him, the urchin insisted upon having a seat all to himself, threatening, if they did not humor him, to sit on his Henri IV hat. This threat produced its effect: Master Narcisse took his seat in a corner, and Cherami declared that the little fellow deserved to be put by himself.

The omnibus started, and they soon arrived at Passy; thereupon Cherami had no choice but to offer Madame Capucine his arm to her aunt's abode. The little boys went before them, jumping and frolicking. At Passy they were in no danger from wagons, and Master Narcisse had seized Cherami's switch, with which he belabored all the stone posts and benches; a proceeding which was far from amusing to the owner of the stick, who expected from moment to moment to see it in the same state as Monsieur Courbichon's cane.

"That little fellow promises well!" he exclaimed.

"Isn't he full of ideas?"

"I am convinced that he will end by breaking my switch. But how does it happen that you didn't bring your maid Adelaide?"

"Oh! don't talk to me about that girl, I beg!"

"What! can it be that the faithful Adelaide stole from you?"

"No, it wasn't her honesty that gave out; it was something else. Ah! who would ever have thought, who would ever have believed—— An ugly, thin, shapeless creature. Oh! men have very beastly tastes sometimes!"

"The deuce! do you mean to say that Capucine——"

"What! oh! no, indeed, monsieur; it wasn't my husband! Ah!"

And Madame Capucine looked up at the sky with an expression which seemed to say:

"If it only had been!"

Then she added indignantly:

"Ballot, monsieur; Ballot, our young clerk!"

"The devil! that young man you liked so well?"

"To be sure. As if anyone could have dreamed! He behaved very well at first."

"And he went astray in the kitchen?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"But was it perfectly certain? People are so ill-natured!"

"They were caught, monsieur; caught among the bunches of onions."

"Enough! tell me no more; you would bring tears to my eyes."

"So, as you can imagine, I purified my house on the instant; I dismissed Mademoiselle Adelaide."

"And your clerk too?"

"He went of his own accord. We might have forgiven him, perhaps; he was so young!"

"Of course, and the smell of onions goes to the heart."

"But Monsieur Ballot chose to lose his head, and away he went."

"You will find somebody to take his place."

"That's what I'm looking for at this moment. Ah! Monsieur Cherami, a young man who had—my whole confidence! You can't rely on anything or anybody nowadays!"

"That's the only way to avoid being taken in."

The stout lady heaved a tremendous sigh and leaned heavily on the arm of her escort, who said to himself:

"I wonder if she would like to have me replace Monsieur Ballot?—Thanks! I have my cue."

In due time, they arrived at Madame Duponceau's house. She was a little woman, who shook her head constantly when conversing, so that she seemed always to reply in the negative to the questions that were asked her. She received Cherami with cordiality, although she barely knew him; but she liked company, and was especially eager to have people admire her house. Cherami was inclined to favor admiring her breakfast first; and, as the young Capucines supported that idea, they repaired at once to the dining-room.

The breakfast consisted of a pie, boiled eggs, ham, and coffee only; but the pie was succulent, the eggs fresh, the ham tender, and the coffee very strong, so that they breakfasted satisfactorily; then Aunt Duponceau cried:

"You must come and see my house, from cellar to roof."

Cherami, whose paunch was well filled, was already saying to himself:

"Sapristi! if I have got to stay here till night, between the aunt and the niece, with the accompaniment of two little brats who keep wiping their hands on my trousers, I shall pay dear for my dinner! Let's see if I can't find a back-door.—We had better begin the inspection of your house with the garden," he said to Aunt Duponceau; "after such an excellent breakfast, one feels the need of a breath of fresh air."

This suggestion was adopted, and they adjourned to the garden, which was of small dimensions and offered nothing attractive to the eye save four gillyflowers in pots; for in December there are few leaves on the trees. The garden presented but slight attraction, therefore, but at the end of it was a gate opening on the Bois de Boulogne. The ladies and the children, being stiff with cold, soon had enough of the garden; whereupon Cherami took a cigar from his pocket, saying:

"I am going to ask your leave to smoke this cigar outside, in the Bois. I cannot go without a smoke after breakfast; it's a habit that has fastened itself on me: a very bad habit, I admit, but it's too late to cure myself of it."

"Smoke in the garden," said Madame Duponceau.

"No, indeed! Your garden's very small, and the smell of tobacco would sadly impair the perfume of your gillyflowers. I don't choose to turn your delightful *cottage* into a barrack."

"He is very well bred," whispered Madame Duponceau to her niece.

"Yes," replied Madame Capucine; "I shouldn't know Monsieur Cherami, now that he's decently dressed."

Our smoker succeeded, not without difficulty, in rescuing his switch from the hands of young Narcisse, who insisted on beating his brother with it; he lighted his cigar, passed through the gate at the end of the garden,

and drew a long breath of relief.

"Par la sambleu!" he exclaimed; "here I am outside at last; there are breakfasts which cost a big price. Madame Capucine ogles me in a way that begins to alarm me. Her aunt always seems to refuse what you ask her. The little brats are two infernal monkeys, who ought to be kept in the big cage at the Jardin des Plantes. Ouf! I feel the need of air! I hardly expected this morning to go for a walk in the Bois de Boulogne, in such an atmosphere as this. But, since I am here, I must make the most of my luck. I won't go back to those mummies till dinner time. I'll tell them that my cigar made me ill."

XXXV

THE BOIS DE BOULOGNE

Cherami sauntered through the Bois, where, by reason of the season and the early hour, he met very few people. He had just lighted his second cigar, when, as he turned from one path into another, he saw a man coming toward him, very well dressed, walking very rapidly, and turning from time to time, to look behind him and on both sides, as if he feared that he was followed. When he saw Cherami walking in his direction, he stopped, and seemed undecided as to what he should do, being evidently inclined to retrace his steps. But, meanwhile, our smoker was drawing nearer, and ere long the two men stood face to face and looked at each other. Thereupon each of the two uttered an exclamation of surprise.

"Pardieu! I am not mistaken. It is Monsieur Auguste Monléard whom I have the honor of saluting?"

"And you are the gentleman with whom I fought at Belleville?"

"Himself—at your service, for anything in my power!—Arthur Cherami."

"Ah, yes! I had forgotten your name."

"This is very early for you to be in the Bois de Boulogne. I say early, although it is after half-past twelve; but in winter people seldom come for a turn in the Bois until between three o'clock and five."

"True, very true; but how about yourself?"

"Oh! I breakfasted at Passy, with certain excellent people, whose society is not over and above diverting: and, faith! after breakfast I came here for a smoke. How does it happen that you are not on horseback?"

"Why, because it suited me to come on foot, I presume."

"That was well deserved—excuse my curiosity. For my part, if I still owned a horse, I certainly wouldn't be on foot. You see, I am very fond of horses! I used to have some fine ones: that was my passion!"

While Cherami was speaking, Auguste continued to glance uneasily from side to side; he was even paler than usual, and his face wore a grave and gloomy expression.

"Do you happen to have a meeting on hand for to-day?" continued Cherami, flicking the ashes from his cigar. "If that's the case, and you need a second, you know, my dear monsieur, that I am entirely at your service, and that I should be enchanted to oblige you in any way."

"No, no, I have no duel this morning," Auguste replied; then, gazing fixedly at the person before him, he added, in a minute or two: "And yet, monsieur, you can, none the less, do me a very great favor."

"I can? Then, speak! I am entirely at your service. I have nothing to do."

"Yes, it was a lucky chance that led to my meeting you here. I left Paris this morning, rather suddenly, and I forgot to write to a certain person; but it's very important that I should."

"You want me to carry a letter to someone?"

"Monsieur Cherami, this is a matter of the utmost gravity; I apply to you, because I think I have judged you accurately. You are a man capable of understanding me."

"The deuce! the deuce! but you have a serious way of talking! It is plain that this is no joking matter."

"Are you still disposed to do me a favor?"

"More so than ever."

"Very well; then be good enough to come with me. There must be a café somewhere about here; a restaurant where I can write a letter?"

"Yes, we have only to turn back a little way, and we shall find what we want."

"Let us go. Have you breakfasted?"

"Why, yes; as I told you just now, I breakfasted at Passy. But that won't interfere with my taking something more. The air is sharp, and walking assists in rapid digestion."

They turned back; Auguste walked so fast that Cherami, despite his long legs, had difficulty in following him; he tried to continue the conversation, but his companion seemed absorbed by his thoughts, and did not answer.

"There's something wrong with that man," said Arthur to himself, as he lighted another cigar. "I don't know what it is, but that long face of his doesn't indicate a man who is trying to make up his mind what sauce to order for his lobster. However, it's his business. He has confidence in me, and I'll not betray him, for he's a good fellow. I am only sorry that I stuffed myself with eggs and pie at Aunt Duponceau's, for I should have breakfasted much better with him, that's sure. But every man isn't a sorcerer."

They found a café-restaurant, and were shown to a private room.

"Order whatever you choose," said Auguste to Cherami; "I have breakfasted."

"You too? In that case, it was hardly worth while to come here."

"I beg your pardon; I am going to write, I must write, two letters; then I will leave you. So, eat at your leisure; you have no occasion to hurry."

"Very good.—Waiter! Let me see, what can I take—something light, to give me an appetite? Ah! I have it.

Bring me a good slice of pâté de foie gras, and a bottle of very old Beaune; we will toy with that, and then we'll see."

Cherami was duly served. Meanwhile, Auguste had seated himself at another table and was writing.

Madame Duponceau's breakfast did not interfere with Cherami's enjoyment of the foie gras, which he watered with frequent draughts of Beaune, saying to his neighbor from time to time:

"Pray drink a glass of this wine; it's old and very good; there won't be any left in a moment; however, we can remedy that by ordering another.—Waiter, bring me some kind of cheese and a second bottle of this Beaune."

Auguste had ceased to write; he sealed the two letters and handed them to Cherami.

"Will you kindly take these letters, my dear monsieur? one is for my wife, Madame Monléard; the address is written on it."

"By the way, how is your good wife?"

"Very well; but allow me to finish. This other letter, without address, is for you."

"For me?"

"Yes; and you must give me your word of honor not to read it until half an hour after I have left you."

"Half an hour after you have left me?"

"Yes; will you promise?"

"If it will oblige you, I promise."

"Thanks; I rely upon your word."

"You may safely do so; I haven't thirty-six words in serious matters; but the other letter?"

"When you have read what I have written to you, you will see what I ask you to do; and I am confident that you will carry out my intentions."

"I have told you that I am entirely at your service."

"Here is my purse, for I shall not come back here. You will find enough inside to pay for whatever you may have ordered."

"Very good; I will pay, and I will put the change in the purse. It's a very pretty little thing—very dainty, and in excellent taste."

"If you like it, pray keep it in memory of—our acquaintance."

"You are really too kind. I don't stand on ceremony, myself, so I accept it."

"And now—pour me a glass of wine, so that I may drink with you."

"Ah! now you're talking!"

Cherami filled two glasses; Auguste took one of them with a firm hand, touched it to the one held by the ex-beau, muttered a few unintelligible words, and swallowed the wine at a single gulp.

"Sapristi! how fast you go! one has no time to follow you. I toss champagne off like that sometimes, but it's a miserable way to drink, as a rule. I like better to sip. Shall we have another glass, so that I may drink your health?"

"No, I haven't time. Adieu, monsieur; I rely on your promise. You will not read that letter for half an hour."

"You have my word! Are you going so soon?"

"I must."

"When shall I see you again?"

"Impossible to say. Adieu, monsieur!"

"Au revoir, rather!"

Auguste took his hat, shook hands with Cherami, pointed again to the two letters on the table, and rushed from the room.

Cherami balanced himself on the hind legs of his chair, drank another glass of wine, and ordered cigars, saying:

"As I have to stay here another half-hour, I may as well employ my time to advantage.—Waiter! coffee, brandy, and kirsch. By the way, see what time it is now by your sundials, and tell me exactly."

The waiter brought what had been ordered, and said:

"The clock in the hall has just struck two, monsieur."

"Very good; when it strikes the half-hour, you are to come and tell me; do you hear?"

"Yes, monsieur; I shall not fail. Does monsieur wish anything else?"

"No; these decanters of brandy and kirsch will help me kill time. If I want you, I'll ring.—This has been a most extraordinary day!" said Cherami to himself, as he lighted a fresh cigar. "I hardly suspected, this morning, when I was pacing the boulevards to get up an appetite, that I should breakfast at Passy, and then breakfast a second time in the Bois de Boulogne. This Monsieur Auguste Monléard is concealing some scheme or other which is not of a cheerful nature. Those two letters he left with me—one of which is for myself—there's a mystery about the whole business! This purse he gave me is a very dainty affair; let's see what there is in it. A hundred-franc note! Damnation! I have my cue! I shall have enough to pay for my breakfast.—What are these other papers? Broker's memorandums: 'bought by order of M. Monléard; sold by order of M. Monléard.'—These are of no importance, and there's nothing else. Can it be that our young capitalist has been unlucky in speculation, and has vamosed, as they say?—It's very possible. Well! I shall know all about it before long; at least ten minutes must have passed. Let's take a drink of kirsch. That little scamp of a Narcisse has nicked my switch all up. Children are very nice—when they're well brought up.—I can't keep my eyes off that letter. Time never dragged so with me! Suppose I ask for my bill—that's a good idea.—Waiter!"

"Did monsieur call?"

"Yes; bring me my check. Add three more kirsches—I shall drink them before I go—and, when you come back, tell me what time it is."

"Yes, monsieur."

The waiter returned with the bill, which he handed to Cherami, saying:

"It's a quarter past two, monsieur."

"Only a quarter! Sacrebleu! you make a mistake; it isn't possible that it's only a quarter past!"

"I give you my word, monsieur, that that's all it is by the clock in the hall. If you will come and look for yourself——"

"All right! Let's see the footing! seventeen francs fifty. Here, change this note for me, and, when you bring back the change, look at the clock a little more carefully."

"Why, monsieur, I can't look at it any different way from——"

"Go, boy, and don't argue. I don't like arguers."

"Such is life!" mused Cherami, resorting to the kirsch once more; "when you're with a woman who pleases you, when you're playing an exciting game of cards, time doesn't walk; it flies: *hora vita simul!* At other times, it crawls like a tortoise; and yet, the time is sure to come when we find that it has moved altogether too fast! That simply proves that men are never satisfied with the present. Ah! what a pretty, old fairy tale that is of *Nourjahad and Cheredin*, which impressed me so when I read it—in my youth. Monsieur Nourjahad is a young, handsome, and wealthy Mussulman, who lacks nothing to make him happy, and, of course, he isn't satisfied; he complains because time doesn't go fast enough to suit him, because he is to marry his cousin at twenty-five, and to reign over a great kingdom when he is thirty. Cheredin is an old dervish, something of a sorcerer; he hears Nourjahad railing at destiny, and says to him: 'I can grant you the power to make time pass as swiftly as you wish; but, beware! it is very dangerous. You will shorten your life, if you do not moderate your desires.'—The young man is overjoyed, he accepts, and promises to use in moderation the power which is bestowed on him. But, fiddle-de-dee! When shall we ever see a man resist the desire of possessing at once what he ought not to have until later? Nourjahad desires to be twenty-five years old, in order to marry his cousin; then thirty, in order to be sultan. Soon he desires to be a father, then to see his child grown up; then, being at war with his neighbors, he wants the decisive battle to come at once. In a word, that devil of a Nourjahad goes so fast, in the satisfaction of his desires, that he finds that he has grown thirty years older in a month; thereupon he curses the power that was placed in his hands, and Cheredin observes: 'My good friend, that is what all men would do, if they were enabled to make time move faster.'—And, touching Nourjahad with his wand, he restores his youth, and advises him to keep it as long as possible.—That is a very sensible preachment; but if, instead of making time move faster, one could make it go backward, ah! then we should look twice before doing it. A man goes through some such infernal quarter-hours in the course of his life, that he wouldn't like to repeat them."

The waiter appeared, panting for breath, and cried:

"I beg your pardon, monsieur, for being so long, but we didn't have the change for a hundred francs here, and I had to go a long way to get it. Lord! what a nuisance change is! Count it, monsieur."

"And the time? Sacrebleu! tell me what time it is, will you?"

"Oh! I didn't think to look, monsieur."

"Then go and look now, villain! beast!"

"Look first and see if the change is right."

"I don't care a damn about my change. The time, you rascal, the time, at once!"

Cherami pushed the waiter out of the room and impatiently awaited his return, muttering again:

"Ah! how well I understand Nourjahad's feeling!"

"Monsieur, it has struck the half-hour; it's three minutes past," cried the waiter.

"At last! that's very lucky! Off with you, then!"

"But is monsieur's change all right? I want to be sure."

"What's that? yes, blackguard, it's all right; here are two francs for you; and now, clear out!"

"Shall I come back and tell monsieur the time again?"

Cherami half rose from his seat; only half, but the waiter understood, and fled.

The two letters were on the table; having thrown away the end of his cigar, Cherami took the one which was for himself, saying:

"It's very strange; I really feel a sort of emotion. Come, no nonsense; let's see what there is inside!"

He opened the letter and read:

"'My dear Monsieur:—When you read these words, I shall be dead—— '

"Dead!" cried Cherami, striking the table violently with his clenched fist. "Nonsense! it isn't possible; I must have read it wrong! but, no; that's what it says: 'I shall be dead.' Let's go on:

"'I had a very respectable little fortune, but it wasn't enough for me; I speculated on the Bourse, and I had bad luck; I married, hoping that a woman's love would change the course of my ideas, and that an attractive home would satisfy my ambition. Unluckily, I was mistaken. The person whom I married has one of those emotionless hearts with which it is impossible to give play to one's feelings; after a week of wedlock, I found that she had not the slightest love for me, but that she desired to cut a figure in society, and to eclipse all other women. Thereupon I speculated more wildly than ever, in order to gratify my vanity, if nothing more.

Ten days ago, I gave a great party, to try to disguise my condition. I still hoped to extricate myself; I risked all that I had! I lost, and I am ruined!—and, as I haven't your philosophy, as I could not determine to live in poverty after having tasted the pleasures of luxury, I am going to blow out my brains. Be good enough to call upon my wife and prepare her gently for the news; I do not think, however, that her heart will suffer most.

"'I ask your pardon for the trouble I cause you, but I have formed this judgment of you: that you are a man and will keep the promise you made me. Receive my last adieu.

"'AUGUSTE MONLÉARD.'"

For a few moments after reading this letter, Cherami was speechless with dismay. He even put his hand to his eyes to wipe away a tear; then muttered:

"What! that handsome young dandy who sat there just now! But, sacrebleu! perhaps it's not too late yet!"

Springing to his feet, he seized his hat and cane, put the letters in his pocket, and left the room. Below, he inquired which direction his late companion had taken; they told him, and he hastened away toward the loneliest part of the Bois. But he soon saw a crowd of people, and, marching toward them, some gendarmes who had been sent for, and who plunged at once into the underbrush.

"What has happened?" he inquired of a peasant woman who passed him; "what are those gendarmes here for?"

"Mon Dieu! monsieur, because someone has killed himself in the woods—a young man—very well dressed, too, I give you my word. I can't understand why people who are rich enough to dress like that should do such things! That little boy there found him."

"It's all over then; he's dead?"

"Oh! yes, monsieur.—And his nice new overcoat!"

"In that case," said Cherami to himself, "I have only to execute the commission he intrusted to me."

XXXVI

A STRONG WOMAN

As he returned to Paris, Cherami's reflections took this turn:

"Well, here's something that changes the state of affairs very materially. That young Fanny's a widow—she's free—her husband is dead. I trust that Gustave won't say now that it was I who killed him! At all events, I have the letter he wrote me, and I will keep it carefully; otherwise, people would be quite capable of believing that I shot him in a duel; but, after all, that young woman, whom Gustave still adores—and who is the cause of his going away from Paris because he's afraid of meeting her—that Fanny for whom he has a passion such as we seldom see nowadays; I might say, such as we never see!—However, since she is a widow now, and since she greeted Gustave so kindly the last time he met her—for I remember that he told me she even urged him to call—now, then, or *ergo*, as we used to say at school, since that young woman did not look upon Gustave with an unfavorable eye when she was married, it seems to me that she should look upon him even more favorably now that she's a widow. She gave poor Monléard the preference, because he offered her everything that attracts a woman. To-day, when she is ruined, it seems to me that she would be very glad to fall in with my young friend, who gives me the impression of occupying a very satisfactory position in life. I really believe that the thing can be arranged—not instantly, because we must give the little woman time to weep over her husband; but I foresee that hereafter Gustave's love and constancy will be rewarded. Ah! I like to think of that; for then Gustave will cease to travel, he will stay in Paris; and a man is very glad to have such friends as he is, always at hand. What a pity that he isn't here now! I would have lost no time in telling him the great news. Oh! but I will find out where he is, I will find him. Meanwhile, I must think about performing my mission to the young wife, with all proper precautions. It isn't precisely an agreeable errand; but if one did only agreeable things, it would become monotonous."

Fanny was in her boudoir, trying on some morning caps, and leaving her mirror from time to time to go to look at the last bulletin from the Bourse, which was on her toilet table, when her maid appeared and told her that a gentleman desired to speak to her.

"A gentleman! What gentleman? Do you know him? Did he give his name?"

"No, madame; I have never seen him here."

"Are you sure that he wants to see me, not Monsieur Monléard?"

"It is certainly you, madame; and he says that it's on very important business."

"Is the man respectable? Does he look like a gentleman?"

"Why, yes, madame."

"Then show him into the salon; I will go down."

She hastily finished her toilet, saying to herself:

"Monsieur Vauflers has probably sent some friend of his to tell me what he has done on the Bourse. It's after four o'clock; yes, it must be that."

Cherami, being ushered into the salon, scrutinized the furniture, muttering:

"It's not bad, it's very *chic!* I used to have such quarters myself. It's more comfortable than the Widow Louchard's lodgings. But one has his ups and downs all the same, even in such surroundings."

Fanny appeared at last; she bowed to her visitor, who seemed to her to have "a funny look"; for such is the fashionable method of describing what one does not know how to describe; then she pointed to a chair, and said:

"You wish to speak to me, monsieur? about some business at the Bourse, I presume?"

Cherami was embarrassed at the sight of the young woman. He realized that his mission was more difficult to execute than he had thought; however, he sat down, stammering:

"Madame—it is—it is on the subject——"

"Of to-day's market, is it not?"

"No, not to-day's, madame; but it was the Bourse which caused—which brought about the event—the calamity——"

"Be kind enough, monsieur, to explain yourself more clearly, for I do not understand you at all."

Cherami bit his lips, seeking the best method of preparing the young woman for what he had to tell her; and after reflecting for a considerable time, he cried:

"Madame, I came to tell you that your husband is dead!"

Fanny started from her seat, gazed at the man before her, and rejoined, with a shrug of her shoulders:

"If this is a joke, monsieur, allow me to inform you that it is in execrable taste."

"Therefore I should not have the hardihood to indulge in it, madame. I did not come here with any purpose of joking; what I say to you, I say in all seriousness."

"But I saw my husband at breakfast this forenoon, monsieur. He was not ill, not even indisposed. What, in heaven's name, can have happened to him?"

"Nothing has happened to him; he himself thought it best to put an end to his own life; and he blew out his brains in the Bois de Boulogne, about half-past two o'clock."

Fanny changed color, but did not lose courage.

"No, monsieur; it's not possible," she rejoined; "there is some mistake, it cannot be my husband. Why should Auguste kill himself—young, rich, and happy as he was?"

"It would seem, madame, that he was much less happy than you like to think. And as to being rich, he was so no longer, for he had ruined himself utterly on the Bourse; he was penniless, and he lacked the courage to endure these hard blows of fortune."

"Ruined!" cried the young woman, springing to her feet. "What do you say, monsieur? Ruined! why, then I am ruined, too! Then I have nothing! Why, that would be too terrible; it would be ghastly!"

"Poor Auguste was right," thought Cherami, observing Fanny's despair; "it isn't his death that grieves his wife most."

"But, monsieur, how do you know—how did you learn of this event? And even if my husband is dead, how do you know that he was ruined?"

"Be good enough to listen a moment, madame. This noon, after breakfasting at Passy with some worthy people,—who must be expecting me to dinner at this moment, by the way, but I shall not go,—I had gone to smoke a cigar in the Bois de Boulogne, where there were very few people, the cold being so intense. There I met your husband; we were acquainted, he had seen me on a certain occasion—in short, he knew what sort of man I am. He came to me and asked me if I would do him an important service; as you may imagine, madame, I placed myself at his disposal. We went to a café, where he wrote two letters. One was for me, which he made me promise not to open until half an hour after he had left me; then he went away. I waited the half-hour, then opened the letter. He told me therein of his deplorable determination, and of the reasons which had led him to it; then he requested me to take the other letter—to its address."

"For whom was that other letter?"

"For you, madame. Here it is."

Fanny took in a trembling hand the letter which Cherami handed her, and read in an altered voice:

"'I thought, madame, that by marrying you I ensured the happiness of both; I was mistaken; I needed a loving wife to calm and allay the vivacity of my passions; I found in you simply a woman who adored money and pleasure above all else.'"

At that, Fanny paused, and read the remainder of the letter to herself:

"I make no reproaches, madame; a woman cannot recast her nature, especially at your age. Feeling is a gift of nature, as selfishness is a vice of the heart; I judged you ill; it was my fault, not yours. Being unable to enjoy the domestic happiness of which I had dreamed, I tried to replace it by all the enjoyments arising from vanity; I have failed, and I have lost all that I possessed. You, too, are interested in the Bourse; take my advice, madame, and do not speculate."

Again Fanny paused, to heave a tremendous sigh, then read on:

"But, madame, do not fear that I leave you burdened with debts; I have met all my obligations; I have paid everything, and my name will remain without blemish, at all events. You can bear it without a blush."

The young woman made a slight movement of the shoulders, which seemed to indicate that she was not overjoyed because her husband had paid all his debts; she even muttered between her teeth:

"That's a valuable thing for him to leave me—his name! and nothing with it! Ah! there's something more written here."

"I have not touched your *dot*; you will find it intact in the notary's hands. With what you obtain from the sale of our furniture, which is very handsome, and our horses and carriages, you will have enough to live in a

modest way. Adieu, Fanny; be happy! I cannot be happy again in this world, and that is why I leave it; adieu!"

The last paragraph seemed to have soothed Fanny's despair in some measure; however, she covered her eyes with her handkerchief, and held it so for some time. Cherami, who had watched her closely while she read her husband's letter, said to himself at that proceeding:

"Oh! it's of no use for you to put your handkerchief to your eyes; I'll bet that you're not crying; and yet—a young husband—to lose him like that, and after hardly six months of married life! There are some women who would have fainted; but she's a strong one!"

Thereupon he rose and took up his hat, saying:

"Madame, I have carried out the melancholy commission which your husband intrusted to me. As I imagine that my presence is no longer necessary, I will retire."

XXXVII

A WEAK WOMAN

Fanny hastily uncovered her face.

"Pardon me, monsieur," she said; "but as you were kind enough to carry out Monsieur Monléard's last wishes, may I hope that you will show yourself equally obliging to his widow?"

"I will do whatever you bid me, madame, too happy to be able to be of some service to you as well as to him."

"Thanks a thousand times, monsieur! You know now the position in which I stand. It seems to you, perhaps, that I have taken very coolly the calamity which has come upon me?"

"Madame, I do not presume to pass judgment upon your feelings."

"But put yourself in my place, monsieur; do you think that I can take as a proof of affection what my husband has done?"

"Dame! a proof of affection!" said Cherami to himself, scratching his nose.—"But, madame, if he feared that he should no longer be able to make you happy, if that thought made him lose his head——"

"At Monsieur Monléard's age, monsieur, a man should have strength of mind, courage. People lose their fortunes every day; but when a man is intelligent and persevering, he makes another."

"It may be that that's not so easy as you seem to think, madame. I, too, had a very neat fortune once; I ran through it; which, to my mind, is much better than gambling it away; it leaves sweeter-smelling memories; but I have never been able to get rich again."

"Monsieur Monléard finds fault with me; he says now that I care for nothing but pleasure; but, when he sought my hand, monsieur, why did he fascinate me by the prospect of a life of luxury and fêtes, of splendid equipages and magnificent gowns? in short, of all the things which will always make a girl's heart beat fast? He married me from caprice, and when that caprice was gratified he was sorry he had married. Oh! I saw that more than once, and that is why, monsieur, I bear up so bravely under the news you have brought me."

"You had no need to tell me all this, madame; but I do not see——"

"I beg your pardon! this is what I ask you to do. In my present position, you can easily understand that I must see my father and sister; but I do not wish to go to them, or to be compelled to tell them of this fatal event."

"I understand, madame: you wish me to undertake to tell them of what has happened?"

"Oh! monsieur, if it would not be too great an abuse of your good-nature."

"I will go to your father's house, madame. Mon Dieu! while I am in the way of doing errands, it won't cost me any more."

"Ah! monsieur, how kind you are! how grateful I am to you!"

"I have always been at the service of the ladies. Monsieur Gerbault's address, if you please?"

"Ah! you know my father's name?"

"Yes, madame. Indeed, there are many things that I know; but I won't tell you them at this moment."

"Here is my father's address."

"Very good; I will go there at once, madame. If I can be of any further use to you, command me; Arthur Cherami, Hôtel du Bel-Air, Rue de l'Orillon, Belleville—but prepay your letters. I present my respects, madame."

"I am a sort of dead man's messenger just now," said Cherami to himself, as he went away; "but, after all, I couldn't refuse that young woman; she's so pretty, and she's no fool; far from it! Ah! I can understand how she bewitched Gustave. Never mind; for my part, I prefer a weak woman to a strong one."

Monsieur Gerbault was at home, and with his daughter, when Cherami made his appearance. Fanny's father, who had never seen his visitor, offered him a chair, and waited for him to explain the object of his visit. But Adolphine, as soon as he entered the room, recognized Cherami as the person who had dined with Gustave on the day of her sister's wedding; and Cherami, on his side, bestowed a graceful salutation upon the young lady, as upon a person whom he had met before.

"Do you know my daughter Adolphine, monsieur?" inquired Monsieur Gerbault, in surprise.

"Yes, monsieur; I had the pleasure of seeing mademoiselle on the day of your other daughter's wedding. I dined at Deffieux's that day, with someone who is not a stranger to you."

"Monsieur is a friend of Gustave," interposed Adolphine, hastily. Monsieur Gerbault frowned slightly, for he remembered being told that it was with a friend of Gustave that his son-in-law had fought a duel on the day

after his wedding; however, he confined himself to saying, in rather a sharp tone:

"I am waiting for monsieur to be good enough to let us know the object of his visit."

The decidedly unamiable manner in which Monsieur Gerbault said these words began to irritate Cherami, who threw himself back in his chair, crying:

"Faith! my dear monsieur, if you think I came here to amuse myself, you're most miserably mistaken; my errand isn't a very agreeable one, at best."

"Monsieur, I beg you to——"

"Ah! but, you see, you assumed an air which—look you! that air of yours doesn't suit me at all, and if you were not this charming young lady's father, I'd have demanded satisfaction before this."

"Oh! monsieur, for heaven's sake!" exclaimed Adolphine, clasping her hands; "father didn't mean to offend you."

"Your father looked like a bulldog, mademoiselle, when you said that I was a friend of Gustave. Why was that? am I a friend to be despised, I pray to know? Friends like me, always ready to risk their lives in order to prove their devotion, don't grow on every bush, I beg you to believe. But here I am losing my temper, and I am wrong. I will tell you in a word what brings me here; it's no use to put on gloves. I come to inform you of the death of a young man of your acquaintance."

"O mon Dieu! Gustave is dead!" shrieked Adolphine, and fell back unconscious, while a ghastly pallor overspread her features.

"My child! my child! what is it, in God's name?" cried Monsieur Gerbault, trying to revive Adolphine; but she did not open her eyes.

Madeleine was summoned, and brought salts and vinegar. They carried the girl to an open window, while Cherami exclaimed:

"No, no; it isn't Gustave who's dead.—Poor girl! on my word, I was far from anticipating this. And it's because she thought Gustave was dead that she fainted. Well! well! well! Ah! the color's coming back a little; it will amount to nothing. See! she's opening her eyes; I will bring her back to life entirely."

He stooped over Adolphine, who was gazing listlessly about, and said:

"Let me set your mind at rest, mademoiselle; it's not Gustave who is dead; I wasn't talking about *Castor*."

"Is that true, monsieur?" she cried eagerly.

"I swear it by your head—and I wouldn't for the world endanger such a charming head!"

"Pray explain yourself then, monsieur!" said Monsieur Gerbault; "of whose death did you come to tell us?"

"Of your son-in-law, Auguste Monléard's; he died about two o'clock to-day, in the Bois de Boulogne."

At that, it was Monsieur Gerbault's turn to fly into a rage, and he strode toward Cherami, saying:

"Ah! you have killed him this time, shameless villain, and you come in person to announce his death! And you are not ashamed of your victory! One duel was not enough; you were bent on having his life!"

"Ta! ta! ta! now it's papa's turn. Deuce take it! where did I ever get fathers and uncles of this breed?—No, monsieur; I didn't kill your son-in-law; he killed himself; and, to speak frankly, it would have been much better for him to have met his death in the duel we fought; for it would have been a more honorable end. However, I will show you the proofs of what I state; for you are quite capable of not believing me: I expected as much; but you will have to surrender to the evidence."

Cherami handed Monsieur Gerbault the letter Auguste had written him, then told him all that we know already: what had happened in the Bois de Boulogne, and his visit to Fanny. During his narrative, Adolphine wept profusely, murmuring:

"Poor Auguste! Oh, dear! how my sister must suffer!"

The news of the suicide affected Monsieur Gerbault deeply, although officious friends had already told him that Monléard was speculating heavily, and in such wise as to risk his fortune. He attempted, thereupon, to apologize to Cherami for the suspicions he had conceived; but Cherami offered his hand, saying:

"Put it there, and let's say no more about it. You are quick, so am I; besides, when one learns of such an entirely unforeseen catastrophe, one has the right to get a little bewildered. Now that I have performed all the commissions that were intrusted to me, you have no further need of me, and I will go. Adieu, Papa Gerbault! Mademoiselle, your servant!"

As Adolphine accompanied him to the door, he seized the opportunity to ask her in an undertone:

"Do you know where Gustave is?"

"No, monsieur; but, I think, in Germany."

"I will unearth him, never fear; I have my cue!"

XXXVIII

THE TWO SISTERS

A fortnight after her husband's death, Fanny was installed in small and unpretentious apartments in the upper part of Faubourg Poissonnière. With her dowry of twenty thousand francs, the proceeds of the sale of her furniture, horses, and carriages, and the sum which she had made by speculating in railway and other shares, the young widow had an income of about twenty-five hundred francs. That was very little, when compared with the handsome fortune she had enjoyed for a moment, but it was enough to enable a woman who was a skilful manager to live comfortably. Monsieur Gerbault had suggested to the young widow that she should come to live with him and her sister, as she had done before her marriage, but Fanny had refused; she preferred to remain free; and then, too, in all probability, she cherished some hopes for the future, and as she

looked at her reflection in her mirror,—for she had retained enough of her furniture to furnish her new abode handsomely,—the pretty creature said to herself that plenty of aspirants to the honor of putting an end to her widowhood would surely come forward; and that, by living alone, she would be more at liberty and better able to choose.

As for the deceased, his suicide had been the sensation of the Bourse and of society for a week; a fortnight later, it was rarely mentioned, and at the end of a month everybody had forgotten it.

But, no: there was one person who often thought of him, to deplore his melancholy end, to regret that fortune had been so cruel to that young man, who, for his part, had treated fortune too cavalierly when she smiled on him. That person was not his widow, but her sister Adolphine. The poor child had at first felt terribly ashamed because she had betrayed the deep interest she felt in Gustave; but she was unable to control the emotion which had seized her when she thought that Cherami had come to inform her of his death. Later, when she knew the truth, she had wept a long while over Auguste's death; then she had hurried to her sister, to comfort her, to mingle her own tears with hers; but she had found Fanny much more engrossed by her pecuniary affairs than by the loss of her husband. Finally, as the young widow found that her sister came to see her every day, and that she persisted in talking about Auguste and shedding abundant tears to his memory, she said to her one day:

"My dear girl, if your purpose in coming here is to divert my thoughts, you go about it very awkwardly. Monsieur Monléard is dead, because he preferred it so; he left me, because he chose to, without troubling himself overmuch as to what was to become of me; frankly, it was hardly worth while to marry me, just to act like this after only six months. He was responsible for my refusing a young man who, as it turns out, would have made me much happier—that poor Gustave, who loved me so dearly! For he really did love me, did Gustave, and, according to what you told me the other day, he is doing very well indeed now. Ten thousand francs a year, he earns, I believe?"

Adolphine wiped her eyes and swallowed her tears, as she replied in a faltering voice:

"Yes—I think so."

"What! you think so? So you're not sure of it now?"

"Why, yes; he told me so himself."

"Very good! with ten thousand francs one can live comfortably enough. One can't have such a stable as I had with Monsieur Monléard; but it's better never to have a carriage than to have to give it up. In fact, I don't see why I should cry my eyes out for the dead man. In the first place, I despise men who kill themselves; everyone is entitled to his own opinion, but that's mine. A man should be able to endure the blows of destiny. Do you know where Gustave is now?"

"No, I don't; he intended to leave Paris again."

"That's strange. Formerly, he always told you where he was going; and now that I ask you, you don't know anything about him."

"He said something about Germany, that's all I know."

"On his uncle's business, I suppose?"

"I think so."

"Well, people don't travel forever; he'll return some time, poor Gustave! and we shall meet again. Ah! he had changed tremendously for the better when he came back from Spain; he had acquired ease of manner and refinement, hadn't he?"

"I didn't notice."

"Oh! how angry you make me!—It seems to me, however, that it's more interesting to talk about the living than the dead."

"Everybody isn't consoled as quickly as you."

"Do you propose to give me a lecture?"

"No, sister; I meant simply that anyone was very fortunate to have such a temperament as yours."

"My dear Adolphine, I have been a widow two months now, and I know a little something of the world. When you have had as much experience as I have, you will realize that you should be able to find consolation for anything."

"I don't think I shall ever be as philosophical as you."

Whenever the two sisters met, Fanny did not fail to lead the conversation to the subject of Gustave. That subject, although intensely interesting to Adolphine, was very painful to her when Fanny introduced it; but, being accustomed by long practice to conceal the secrets of her heart, to confine therein a sentiment which she dared not avow to anyone, Fanny's younger sister contrived to listen with apparent indifference to the project which Auguste's widow already had in contemplation.

One day, while talking with Adolphine, Fanny suddenly asked:

"By the way, do you know who that man was whom Monsieur Monléard employed to inform me of his death? I never saw him at the house, and yet Auguste must have been intimately acquainted with him to intrust him with such a commission."

"That was Monsieur Cherami."

"Yes, that's the name he gave me when he left his address and offered me his services. He has a most original aspect, that individual. But who is Monsieur Cherami, anyway? When I asked him to go to tell you, he seemed to know father's name."

"Indeed! he probably learned it from Gustave."

"Does the man know Gustave too? For heaven's sake, does he know everybody? Was it through Gustave that he knew my husband, also?"

"Why, yes, in a certain sense; for——"

"For what? Do go on, Adolphine; I don't know what's the matter with you nowadays, but I have to tear the words out of your mouth."

"I thought you knew about it at the time. Your husband fought a duel the day after your wedding."

"I know all about that; with a fellow who called out, when I left the ball that night: 'There goes the faithless Fanny!'—Mon Dieu! I remember it as well as if it were yesterday. But what connection——"

"The man who made that remark when he saw you leaving the ball was Monsieur Cherami."

"That man? nonsense! Do you mean to say that it was he whom my husband fought with?"

"Yes, it really was."

"Ha! ha! ha! that is too funny!"

"What! you laugh?"

"Why shouldn't I laugh, pray? Ah! how little idea men have of what they want, and how richly they deserve, as a general rule, that we should make sport of their mighty wrath! Think of it! Monsieur Monléard fights a duel with Monsieur Cherami, and, a few weeks later, selects him as the confidant of his last wishes! You see that men don't know what they are doing, and that these lords of creation, who assume to deem themselves much more reasonable than we, are infinitely less so."

"There may have been other reasons that we don't know about."

"Oh! you will always take sides with the men!"

"Why accuse those who are no longer able to defend themselves?"

"Oh! that is a superb retort; but, I may ask, why give the dead credit for qualities which they had not when they were alive? I have heard that done a hundred times in society. There was some artist or author, of whom they said things much too bad for hanging: he was ill-natured, envious; he decried his fellows, he had neither talent, nor style, nor imagination. But, let him die—the same people all sang the palinode: the deceased was a most delightful man, kind-hearted, obliging to his fellow artists, full of talent, gifted with a marvellous imagination. How many times I have heard all that! and I used to shrug my shoulders in pitying contempt, thinking: 'For heaven's sake, messieurs, do at least try to remember to-day what you said yesterday!'—But I would like right well to know why this Monsieur Cherami called me 'the faithless Fanny.' Do you know, Adolphine, you, who know so many things without seeming to?"

Adolphine blushed, as she replied:

"That gentleman dined with Gustave at the restaurant where you gave your wedding supper and ball. Gustave, in all probability, told him of his love and his disappointment; and then Monsieur Grandcourt, Gustave's uncle, came there after his nephew and took him away. Monsieur Cherami stayed at the restaurant, and it seems that he was a little tipsy."

"And in his devotion to his friend, he reproached me for my perfidy! Ah! that was very well done! To fight to avenge one's friend is a deed worthy of the knights of old. When I see Monsieur Cherami again, I will offer him my compliments."

"Do you mean that you bear him no ill-will for calling you faithless?"

"Oh! not the least in the world! If women lost their tempers every time they were called faithless, they would spend most of their time in anger."

While interviews of this sort were constantly taking place between the two sisters, both of whom were engrossed by the same thought, although one was compelled to stifle her sighs, while the other made no secret of her hopes, a certain person was taking much pains to bring back to them the subject which interested them so deeply. The reader will have guessed that we refer to Cherami.

XXXIX

THE HUNT FOR THE FEATHER-MAKERS

After Auguste's death, the ex-Beau Arthur had reflected thus:

"I must wait until a few weeks have passed; it wouldn't be decent for my lovelorn Gustave to return at once and throw himself at the pretty widow's feet; *non est hic locus*; it isn't always best to take active steps; in order that they may succeed, they must be taken at the opportune moment. I still have some débris of the five hundred francs my dear friend loaned me, and I have the change of the hundred-franc note which poor Monléard left me to pay for the breakfast, which cost only seventeen francs fifty. With that, and with a passably pretty switch, and a passably decent costume, one can enjoy this paltry life of ours to some slight extent. Gad! at this moment I should be very glad to meet those two grisettes whom I saw one day at an omnibus office at Porte Saint-Martin. Parbleu! the same day I made the acquaintance of Gustave. They were both pretty—one was a brunette, the other a blonde—one plump and one thin—a morsel for an attorney; and, judging from appearances, one bright and one stupid. Their names were Laurette and Lucie, and they were feather-girls on Rue Saint-Denis. I have never met them since. Par la sambleu! it's my fault, I'm a jackass! I had only to go into all the feather-shops on Rue Saint-Denis—to tell the truth, I haven't always been in a position to play the gallant with young ladies—to invite them to the play and to supper, and I can't do anything less than that by way of renewing the acquaintance. But, now that I'm in funds, what prevents me from looking them up? That idea smiles upon me. It reminds me of happy days.—My mind is made up: before I begin my search for Gustave, I will go in quest of Laurette and Lucie; this very evening, after dinner, I will try my hand at hunting the feather-girls."

Cherami dined, and acquitted himself of the task like one who had not breakfasted twice. Then, his head being a little heated by the fumes of a bottle of old Pommard, he betook himself to Rue Saint-Denis, looking to right and left in quest of feather-shops. He did not go far without discovering one. He opened the door and entered with a haughty air, scrutinizing all the young women in the establishment.

The forewoman eyed the individual who had struck an attitude *à la* Spartacus in the centre of the shop, where he stared at one after another without speaking, and said to him:

"Will monsieur kindly tell us what he would like?"

Cherami, having taken time enough to examine all the shopgirls, of whom there were ten or twelve, replied in a drawling tone:

"A thousand pardons, madame; I did come in here in search of something; there is no doubt of that; but I don't see what I want; no, I don't see it."

"If monsieur will tell me what he desires, I can tell him at once whether he will find it here."

"Very good, madame; I am looking for children's caps—for a little boy of five."

All the girls in the shop laughed aloud; but the forewoman assumed a sour expression as she rejoined:

"Did monsieur take this for a hat-shop?"

"Have I made a mistake? Oh! I beg your pardon; I am distressed; it was all these feathers that misled me; they put so many feathers on hats nowadays. Accept my apologies, madame; your humble servant."

Having executed a graceful bow, Cherami left the shop, saying to himself:

"That's one; I did that very well; it wasn't a bit bad. My two young friends are not there. Let's try another."

A little farther on, he saw another establishment for the sale of flowers and feathers. He entered as before, and struck the same attitude.

"We are waiting for monsieur to say what he wants," said an old woman.

"Mon Dieu! madame," said Cherami, examining the girls, of whom there were not so many as in the first shop, "I would like—I wanted a coat, either blue or black, but made in the latest style, and, above all things, becoming to me. I don't care for the price, but I am particular about being well dressed."

"You are not in a tailor's shop, monsieur!" retorted the old woman superciliously, while the workgirls exchanged glances and laughed till they cried.

But the old woman bade them be silent, and added:

"Apparently you didn't look to see what we keep here, monsieur?"

"What! am I not in a shop of outfitters for both sexes?"

"No, monsieur; we sell only flowers and feathers."

"Oh! a thousand pardons, madame; but your shop has a sort of resemblance to the Magasin du Prophète. It isn't so brightly lighted, I agree; but these flowers, these wreaths—it's all so pretty! and, in Paris, outfitters' shops look like stage decorations.—Accept my apologies, madame."

"Two!" said Cherami, when he was in the street once more. "My pretty grisettes are not there either. Patience! we shall find them at last. Ah! I see another feather-shop; they fairly swarm in this street. Forward!"

In the third shop, Cherami asked for shirts, while passing in review the workgirls and apprentices, without finding those whom he sought. He succeeded, as before, in making the young women laugh and in obtaining a tart response from the mistress of the place.

In the fourth shop, after staring about for some time, Cherami exclaimed:

"I don't see any; this is very strange; I don't see any, and yet I was certain that I saw several in the window."

"Will monsieur kindly tell us what he desires?" said the forewoman.

"I want to buy a Bayonne ham, madame; the best you have."

This time the laughter was general, and the mistress shared the merriment of her workgirls; so that Cherami had an opportunity to examine them at his leisure. At last, when the hilarity had subsided somewhat, the forewoman, still smiling, said to him:

"We don't sell hams here, monsieur; pray, what sort of a place did you take this for?"

"Oh! a thousand pardons, madame; isn't this a provision shop?"

"No, monsieur; it's a flower and feather shop."

"Ah! I am a miserable wretch! But let me tell you what misled me: it was the birds that I saw in the window. I said to myself: 'That's game; therefore, they sell provisions.'"

"Those are birds-of-paradise that you saw, monsieur; they're used to put on ladies' hats, but not to eat."

"Birds-of-paradise! Pardon me, but they are in paradise, in very truth, since they live under the same roof with such charming ladies! I renew my apologies, and beg you to accept my respects."

Cherami left the fourth shop, saying to himself:

"They are not there either; I shan't have my cue this evening. This is enough for to-day; but I am well pleased with the effect I produced in that last place: they all laughed, even the mistress herself laughed like a madwoman! It was very amusing to see the gayety on all those female faces—and all because I asked for a ham! After all, a ham was more absurd than a coat, shirts, or children's caps! Well, to-morrow I must ask for something even more absurd. Oh! I shall think up something; I'm never at a loss. Meanwhile, let's go and have a game of pool at the usual place. When my pocket is well lined, I play superbly, I handle my cue magnificently. I am sure of winning, according to the proverb: 'Water keeps flowing to the river.'"

The next day, after dinner, Cherami returned to Rue Saint-Denis, saying to himself:

"I know how far I went yesterday, and where I must begin to-day. I have something very amusing to ask for. How I'll make them laugh! Oh! I propose that not even the forewomen shall succeed in keeping a serious face. They will fancy they're at the Palais-Royal when Grassot plays *La Garde-Malade*, or *Le Vieux Loup de Mer*."

But, since the preceding night, certain things had happened in Rue Saint-Denis which our grisette-hunter could not divine.

In a quarter so wholly given over to business, there are brokers and under-clerks who go about almost every morning inquiring as to the course of prices, articles most in demand, etc.; this is commonly called *faire la place*. Now, when one of these brokers entered a certain feather-shop, the girls asked him laughingly:

"Have you brought us some children's caps? we had a call for some last night."

"Caps? you are joking!"

"No, indeed!"

And thereupon they told him about their customer of the night before. The story made the broker laugh, and that was the end of it. But at another shop they told him about a man who had wanted to buy a coat.

"This is a strange thing!" he exclaimed; "over yonder, somebody asked for a child's cap. Can it be the same man?"

At that, the proprietor's interest was aroused.

"I must go to see my confrères, and find out whether they also saw this person."

"That is right," said the broker; "we must go to the bottom of this; for it seems to me as if someone had made up his mind to play a practical joke on you. I'll go with you."

They soon learned that Cherami had visited four shops; but they also satisfied themselves that he had been to no more. The dealers in feathers took counsel together, and those who had not received a call from the jocose gentleman said to one another:

"Perhaps the fellow will begin again to-morrow night; we must prepare to give him a warm reception."

The tradesmen, at whose establishments he had asked for caps, a coat, shirts, and a ham, said to their confrères:

"Allow us to come to your shops to-night and wait for this man, so that we can have our share in the reception you propose to give him."

Everything being agreed upon, in the evening they divided up into groups and waited impatiently for the party of the night before to appear.

Our hunter of feather-makers entered Rue Saint-Denis, far from suspecting all that had been plotted against him; he waved his switch about, looked to right and left, then said to himself:

"I went in there—and there. I recognize the shops perfectly. Ah! there's my number three. There's only one more—the fourth—there it is; yes, I recognize the forewoman, who had a very amiable expression, laughing as she did with all the rest of them. Now, I will go into the next one I see, and we'll have a little laugh. Oh! the question I am going to ask will be so laughable! the girls will fairly howl. I won't even answer for it that I can keep a serious face myself.—Ah! there's a feather-shop. A fine place—forward!"

Cherami made but one bound to the shop he had discovered; he entered, struck a graceful attitude, and ogled the workgirls, not noticing several young men who had stepped behind the doors when he entered.

The forewoman looked at him in a strange way, but asked him, none the less, in a polite tone, what he wanted.

Cherami replied, with a winning smile:

"What do I want? Mon Dieu! fair lady, a very simple thing. I would like—I like to think that you keep them—I would like a broomstick."

"Certainly we keep them, monsieur," the forewoman instantly answered. "How lucky! we have just laid in a stock. You couldn't go to a better place."

While Cherami listened in utter amazement to this reply, which he was very far from expecting, the young men, who had, as it happened, provided themselves with broomsticks, came forth from their hiding-place and fell upon him at close quarters, crying:

"Ah! you want broomsticks, do you? well! you shall have 'em!—to teach you to go into shops as you did last night, to make sport of honest tradesmen! Take that, and that! how do you like broomsticks?"

Cherami, who was unprepared for this attack, tried to parry the blows with his switch, but the switch was no match for the weapons of his opponents; so he thought of nothing but making his escape.

"I will wait for you in the street, messieurs," he cried; "I challenge you all, one at a time."

But they made no reply; they simply pushed him into the street and closed the door on him. Somewhat ashamed of the result of his jest, our friend, who had received a too well-aimed blow from a broomstick over his left eye, walked away, holding his handkerchief to the wound, and saying to himself:

"What a damnable idea that was of mine, to ask for a broomstick! This time, I have my cue!"

XL

THE BANKER

Cherami's left eye was so badly damaged, and retained so long the marks of the blow it had received, that the ex-beau was obliged to keep his room six weeks, because he did not choose to go out with a bandage across his face.

Madame Louchard, who was frequently intrusted with the duty of dressing the wounded organ, said one day to her tenant:

"How in the world did you get that *trump*?"

"You call that a *trump*, my amiable hostess! It would be a deuced fine hand which was full of such trumps!"

"You fought another duel, did you, hot-head?"

"I am forced to confess that I was beaten this time; I wasn't strong enough; there was a whole regiment against me."

"That wasn't done by a sword, was it?"

"No, unluckily! A sword puts your eye out, but doesn't force it out of your head. But I got it for the sake of two girls!"

"Aha! so you must have two at once! God! what good reason I have to hate men!"

"However, this forced retirement has compelled me to be economical; I have given you a superb payment on account."

"Twenty-five francs! Do you call that superb?"

"Everything is comparative; I usually give you only a hundred sous. My eye is getting well, thank God! I shall soon resume my activity."

"And run after your girls again, I suppose?"

"No, on my word as a gentleman, I shan't begin that again; I've had enough of it! I have my cue. I am going to try to find my friend Gustave; he may have been in Paris since I have kept my room. My first visit will be to his uncle, a by no means amiable party, who presumes to look askance at me; but, so long as he tells me where his nephew is, I will allow him to make faces at me, if it affords him any pleasure."

A few days later, Cherami was, in fact, able to go out, and without a bandage; his eye had resumed its normal appearance. Our man had taken great pains with his toilet: his boots were polished, his hat and coat carefully brushed; he took his switch, entered the omnibus from Belleville, took an exchange check, and, in due time, arrived at the banker's establishment in Faubourg Montmartre.

On this occasion, Cherami did not stop to talk with the concierge; he went straight to the office and found the same clerk still at work on his figures. It is a fact that there are some clerks in banking-houses who pass almost the whole day at that work. When they go to sleep, it would seem that they must always see figures dancing and fluttering about them; what a pleasant life! and what delightful dreams!

Cherami stopped in front of the old clerk, who kept his eyes fixed on his ledger as before, making the same dull sound that some machines make: "Six—eight—fourteen—twenty-seven—thirty."

"I say, my good man, haven't you stopped that since the last time I came?" cried Cherami, tapping on the clerk's desk with his switch. "Sapristi! you're no common clerk; you're a living logarithm, a ciphering-machine on which somebody ought to take out a patent! You ought to fetch a big price."

The old clerk replied simply, without raising his head:

"Don't hit my ledger like that; don't you see that you raise the dust?"

"Yes, to be sure, I see that I raise lots of dust; your office-boys don't dust here every day, it seems?"

"Thirty-five—forty-four—fifty-three."

"Ah! the machine's starting up again. Look you: I would be glad to avoid applying to your employer, Monsieur Grandcourt, as we're not on the best of terms. Come, Papa Double-Naught, tell me if the banker's nephew, Gustave, has returned from Germany. I have something to say to him—something important, very important; I am anxious to assure his happiness! Well?"

"Eighty from a hundred and sixty leaves——"

"Ah! this is too much! it passes conception! He ought to be sent to the Exposition!"

Having brought his switch down on the desk once more, with such violence that the sand and ink flew up into the clerk's face, Cherami strode toward the banker's private office, and found that gentleman reading the newspaper.

At sight of Cherami, whom he recognized at once, although his apparel was greatly improved, Monsieur Grandcourt frowned. His visitor, on the contrary, tried to smile, and said, bowing gracefully:

"Monsieur, I have the honor to be your servant."

"Good-morning, monsieur!"

"Do you remember me, by any chance?"

"Perfectly, monsieur. Indeed, you are not at all changed, except in respect to your dress, which I congratulate you upon having renewed."

"Ah! you notice that? You look at a man's dress, I see?"

"Why, I should say that it was impossible not to notice it."

"I mean to say that you attach importance to it, that you judge the man by his coat."

"Was it to ascertain my opinion on that subject that you called on me, monsieur?"

"No; oh, no! I snap my fingers at other people's opinions. I know my own value, and that's enough for me."

"I congratulate you, monsieur, on knowing your own value; it is quite possible that the world at large doesn't suspect it."

Cherami bit his lips and twisted his whiskers, muttering:

"This devil of a fellow hasn't changed, either—still sarcastic, mocking. I don't despise intellects of that type; they prick and stir one up. You retort, and the conversation is all the more highly spiced."

Monsieur Grandcourt repressed a faint smile and leaned back in his chair, crossing his legs, as if waiting to hear what his caller had to say.

"I would be willing to bet that you guess why I have come?" said Cherami at last.

"It is quite possible, monsieur; still, I may be mistaken."

"I have come to ask where your dear nephew is—my friend Gustave."

"He is travelling, monsieur."

"Still travelling? But, he must be somewhere."

"He was at Berlin not long ago."

"Not long ago—that's rather vague. However, he writes to you, and you answer him, I presume?"

"There is no doubt about that."

"Consequently, he tells you where to send your letters. Very good! be kind enough to give me his address, so that I may write to Gustave forthwith. I desire to tell him a piece of news which will make him very happy, and will probably hasten his return to Paris. When one can give a friend pleasure, it would seem that one cannot do it too quickly! Don't you agree with me in that?"

"Perhaps, monsieur; that depends on the possible results of the pleasure which you wish to afford your friend. What is this joyous news which you are in such haste to transmit to my nephew, so as to make him hurry back? Couldn't you tell me?"

"I might say that you are very inquisitive; but you are my friend's uncle, and, for that reason, I excuse you. The little woman whom Gustave adored, whom he still adores—at least, he told me so before he went away—that charming Fanny!—and she really is very pretty! I had a chance to examine her at my ease when I called on her—a refined, intellectual face, a coaxing voice, a foot just large enough to say that she has one——"

"Well, monsieur, this Fanny?"

"Well, dear uncle, she is a widow!"

"Oh! monsieur, I have known that a long while. She's a widow because her husband blew his brains out, which doesn't indicate that he was very happy at home."

"I beg your pardon; he killed himself because he was ruined—by unlucky speculations on the Bourse. Still, I am not talking about the dead man, but about his widow. Since the woman Gustave adored is free, what is there to prevent him, later—I don't say now, at once, but when her year of mourning has passed——"

"So, monsieur, it is with the purpose of reviving that idiotic passion of my nephew for a woman who laughed at him, that you insist upon knowing where he is? You hope that on receipt of your letter he will drop everything and return to Paris?"

"I am even capable of going where he is, myself, to fetch him home, if it isn't too far—and doesn't cost too much! I will travel third class; I don't mind. One must make some sacrifice to friendship."

"You will not have that trouble, monsieur; and as I consider that my nephew will certainly return soon enough, so far as seeing your Fanny is concerned, and as I flatter myself that he will then have ceased to think of that young woman, I shall not give you his address."

"Ah! indeed! so you are still as hard-hearted and tyrannical as ever?"

"A man is not necessarily a tyrant, monsieur, because he prevents silly boys from making fools of themselves. I am well aware that, nowadays, it is customary to give that name to those who insist that laws and customs and individual rights shall be respected; that old age shall be honored, that children shall revere their parents and celebrate their birthdays, and that there shall be no smoking in a room where there are ladies; if that's what you mean by *tyrant*, why, I am a tyrant, monsieur, and I am proud of it."

Cherami paced up and down the room, muttering:

"You are trying to make me think it's noon at two o'clock! I care nothing for all that! Once, twice, will you give me Gustave's address?"

"A hundred times, no!"

"Good-day, then! I have my cue!"

And Cherami rushed from the room in a rage, saying to himself:

"If I had such an uncle as that, I'd disinherit him!"

XLI

THE YOUNG WIDOW

For several days, Cherami went every morning and inquired of the banker's concierge if the young traveller had returned; but as he always received a negative reply, he soon tired of repeating the same trip to no purpose, and confined himself to going there once a week.

Meanwhile, time passed, and Cherami, reduced once more to the necessity of living on his slender income, found himself anew without enough money in his pocket to buy a cigar.

But winter had given place to spring, fine weather had returned, and the ex-beau strolled about in search of acquaintances more persistently than ever.

One morning, near the Château d'Eau, he saw two girls, apparently waiting for an omnibus; he walked toward them, saying to himself:

"Par la sambleu! I believe those are my pretty feather-makers. Yes, they certainly are Mesdemoiselles Laurette and Lucie."

Hearing their names, the young women turned and looked at the stranger, who bowed low to them. Suddenly Laurette, the dark one, cried:

"Ah! I recognize monsieur now; he's the one who talked with us at Porte Saint-Martin last summer."

"Yes, mesdemoiselles; the same. Are you going up to Belleville again?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"And to the restaurant in Parc Saint-Fargeau?"

"No, monsieur; but we have a friend who lives in the village of L'Avenir."

"And where might the village of L'Avenir be, if you please?"

"What! you don't know it?"

"I have never been able to read the future (*l'avenir*), and I was not aware that it had a village."

"It's in Romainville Forest, a little this side, on high land from which you get a fine view. There have been a lot of houses built there, almost all alike; small, but very neat and prettily decorated, each with its little garden. As they don't cost much, and you can pay on very easy terms, why, the village of L'Avenir sprang up all at once, as if by magic."

"Pardieu! I'll go and buy a house there—as soon as I'm in funds. Ah! mesdemoiselles, I have hunted everywhere for you! If you knew all that I have done to find you!"

"Us, monsieur? Why did you want to find us?"

"To ask you to go to the play and to supper."

"Ah! what a fine idea! But perhaps we wouldn't have accepted?"

"That *perhaps* relieves my mind. There was nothing improper in my suggestion."

"Monsieur certainly has too gentlemanly an air for anybody to distrust him."

"Damnation!" said Cherami to himself; "what a pity that I haven't a sou! I'll bet they would accept now."

"Where did you look for us, monsieur?"

"Why, in all the feather-shops on Rue Saint-Denis."

"Ah! you would have had to look a long while. We're not in the feather business now; we have changed."

"What are you in now?"

"Pearls; we string pearls."

"Ah! that's a very pretty trade. I have never worked in pearls myself, and yet I would have liked——"

"Here's our 'bus, Laurette—come. Adieu, monsieur!"

"In what quarter, please?"

"Rue des Arcis."

The young women climbed into the omnibus, and Cherami watched them ride away. He sighed, muttered a malediction against fate, tapped his trousers with his switch, and continued his promenade. But he had not walked a hundred yards, when he found himself face to face with a young lady dressed in mourning, who stopped and bestowed a gracious salutation upon him. Cherami bowed to the ground, for he had recognized Auguste Monléard's young widow.

"Good-morning, monsieur! do you recognize me?" said Fanny, with a smile.

"Ah! madame, I must be short-sighted to the last degree to have forgotten your enchanting face after I had seen it once!"

"But this mourning changes one a good deal."

"Whether you wear black, or pink, or nothing at all, I will answer for it that you will always be charming. Indeed, I should prefer the last."

"You are very gallant, Monsieur Cherami!"

"I am delighted to find that madame remembers my name."

"I have not forgotten it, monsieur; indeed, I was very anxious to see you."

"Really! If I could have dreamed of such a thing, madame, I would have done myself the honor to call upon you long since."

"I wanted first of all to thank you for your kindness in going to my father's to perform an unpleasant errand."

"Oh! let us say no more of that, I beg! Have you any other commission to intrust to me? I am at your service, I have nothing to do; command me."

"I thank you, Monsieur Cherami. Do you know Monsieur Gustave Darlemont?"

"Do I know him! He is my best friend, my Euryalus, my Orestes, my Pythias.—Yes, indeed, madame; I do know him and appreciate him; he is a charming fellow, who deserves to be loved."

"Tell me frankly, Monsieur Cherami,—surely you have no reason now to conceal the truth from me,—did Gustave ask you to fight with my husband?"

"Ah! so madame knows that it was I who——"

"Who fought a duel with Monsieur Monléard. To be sure; but have no fear; I bear you no ill-will at all for that."

"She's a charming creature," said Cherami to himself; "I fancy that she would bear me no more ill-will if I had killed her husband."

"But, monsieur," rejoined Fanny, "be good enough to tell me why you called me faithless when you saw me pass?"

"Oh! mon Dieu! my dear madame, it's very easy to understand. I had dined with poor Gustave at the restaurant where you gave your wedding party. During the whole meal, the dear fellow was in such utter despair that it was painful to see him. He didn't eat, he didn't drink; I was compelled to dine for two, and to hold on to him every minute to keep him from seeking you out in the midst of your party."

"Really! Poor fellow! was he so broken up as that?"

"In the evening, he spoke to your sister and made her promise that, when you came back for the ball, she would arrange it so that he could have an interview with you."

"My sister never told me a word of all this. That Adolphine's a strange creature!"

"On the contrary, it seems that she sent word to Gustave's uncle, to come to take him away."

"What business was it of hers?"

"The uncle came and compelled his nephew to go with him; I was left alone. I had drunk quite a lot of punch; I had looked in at a wedding party on the floor above yours. As I came from that party, heated by dancing, and still thinking of my disconsolate friend, I caught sight of you, and I let slip that remark; which I

retract to-day, and offer a thousand apologies for making it."

"You are freely forgiven. So Gustave had nothing to do with the duel?"

"He knew absolutely nothing about it until he returned from Spain."

"Do you know where he is now?"

"Alas, no! In Prussia, I believe. I have been several times to ask; but he has an uncle who is the most disagreeable man you can imagine! If he weren't so closely connected with my friend, I would have run him through before this. Still, Gustave must return some time; I am on the watch for him."

"When you hear anything about him, it will be very kind of you to let me know. This is my new address."

"Be sure, madame, that I shall be only too happy to prove my zeal."

"Adieu, Monsieur Cherami!"

"Madame, accept my most respectful homage.—I don't know whether she is sincerely fond of Gustave," thought Cherami, as the charming widow left him, "but it is certain that she is burning to see him again."

XLII

ORESTES AND PYLADES

Fanny had been a widow more than six months, when, as Cherami was approaching Monsieur Grandcourt's abode one morning, he saw Gustave come out. He uttered a joyful exclamation, and hastened to throw his arms about the young traveller, crying:

"*Tandem*! *denique*! here he is at last! this is good luck, indeed! Damnation! you've been away a long while, but we will hope that it's the last time."

"Good-day, my dear Arthur!" said Gustave, as they shook hands. "Were you coming to see my uncle?"

"Your uncle! Sapristi! he's a dear creature, is your uncle; let's talk about something else. Why, I have been here a hundred times; I wanted to get your address, so that I could write to you or come after you; but it was impossible to obtain the slightest information from your uncle. When did you return?"

"Last night, at nine o'clock. But why were you so anxious to know where I was? What had you to tell me that was so important?"

"Hasn't your uncle told you anything?"

"We had a talk this morning, on business; that's all."

"Ah! the old fox! there's no danger that he would tell you what interested you most."

"Then do you tell me, quickly, Cherami."

"Your former passion, that little woman you loved so dearly——"

"Fanny! Great God! is she dead?"

"No, no! she's not dead; she's in bewitching health, she's just as pretty as ever, and more than that—she's a widow."

"A widow! Great heaven! can it be possible?"

"It's more than possible, it's so. Her husband speculated in stocks, and ruined himself; then, *crac*! a pistol-shot—you understand."

"Oh! what a calamity! Why, it's perfectly ghastly; how long ago was it?"

"Almost immediately after you went away."

"Poor Fanny! she expected to find her happiness in that marriage; how she must have grieved! how bitterly she must have wept!"

"My dear Gustave, you don't know that young woman at all. She has very great strength of character; she received the news of her husband's death with a stoical courage worthy of the Spartan women who sent their sons to war, bidding them to return as victors or not at all."

"How do you know that, Cherami?"

"Pardieu! because it was I to whom her husband confided his last wishes and the mission of informing his wife of his death."

"To you! you who fought a duel with him?"

"Precisely! that duel made us the best friends in the world. I will tell you all about it in detail another time. Let it suffice for the present, that the young widow, who is already thoroughly consoled, does not cease to talk about you, to ask about you, and to inquire whether you will return soon."

"Is that true? you are not deceiving me? Fanny thinks of me?"

"It is as I have the honor to tell you, and, between ourselves, I believe that she never really loved her husband—which explains why she wasted so little regret on him."

"All that you tell me surprises me so that I can't collect my thoughts. Fanny widowed! Fanny free!"

"Yes, widowed, and more than six months passed already! By the way,—and this is the first question I should have asked you,—do you still love her?"

"Do I still love her! Ah! my dear Arthur, can you doubt it?"

"It seems to me that you have had plenty of time and a perfect right to forget her. I seem to recall that that was your hope when you went away."

"That may be; but I have not been able to do it. I tried to distract my thoughts, to fall in love with other women. One day, I fancied that I was; but the illusion soon vanished; and then, the last time I met Fanny, she was so sweet with me that the memory of that occasion was not well calculated to destroy my love."

"Then you love her? you are sure of it?"

"Nonsense, my dear fellow! why do you ask me that?"

"Oh! because I had thought of something else; and if you were no longer in love with the widow—— But, as you are still daft over her, why, that's at an end; and I believe that things will go on now to suit you."

"I am going to see Adolphine, Fanny's sister, to-day."

"Why shouldn't you go to see Fanny herself? I should say that that would be the shortest way. I can give you her address."

"Oh! you can't mean that, my friend! that I should go to that young widow's house at once—I, who have not been to see her since her marriage! It wouldn't be proper. She must give me permission first."

"But, as she urged you to call on her when she was a married woman, it seems to me that she can afford to receive you now that she's a widow."

"To be sure, but not right away; I must see her first, at her father's. She must go there often, now?"

"I should rather see you go to the little widow's than to her father's."

"Why so?"

"Why, indeed! That's the sequel of the idea I spoke about just now. However, do as you think best; the main point is that you have come in time, and that you should stay in Paris; because I am horribly bored while you are away. On my word, I seem to miss something."

"Dear Arthur! I am really touched by the interest you take in everything that concerns me.—And yourself, my friend—are you happy, are you doing well in business?"

"I can't do badly, because I do no business at all. I am content—because I am a philosopher! I am happy—when I have my cue; but I haven't had it for some time."

"I'll bet that you have no money."

"You would win very often if you made that bet."

"And you didn't say a word about it! Am I no longer your friend?"

"My dear Gustave, you overwhelm me;—but I owe you something now, and——"

"What does that matter? Do friends keep accounts with one another? Isn't he who can oblige the other the happier?"

"Damme! if all my friends of the old days had been of your way of thinking!"

Gustave produced his wallet, took out a banknote, and thrust it into Cherami's hand, saying:

"Here, my good friend, take this; and when it's all gone, tell me so. Now, adieu! I must leave you and go to Monsieur Gerbault's; I dine with my uncle to-day; but if you will dine with me to-morrow, be in front of the Passage de l'Opéra at six o'clock."

"If I will! Par la sambleu! why, it will be a regular fête for me."

"In that case, adieu, until to-morrow!"

When Gustave was a long distance away, Cherami continued to look after him, saying to himself:

"There goes the pearl of friends; I don't know the pearls upon which Mesdemoiselles Laurette and Lucie are employed, but a real friend is worth far more than all the treasures of Golconda, and is much rarer too. I was on the point of mentioning a certain idea that I have got into my head relative to little Adolphine, the pretty widow's sister; but I thought, on reflection, that I should do better to say nothing about it. What good would it do to tell him that I think poor Adolphine's in love with him, when he still loves Fanny? It would make him unhappy, and that's all; he wouldn't dare to go to Papa Gerbault's to talk about his dear Fanny. I certainly did well to hold my tongue. Let's see what he slipped into my hand. Generous Gustave! he is quite capable of loaning me five hundred francs more."

Cherami unfolded the banknote which he held in his hand, and was thunderstruck when he saw that it was for a thousand francs.

Having satisfied himself that he was not mistaken, Cherami stuffed the note into his cigar-case, muttering:

"A thousand francs! he gave me a thousand francs, and said: 'When that's gone, let me know!' Sacrebleu! this unexpected wealth bewilders me. That young man's behavior touches me; it makes me blush for my own. Come, Arthur, my good friend, do you propose to continue your dissipation, your foolish courses? And because you have fallen in with a whole-souled fellow who gave you money without counting it, are you going to work, as usual, to waste that money as you wasted your fortune? I say *no*! par la sambleu! I will not do it; I propose to show myself worthy to be Gustave's friend. From this day forth, I turn over a new leaf, I become a reasonable man, I put water in my wine; and, for a beginning, I will go and dine for thirty-two sous."

While Cherami was forming these excellent resolutions, Gustave betook himself, without loss of time, to Monsieur Gerbault's house.

Adolphine was alone, trying, by dint of practising diligently on the piano, to forget for a moment the secret pain which was gnawing at her heart. Fanny's sister had changed perceptibly in the last few months; a genuine passion does not leave one unscathed; at nineteen years of age, such a passion occupies one's every moment, obtrudes itself upon one's every thought. The girl's features bore traces of her suffering; her face had grown thin and pale, and constantly wore an expression of sadness, which she strove, but in vain, to hide beneath a smile in the presence of others; and her sister's company was not likely to afford her any distraction, because she talked almost incessantly of the man whom Adolphine would have been glad to forget.

Madeleine, who had recognized Gustave, did not deem it necessary to announce him, but allowed him to enter her mistress's apartment, where he could hear her playing the piano. He went forward softly and stood behind Adolphine, and several moments passed before she happened to glance at the mirror over the piano and saw him standing there. A cry escaped her; she whispered Gustave's name, then a ghastly pallor spread over her face, and she looked down at the floor.

"Mon Dieu! my dear Adolphine! what's the matter?" cried the young man, in dismay; "shall I call somebody?"

But Adolphine motioned to him not to go, and shook hands with him, saying in an uncertain voice:

"It's nothing—the surprise—the excitement; I was so unprepared to see you! But it's all gone.—So you are at home again, Monsieur Gustave?"

"Yes, my good little sister. So you didn't expect me, eh? You had forgotten all about me?"

"Oh! I don't say that; on the contrary, it seemed to me that you were staying away a long while this time."

"I have been away nearly seven months; and during that time, I understand that—many things have happened here."

"Ah! you know?"

"Yes, I know that your sister is a widow."

"Who has told you that, so soon?"

"Cherami; you know, the man who was with me the day of——"

"Oh, yes! I know him; it was he, too, who came to tell us the fatal news of poor Auguste's death; for, I don't know how it happens, but your Monsieur Cherami succeeds in having his finger in everything; everybody takes him for a confidant.—When did you return?"

"Only last evening."

"It was very nice of you to think of coming here. Father is out, but he will be at home soon."

"Good! for I shall be very glad to talk with him. I trust that he won't think it improper for me to come here now, as he did before?"

Adolphine could not restrain a nervous gesture as she replied:

"Ah! so you want to come to see us again? Yes—I understand—you are no longer afraid to meet Fanny."

"Do you think that I ought to avoid her presence still? tell me, dear Adolphine!"

"I? Oh! I don't think anything about it. Why should you suppose that I think that? I can't read your heart, you see, and I have no idea whether it still entertains the same sentiments as before."

"Ah! I can safely tell you, who have always treated me like a brother; indeed, why should I make a mystery of it, anyway? Yes, I love Fanny as dearly as ever, her image has not ceased for a single day to be present in my thoughts. My love, although hopeless, has never changed. Judge, then, whether I can cease to love her, now that I am once more at liberty to anticipate happiness in the future!"

Adolphine passed her hand across her brow and made an effort to retain her self-possession, as she replied:

"Ah! it's a fine thing to love like that, with a constancy which time and absence have failed to shake! It's a fine thing; and a woman could not love you too well to recompense a passion as true and pure as yours!"

"Now, that we are alone, tell me, dear Adolphine, do you think that Fanny will receive me kindly? Do you think that my constancy will touch her? that her heart will be moved by it? Ambition and the wish to cut a figure in the world caused her to prefer Monsieur Monléard to me. I can readily forgive her, young as she was, for listening to vanity rather than love—for I fancy that she never had much love for her husband."

"Oh, no! I don't think that she had, either."

"In that case, his death cannot have caused her a very deep grief?"

"She regretted his fortune, that's all."

"What are her means now?"

"Twenty-five hundred francs a year. My father asked her to come to live with us, but she preferred to have a home of her own."

"Twenty-five hundred francs! That's very little for one who has kept her carriage."

"It's quite enough for one whose happiness doesn't depend on money."

"You think so, Adolphine, because you haven't your sister's tastes; but all women aren't like you. Fanny loves society; she's a bit of a coquette, perhaps—that's a very pardonable fault. Thank heaven! I am so placed now that I can gratify the tastes of the woman whom I marry. I earn ten thousand francs a year; she will not be able to have horses in her stable and carriages in her carriage-house, but she will not be obliged to walk when she doesn't want to.—You don't answer me, Adolphine—do you think Fanny will consent to be my wife?"

"Oh! now that you earn ten thousand francs a year, she will smile on your suit, no doubt."

Gustave sighed, as he rejoined in a lower tone:

"Then, if I couldn't offer her that, she would refuse me again? That's what you mean to imply, isn't it?"

"No, no! Mon Dieu! Monsieur Gustave, I didn't mean to hurt you; I did wrong to say that. Fanny must love you—why shouldn't she love you? It would be awfully ungrateful of her not to—when you have given her abundant proof of so much love and constancy—and have forgiven her for the sorrow she caused you. Certainly she loves you; you will be happy with her; but—you see—I can't bear to talk about it all the time—because it worries me—it makes me uneasy—for you. Mon Dieu! I am all confused."

Gustave scrutinized the girl more closely, then exclaimed:

"Why, I hadn't noticed before! How you have changed; how thin you are! Have you been ill, my little sister?"

"Ah! you notice it now, do you? Why, no, I am not ill; nothing's the matter with me; I don't know why I should change."

"Are you in pain?"

Adolphine raised her lovely eyes, as if appealing to heaven, as she replied:

"No, I have no pain."

"I can't have you sick! I insist upon your recovering your fine, healthy color of the old days; and now that I

have returned, I will look after your health."

"Thanks! thanks! you will come to see us often, then?"

"I hope to do so; and your sister—does she come here often?"

"Thursdays, because we receive then; occasionally on other days."

Monsieur Gerbault's arrival put an end to this conversation. He greeted Gustave cordially, and the young man made no secret of the pleasure it would give him to come frequently to the house; he did not mention Fanny, preferring not to begin to talk of his renewed hopes at their very first meeting; but he adroitly found a way to make known his financial position, which would enable him, if he married, to offer an attractive prospect to the woman who should bear his name.

Now that his oldest daughter was a widow, Monsieur Gerbault saw no impropriety in Gustave's meeting her; and he was the first to urge the young man to come to his house at his pleasure, as before. Gustave was enchanted; he pressed Monsieur Gerbault's hand, then Adolphine's, and took his leave without noticing that the latter's depression had become more marked than ever.

XLIII

A COMPLETE REFORMATION

The next evening, at six o'clock, Cherami, dressed with an elegance which made of him once more the stylish beau of former days, was walking near the Passage de l'Opéra. Several of his former boon companions, who had ceased to bow to him since he had worn a threadbare coat, had stopped when they caught sight of him and acted as if they would accost him; but Cherami at once turned on his heel, saying to himself:

"Go your way, canaille! I know what you amount to, my fine fellows! You wouldn't look at me when I was strapped. You recognize me because I am well dressed. Avaunt! I have had enough of such people!"

Gustave soon appeared; he could not restrain an exclamation of surprise as he gazed at the man who could once more call himself Beau Arthur.

"Sapristi! my dear fellow! Pray excuse these manifestations of surprise," said Gustave; "but, upon my word, at first glance I didn't recognize you. You are superb—I don't exaggerate; no one could wear handsome clothes more gracefully."

"That's a relic of early habit."

"Why have you gotten yourself up so finely?"

"It was the least I could do to show my respect for such a friend as you."

"Let us go and dine, and we will talk."

"I am at your service."

The gentlemen entered the Café Anglais, and Gustave said to his companion:

"Order the dinner; you know how to do it."

"Pardon me, but I think I won't order again," said Cherami; "I went about it like a bull in a china-shop; I don't propose to do it any more; you do the ordering."

"What does this mean? You, a man who understood life so well!"

"On the contrary, I understood it very ill; and I have changed all that—a complete reformation; better late than never."

Gustave finally decided to order the dinner; but at every moment his guest said to him:

"Enough; that's quite enough! and we'll have only one kind of wine."

"Faith! my dear fellow, you may eat and drink what you choose; but I propose to order to suit myself; I haven't turned hermit, you see."

"Go on, you are the master. I will get drunk, if you insist; it's my duty to obey you."

Throughout the first course, Cherami put water in his wine, and was very abstemious.

"I shouldn't know you," said Gustave.

"So much the better! I aim to be unrecognizable; but let us talk of your affairs: have you been to Papa Gerbault's?"

"Yes; I saw Adolphine, Fanny's younger sister; still, as always, kind and affectionate and ready to help me."

"I have an idea that she is very affectionate, in truth."

"But I found her very much changed—she is thin, and she has lost her fresh color. One would say that the girl has some secret sorrow."

"There's nothing impossible in that, poor child! And you told her that you still love her sister?"

"To be sure; I confided to her all the hopes which Fanny's present position justified me in forming. Oh! I made no mystery to her of my love for her sister."

"That must have afforded her a great deal of pleasure!"

"Adolphine takes an interest in my happiness; if she can help me with Fanny, she will do it, I am sure."

"She is quite capable of it. But, look you, if you take my advice, you will go directly to the young widow, and not have the little sister for a constant witness of your love making; it's a dangerous business for a heart of nineteen years! When one sees others making love, it may arouse a longing to make love on one's own account."

"My dear Arthur, I ask nothing better than to go to Madame Monléard's; but I must see her first at her father's, and she must give me permission to call on her."

"Never fear; she'll give you permission. What about your uncle? have you spoken to him about the revival of your hopes?"

"No, indeed! he isn't fond of Fanny. There'll be time enough for that when affairs come to a head."

"By the way, if I want to see you now, where shall I find you? I don't want to apply to your uncle again; he's an old curmudgeon whom I can't get along with. He has a way of looking at me! If he hadn't been your uncle, we should have had it out before this, I promise you."

"My dear fellow, my uncle is a most excellent man, I give you my word; very just and fair at bottom; a little obstinate when he has formed a bad opinion of people; but very willing to revise his judgment when you prove to him that he was wrong."

"A noble trait, that!"

"He has a prejudice against Fanny; he believes her to be incapable of loving; but when she makes me happy, he will be the first to agree that he was wrong. As for myself, I have accepted a very nice suite of rooms in his house, where I shall stay till I marry."

"In your uncle's house! Then no one can see you without his permission?"

"Not so; my apartments are on the second floor, front, entirely separate from his."

"Does the concierge know you now?"

"Yes, never fear; he knows my name. Come, my good fellow, a glass of champagne to my love, to my union with Fanny!"

"You insist on drinking champagne?"

"Most certainly."

"Very good, if you insist on it! We might well have been content with this claret, which is perfect."

"But what is the meaning of this virtuous conduct? what revolution has taken place in you? who has wrought this miracle?"

"Who? Don't you suspect?"

"Faith, no!"

"Well, it was you, my dear Gustave."

"I? Nonsense!"

"It's the truth, none the less. Twice now, you have obliged me; and with such tact, such generosity——"

"Oh! I beg you——"

"Sacrebleu! let me speak; I am not talking *blague* now, and you must believe me, because I have no reason for lying. I brought myself up with a sharp turn; I said to myself that, although I am no longer young, I am not old enough yet to live at other people's expense. In short, I don't propose to throw money out of window any more.—Better still: I am conscious now of a desire to do something—to work and occupy my mind. I used to laugh at clerks, at the men employed in offices; but find me such a place, my friend, and I promise you that I'll fill it in such a way that they won't turn me away."

Gustave took Cherami's hand and pressed it warmly.

"This is very well done of you," he said; "I certainly can't blame you for such good resolutions. If you keep to them, why, I will look about, and I will find something for you."

"Oh! I shall keep to them; my mind is made up."

"Meanwhile, as one must never carry anything to excess, there's no law against your drinking champagne, provided you don't get drunk on it."

"Very good; let us drink it, then."

"To my love!"

"To your love! But take my advice, and attend to your business yourself; don't put it in the little sister's hands any more."

"Do you think her capable of doing me a bad turn with Fanny?"

"No, indeed! God forbid! she loves you too well to do you a bad turn with anybody. But the result of my experience is that, in love, you should never employ an ambassador. It's a waste of time."

"I will follow your advice. Thursday, I shall see Fanny at her father's, and I will ask her permission to call on her."

"In that way," said Cherami to himself, "that poor girl won't have them making love under her nose, at all events."

XLIV

COQUETRY

Thursday arrived, and on that day a few faithful friends and some less faithful acquaintances were accustomed to meet at Monsieur Gerbault's in the evening and play cards. Among the faithful friends—faithful in their attendance, that is—were Messieurs Clairval and Batonnin; among those who came only occasionally was young Anatole de Raincy, who, like a well-bred youth, had not taken offence at Adolphine's refusal of his hand; and, being still a great lover of music, did not, because of that refusal, renounce the pleasure of singing duets with her.

Since Fanny had been a widow, she had come regularly to her father's to dinner on Thursday; her sparkling conversation and her playful humor, upon which her bereavement had imposed silence for a fortnight at most, contributed not a little to the success of the evening party. The young widow, who knew that Anatole de

Raincy had sought Adolphine's hand and had been refused, never failed, when she found herself in that young gentleman's company, to dart glances at him which might well have turned his head, but for the fact that, in order to captivate him, a woman must first of all possess a sweet voice; and Fanny sang very little, and then her singing was not true.

So that Monsieur de Raincy did not respond to the glances of the pretty widow, who soon confided to her sister that that Monsieur Anatole was nothing but a canary; that he ought to be fed on nothing but chickweed.

On the day in question, Adolphine, when she was joined by her sister, whom she had not seen during the week, experienced a feeling of discomfort which she strove to overcome, saying to her hurriedly:

"I imagine that you will see someone here this evening whose presence will not be distasteful to you."

"Ah! whom do you expect this evening, pray?"

"Monsieur Gustave Darlemont."

"Gustave! Is it possible? Gustave has returned, and you haven't told me?"

"You have only just come; I couldn't tell you any sooner."

"But when did he return? When did you see him?"

"He came to see us on Monday; I believe he arrived in Paris the night before."

"What! he has been here since Monday, and I didn't know it! And he's coming to-night—you are quite sure? Did father invite him for to-night?"

"Father didn't actually invite him; but he knows that we receive on Thursdays, and, as he expressed a wish to visit us anew—— And then, he knows that he will meet you."

"Did he talk much about me? Does he act as if he still loved me? Oh! tell me everything he said, little sister; don't forget a single thing. It is very important; I must know what to expect."

Adolphine made an effort, and replied in a voice trembling with emotion:

"Yes, Monsieur Gustave told me that he still loved you, that he had never ceased to think of you."

"Oh! how sweet of him! There's constancy for you! And they say that men can't be faithful!—The poor fellows: how they are slandered! Dear Gustave! then he's well pleased that I am a widow, I suppose?"

"You can understand that he couldn't quite say that."

"No, no, but he thinks it; that's enough. And he's coming? Mon Dieu! how does my hair look? it seems to me that this cap hides my forehead too much."

"You look very well; and, besides, doesn't a woman always look well to her lover?"

"Oh! my dear girl, in order to please, one must always try to look pretty."

And Fanny ran to a mirror; she arranged and rearranged her hair, took off her cap and put it on again; and finally tossed it aside, saying:

"I certainly look better without a cap."

"But, sister, I supposed that your mourning required——"

"My dear girl, I've been a widow more than six months; I have a right to arrange my head as I please, and when one has fine hair it's never a crime to show it."

During dinner, Fanny talked incessantly of Gustave; Adolphine said nothing; Monsieur Gerbault let his elder daughter talk on, but he kept a serious countenance and looked frequently at Adolphine. At the time that she fainted at the idea that Gustave was dead, a sudden light had shone in upon her father's mind; but he had made no sign; he respected his younger daughter's secret, although at the bottom of his heart he was the more deeply touched by her suffering, because he could see no way of putting an end to it.

The dinner seemed horribly long to Fanny; she asked for the coffee before her father had finished his dessert, and kept leaving the table to look at herself in the mirror. This manœuvre was repeated so often that Monsieur Gerbault could not resist the temptation to say to her, with a smile:

"My dear, it seems to me that, for a widow, you are rather coquettish."

"In my opinion, father," she made haste to reply, "a widow is more excusable for being coquettish than a married woman whose husband is alive; for, you see, a widow is free."

"Yes, no doubt that is true, especially when she has been a widow a long while."

"Well, do you call six months nothing? And I am in my seventh!"

"Yes, indeed! yes, indeed!—Never mind; the story of the *Matron of Ephesus* no longer seems improbable to me."

"What's that about the *Matron of Ephesus*? I don't know that story."

"It's a fable; but it might very well be history, after all."

"Ah! did someone ring?"

"I didn't hear anything."

"How late your people come!"

"Do you think so? It's only seven o'clock."

"Nonsense! Your clock is slow."

"It keeps excellent time."

"Oh! I don't know what's the matter with me; I can't keep still."

Adolphine followed her sister with her eyes, thinking:

"It's her love for him that makes her so coquettish and so impatient! It's very funny; when he used to come before, I never thought of looking in my mirror; I thought of him, not of myself."

At last, the bell rang; it was Monsieur Clairval, cold, phlegmatic, taciturn. Next came Madame Mirallon, who always wore full dress, even at small parties. Next came a lawyer and a doctor, enthusiastic whist players, who were constantly disputing, one being a hot partisan of the short-suit lead, the other declaring

that a good player would never stoop to that.

At every ring, Fanny gazed eagerly at the door; she made a funny little wry face when she saw that the person who appeared was not he whom she expected.

"My gentleman keeps us waiting a long while!" she murmured; then ran to her sister.—"Adolphine, are you sure you told him Thursday? Perhaps you said some other day?"

"No. At all events, he knows that we have always received on Thursday."

"He knows, he knows! When a man travels so much, he can easily forget. It's after eight o'clock, and you see he doesn't come."

"Eight o'clock isn't late. Never fear; he'll come."

"You think so?"

"Oh! I am sure of it."

"You are quite sure that he still loves me?"

"If he doesn't, why should he have told me that he did?"

"Oh! my dear, men say so many things that they don't think!"

"I can't understand how anyone can lie about love."

"Ah! you make me laugh; love's just the thing they lie most about.—There's the bell. This time it must be he."

Fanny's expectation was deceived once more; Monsieur Batonnin appeared, with his inevitable smile, and his measured words.

"What a bore!" muttered the young woman, moving uneasily on her chair; "it's that wretched Batonnin—the doll-faced man, as we used to call him at our parties."

"Don't you like him? Why, he used to go to your house——"

"Well! what does that prove? Do you imagine that, in society, we are fond of everybody we receive? On the contrary, three-quarters of the time the greatest pleasure we have is in passing all our guests in review and picking them to pieces."

"Ah! what a pitiful sort of pleasure! But whom can you share it with? for, if you speak ill of everybody——"

"You take a new-comer, and go and sit down with him in a corner of the salon; and there, on the pretext of telling him who people are, you give everybody a curry-combing. It's awfully amusing!"

"But the new-comer, if he isn't an idiot, must say to himself: 'As soon as I have gone, she'll say as much about me.'"

"Oh! we don't even wait till he's gone to do that."

Monsieur Batonnin, having paid his respects to Monsieur Gerbault and to the card-players, joined the two sisters.

"How are the charming widow and her lovely sister? The rose and the bud—or, rather, two buds—or two roses; for, both being flowers, and the flowers being sisters, and having thorns—why——"

"Come, Monsieur Batonnin, make up your mind. I want to know whether I am a rose or a bud," said Fanny, glancing at the guest with a mocking expression.

"Madame, being no longer unmarried, you are necessarily a rose."

"All right; that fixes my status! And my sister is a bud?"

"Yes, to be sure—but I am pained to observe that this charming bud has drooped a little on its stalk for some time past."

"Do you hear, Adolphine? Monsieur Batonnin thinks that you are drooping on your stalk, which means, I presume, that you are losing your freshness."

"That isn't exactly what I meant to say."

"Don't try to back down, Monsieur Batonnin; besides, you are right; my sister has changed of late. She assures us that she is not ill, that she has no pain; for my part, I am convinced that something is the matter, but she doesn't choose to make me her confidante."

"Because I have nothing to confide," rejoined Adolphine, in a grave tone; "and it seems to me that monsieur might very well have avoided this subject."

"Excuse me, mademoiselle; I should be much distressed to have offended you; it was my friendship for you which led me to——"

"I myself, monsieur, have never been able to understand the kind of friendship which leads one to say to people point-blank: 'Mon Dieu! how you have changed! you are deathly pale! are you ill? you look very poorly!' If the person to whom you say it is really well, then you have seen awry; if she is really ill, you run the risk of making her worse by frightening her as to her condition. In either case, you see, it would be better to say nothing. Such manifestations of interest resemble those of the friends who can't reach you quickly enough when they have bad news to tell, but whom you never see when you have had any good fortune for which congratulations would be in order."

Monsieur Batonnin bit his lips, and tried to think of an answer; but they had ceased to pay any heed to him, for the door of the salon opened once more, and this time it was Gustave who appeared.

XLV

JOYS AND TORMENTS OF LOVE

The young man, having shaken hands with Monsieur Gerbault, walked toward Adolphine and her sister; it

was easy to see how excited and perturbed he was; but Adolphine, whose emotion was even greater perhaps, hastily left her seat and, after responding to Gustave's greeting, went to talk with Monsieur Clairval, who was not playing cards at that moment; so that there was no one to interfere with the interview which Gustave desired to have with her sister.

As for Fanny, she was absolutely unembarrassed; she smiled sweetly on Gustave, greeted him as if she had seen him the day before, and said, pointing to a seat by her side:

"So here you are at last, monsieur le voyageur! Mon Dieu! you seem to be imitating the Wandering Jew nowadays; you travel all the time, you are never at rest. Do you know, monsieur, that your friends are not reconciled to your long absences, and you surely will put an end to your peregrinations—unless you have a fancy to discover a new world?"

Gustave, bewildered by the jocular tone in which the widow addressed him, was unable for a moment to find words in which to reply. Fanny interpreted his confusion to her own advantage, and continued, but with a change of manner, and in an almost sentimental tone:

"Many things have happened since we met."

"Yes, madame; I have heard of the—loss you have sustained; and I beg you to believe that I shared the grief which you must have felt."

"I don't doubt it; you have so much delicacy of feeling, Monsieur Gustave! Yes, I had a very cruel experience, although Monsieur Monléard hardly deserved the tears I shed for him. He was a proud man, overflowing with vanity, hard-hearted, loving only himself, conceited, self-sufficient; but he is dead, I don't mean to speak ill of him, although he left me in a decidedly equivocal position. Ah! if I had known—if I could have foreseen. I have bitterly regretted what—what——" Then, suddenly changing her tone again, and becoming playful once more: "You are just from Berlin, I hear? Is there much fun there? Are the balls gorgeous? do the women dress well? does everybody go to the theatre? The Germans are very fond of music; you must have gone to concerts and evening parties and the play a great deal. Ah! what fortunate creatures men are! They can do whatever they please, while we poor women are obliged to stay at home, and, in many cases, never have anyone come to see us! That's the way I've been living for six months; and I am terribly bored; oh! terribly!"

"You had your sister, at least, to share your troubles."

"My sister! She's a lively creature, isn't she? I don't know what's been the matter with her lately, but she's a regular extinguisher. And then, you know, my temperament isn't like Adolphine's; she is melancholy by nature, and I am very light-headed. Don't you remember, Gustave? Heavens! what a mad creature I am! here I am calling you Gustave, just as I used to before I was married! Does that offend you?"

"Oh! you can't think it; it reminds me of such a happy time!"

"Why, I don't see but that that time has come back; for we are in the same position that we were then—almost."

Gustave could not restrain a sigh at that *almost*. The young widow made haste to continue:

"And now that I am free, that I am my own mistress, won't you do me the favor of coming to see me sometimes, Monsieur Gustave? Won't you have a little pity on the tedium of a poor widow, who was so anxious for you to come back, who talked about you every day with Adolphine?"

"What, madame! can it be true? you have thought sometimes of me?"

"He asks me if I have thought of him! he doubts it!—Is it because you had altogether forgotten me?"

"I, forget you? Ah! that would be impossible! Your lovely features are engraved on my heart, on my mind. Although far from you, I saw you all the time. Ah! Fanny, when one has once loved you.—But, pardon me, madame, I am losing my head; I call you Fanny, as I used."

"That doesn't offend me in the least; on the contrary, I like it. But just see what faces Monsieur Batonnin is making at us! One would say that he was trying to throw his eyes at us. Mon Dieu! how funny he is when he looks like that! Ha! ha! ha! it's enough to kill one."

"Madame Monléard is in great spirits to-night," said Monsieur Clairval to Monsieur Batonnin, who replied:

"I've noticed that she's been in much better spirits ever since she's been a widow."

"That Monsieur Batonnin, with his soft-spoken ways, always has something unkind to say," muttered Madame de Mirallon.

"And he smears honey on his words, to make them go down; that's the custom."

Adolphine had walked mechanically to the piano; she was suffering intensely, she would have liked to leave the salon, but she dared not, because it would have worried her father. To make her misery complete, Monsieur Batonnin joined her.

"Are we going to have the pleasure of hearing you sing, mademoiselle?"

"No, monsieur; I could not possibly sing; I have a very sore throat."

"I trust, mademoiselle, that you are not still offended with me because I thought that you looked ill?"

"Oh! not at all, monsieur; indeed, I think that you must have been right, for I don't feel very well this evening."

"Madame your sister is well enough for two, I judge, she is in such good spirits; she seems to be talking a good deal with that gentleman. Isn't he the same one who was with you one morning when I came to your room with your father?"

"Yes, monsieur; that is he."

"He was very dismal then; it seems that his gloom has disappeared, for he is laughing heartily with your sister. Are they acquainted?"

"Why, to be sure; Monsieur Gustave is an old friend of ours."

"Very good! I said to myself: 'Madame Monléard doesn't stand much on ceremony with that young man; he

must be an old acquaintance, at least.'"

To avoid listening any longer to Monsieur Batonnin, Adolphine seated herself by the whist table, and pretended to watch the game; but, sit where she would, she heard her sister's exclamations, whispering, and laughter, and the evening seemed endless to her.

At last the clock struck eleven; Fanny rose and prepared to take her leave. Gustave looked at her, as if undecided as to what he should do, but the young widow observed:

"Monsieur Clairval is playing whist; besides, I don't want him always to have the trouble of going home with me; and as Monsieur Gustave is here, perhaps he would be willing to escort me as far as my door."

Gustave's face beamed; he hastened to say that he should be too happy to offer her his arm. Whereupon, Fanny made haste to say good-night to her father and sister.

The young man, in his turn, went to Adolphine, and said to her in an undertone:

"Dear little sister, I am a very happy man! She has given me permission to call on her; she has even given me to understand that she regrets having refused to marry me; in short, she is touched by my constancy."

"It is well; be happy, that is my dearest wish; and, above all things, go to my sister's; that will be much better, believe me, than to come to court her here."

Gustave was about to reply, but Fanny called him and took him away. Thereupon Adolphine went to her room, saying to herself:

"Such evenings as this are too horrible; I shall not have the courage to endure them often. Oh! let them be happy together! but I pray that he may not come here any more, that I may not be forced to be a witness of his love for another!"

XLVI

IN WHICH CHERAMI ACTS LIKE SAINT ANTHONY

Gustave did not fail to take advantage of the permission Fanny had accorded him. Two days after the party at which they had met, he called upon the young widow, who greeted him thus:

"I began to think that you were off on your travels again, and that we shouldn't see you for another six months."

"Oh! I have no desire to travel now; I am too happy in Paris; especially if you allow me to come to see you."

"What good does it do for me to allow it, when you don't come? I expected you the day before yesterday, I expected you yesterday."

"I was afraid of being presumptuous if I took advantage too soon of the permission you gave me."

"I thought that you wouldn't stand on ceremony, and that we should be on the same terms together as before my marriage to Monsieur Monléard."

These words were accompanied by such a soft glance that Gustave no longer doubted that he was loved. He took Fanny's hand and covered it with kisses; she did not resist, and her hand responded tenderly to the pressure of his. Any other than Gustave would probably have carried further his desires and his acts, but he had long been accustomed to look upon Fanny as the woman whom he wished to make his wife; and in his love there was a sort of respect which her widow's dress could not fail to intensify.

So Gustave confined himself to repeating that he had never ceased to be enamored of her whom he had hoped to call his wife, and that he would be very, very happy if his hopes could be gratified at last. For her part, Fanny gave him to understand that while she might once have been ambitious and fickle, those failings should be charged to her age and consequent giddiness, and that, in reality, her heart had never been in agreement with her vanity.

Then the young widow, by a natural transition, adroitly led Gustave on to speak of his position and prospects. He was assured of ten thousand francs a year if he remained in his uncle's banking-house; he could hope for more in the future; to be sure, Monsieur Grandcourt would not be pleased to have his nephew marry, but he would place no obstacle in the way of the execution of his project. They would not live in the banker's house, but would take pleasant apartments not far from his offices; they would keep no carriage; he would take his wife to the theatre very often, and to the country; he would not give her diamonds, but she should have handsome dresses, and, as she was charming in herself, she would always be the loveliest of women, even if she were not covered with jewels.

In such conversation as this, forming the most attractive plans for the future, the hours which Gustave passed at Fanny's side seemed very short. Being entirely at liberty to see his love at her own home, he went much less to Monsieur Gerbault's. As for Adolphine, she did not go to her sister's at all; for she knew that she would meet Gustave there, and she avoided his presence as much as possible.

Two months passed thus, during which time Cherami saw very little of Gustave, who spent with Fanny all the time that he could spare from his business.

But one morning, just as our lover was starting to call on his enslaver, Cherami caught him on the wing.

"Par la sambleu! my dear Gustave, is there no way of having a word with you? Have you nothing to say to your friend? Or am I no longer your friend? One would say that you avoided me!"

"No, no, my dear Arthur, far from it; it always gives me great pleasure to see you; but you are well aware that I am in love, more in love than ever, and that I pass with Fanny all the time I can steal from my duties."

"Very good! and tell me about this love of yours; sapristi! are you satisfied? Does it go as you want it to this time? Tell me that much, at least."

"Ah! my friend, I am the happiest of men! Fanny loves me; I can't possibly doubt it now. As soon as her mourning is at an end, we are to be married; we are already making our plans, our projects for the future;

next month, as it will be almost ten months then, we shall begin to look about for apartments, which I shall have furnished and decorated in advance. I intend that Fanny shall find them fascinating."

"Well, I see that everything is going all right. The little woman is yours this time—and you think so much of her!—And her sister, the good Adolphine—do you still see her?"

"I have seen very little of her lately; she never comes to her sister's, and that surprises me; twice I have tried to talk with Adolphine, to tell her that my marriage to Fanny was settled; but I couldn't find her, she had gone out; for I can't believe that she would have refused to see me—her brother."

"In all this excitement, you haven't thought about a place for me, I suppose?"

"Pardon me, I did mention it to my uncle. He doesn't seem to believe that you are serious in your desire for employment."

"Ah! pardieu, if your uncle has got to have a hand in it, I am very certain that I shall never get a place!"

"Never fear; I will attend to it myself, but there's no hurry. Are you in need of money? Tell me."

"Why, no, I am not in need of money. Do you suppose that I have already gone through the thousand francs you loaned me?"

"But that was more than two months ago, and——"

"True, and formerly I should have seen the last of it in a week; I should have made only seven mouthfuls of it. But to-day it's different! I told you that I had reformed. I have discovered, just at the beginning of Boulevard du Temple, a soup dealer who supplies dinners; and delicious dinners, too, on my word of honor! you don't have a great variety of dishes, to be sure; but everything is good. Excellent roast beef; you would fancy you were in London; and you can dine abundantly for eighteen sous. Eighteen sous! I used to give more than that to the waiter."

"My friend, you shouldn't go to extremes in anything; it seems to me that you are carrying your reformation too far."

"I am very well pleased; I believe that I shall end by living on my five hundred and fifty francs a year; when that time comes, I propose to parade the streets between two clarionets, to exhibit myself."

"After I am married, I will find you a suitable place."

"Make haste and marry, then, that I may have my cue. By the way, I venture to believe that it won't come off without notice to me? I don't ask to be invited to the wedding; that would be presumptuous; but I desire, at least, to salute the bridal couple when they leave the church."

"And I propose that you shall be of the wedding party. We shall not give a ball,—her widowhood is too recent,—but a handsome banquet, and I hope that, on that day, you will forget your reformation. But, adieu! I am late, she is expecting me. You will hear from me soon."

"A mighty good fellow!" said Cherami to himself, as Gustave hurried away; "he deserves to be happy! But will he be, with his Fanny? Hum! I'm none too sure of it. For my part, I should prefer the other; but as he's in love with this one—to be sure, she's a very pretty woman, but I, old fox that I am, I wouldn't trust her!—Sapristi! what do I see? My two little pearls, Laurette and Lucie, and I have money in my pocket! But, no; by Saint Anthony, I will not yield to the temptation! Let's be off before they see me."

Laurette and Lucie were, in fact, coming toward Cherami, both dressed with much coquetry and looking very attractive; but he, after heaving a profound sigh, retreated with so much precipitation, that he ran into the door of an omnibus, which had stopped for a lady; and, being urged by the conductor, he concluded to enter also.

XLVII

THE RETURN FROM ITALY

Several weeks passed. It was a Thursday; and Fanny, who had not been at her father's for a long time, said to Gustave when she saw him during the day:

"I must go to dine with father to-day, my dear; I trust that you will come there this evening?"

"As you will be there, you may be certain that I will come. By the way, I saw that there was an apartment to rent in a nice house on Rue Fontaine. Do you like that quarter?"

"Very much."

"Very well; I will go some time to-day to look at it, and if it seems to me to be suitable I will tell you this evening, so that you can go to see it. For ten months have passed; the time is not very far away when I shall be able to call you my wife! so it is none too soon for me to see about getting an apartment ready."

"Do so, my dear; you can tell me to-night if you have found what we want."

About five o'clock, the widow went to her father's. Monsieur Gerbault always welcomed his daughter kindly, and Adolphine did her utmost to smile on her sister.

"So you're really going to marry Gustave this time, are you?" said Monsieur Gerbault.

"Why shouldn't I, father? Do you think I shall be doing wrong?"

"No—but I regret that you didn't marry him a year ago."

"Why, father, it seems to me that I acted very wisely! Gustave had only a very modest salary then. Monsieur Monléard offered me a fortune, and I could not hesitate; the sequel didn't come up to my hopes; but certainly no one could have foreseen that."

"But you are very lucky to fall in with a man who still loves you after you have once cast him off."

"Mon Dieu! father, if Gustave had not loved me, some other man would have turned up—that's all there is to that."

"Possibly; at all events, I see that you have an answer for everything."

Adolphine listened to her sister with an air of amazement, but she did not venture to make a single reflection; she kept to herself the thoughts which Fanny's remarks inspired; and she avoided, so far as she possibly could, any conversation with her on the subject of her approaching marriage to Gustave.

The evening brought to Monsieur Gerbault's salon his faithful whist players, and Gustave, who shook hands warmly with the man whom he already looked upon as his father-in-law, and affectionately with Adolphine. She, by an involuntary movement, withdrew her hand at first; but the next moment she forced herself to smile, and offered her hand to Gustave, saying:

"I beg your pardon. I thought you were Monsieur de Raincy."

"And she absolutely refuses to give her hand to him," said Fanny, with a laugh, "although he offers his name in exchange for it. Don't you think, Gustave, that she makes a great mistake in refusing that young man?"

"Why so, if she doesn't love him?"

"As if people married for love!"

Realizing that she had said something which might distress Gustave, the young woman hastily added:

"When a woman has never been married, she ought to be reasonable; with a widow, it's different; she can afford to obey the dictates of her heart."

These words speedily restored the serenity of Gustave's brow, which had become a little clouded. A moment later, Monsieur Batonnin arrived, and, having saluted the company, said, with a radiant expression:

"I have just met someone, whom you will probably see this evening, for when I said: 'I am going to pass the evening at Monsieur Gerbault's,' he exclaimed: 'Oh! I mean to go there, too, if only for a moment.'"

"Who is it?" queried Monsieur Gerbault.

"Someone who is very agreeable—just back from Italy. What! can't you guess? Monsieur le Comte de la Bérinière."

"Ah! the dear count! Has he returned?"

"Only yesterday. He instantly asked me for all the news. When I told him that Madame Monléard was a widow, he was tremendously surprised; he couldn't get over it."

"Mon Dieu! how stupid that man is!" muttered Gustave, glancing at Fanny.

Since the announcement of the Comte de la Bérinière's return, she seemed disturbed and preoccupied. In a few moments, she left her seat between her sister and Gustave, went to the window for a moment, as if to get a breath of air, and then, instead of returning to her former seat, sat down near the whist table.

Adolphine followed her sister with her eyes, and did not lose a single one of her movements. Meanwhile, Gustave, seeing Fanny seat herself at a distance, drew nearer to Adolphine, and said:

"Your sister, I see, wishes me to tell you of our delightful plans for the future; for I have had no chance to talk with you lately, dear Adolphine; I have been here several times, but have failed to find you."

"Yes, I know it."

"I think that you are not indifferent to what interests me, that you take pleasure in my happiness. You saw me when I was so unhappy! I am sure that you want to see me happy now."

"Yes, of course I do. A love like yours well deserves to be reciprocated."

Gustave began to lay before Adolphine all the plans he had formed for the future, when he should be her brother-in-law. Adolphine listened with only half an ear; she seemed much more interested in watching her sister, who pretended to take a deep interest in the game of whist; but soon the arrival of the Comte de la Bérinière caused a general movement. Everyone congratulated the traveller on the happy influence which the climate of Italy seemed to have had on his health.

"Yes, I am very well indeed," said the count, who, after bowing coldly to Adolphine, eagerly approached her sister. "Italy's a very beautiful country, but it isn't equal to France, especially Paris! I tell you, there is nothing like our Parisian women; and what I look at first of all, in any country, is the women."

"Still, you have stayed away a long while, monsieur le comte," said the widow, motioning to Monsieur de la Bérinière to take a seat by her side, the gesture being accompanied by her most charming smile.

The count hastened to obey; and said to her, almost in a whisper:

"I have, in truth, been absent more than a year; and, meanwhile, certain things have happened which it was impossible to foresee. Permit me to offer you my condolence on your widowhood."

"Yes, I am a widow, I have become free again; it is more than ten months since it happened. Truly, it could hardly have been anticipated! You must find me greatly changed, do you not? I have grown old and thin—and then, this costume is so dismal!"

"In other words, you are still captivating; indeed, if such a thing were possible, I should say that you are even lovelier than you were. As for your dress—what does that matter? You adorn whatever you wear."

"Oh! monsieur le comte, you flatter me; you don't mean what you say."

"Do I not? I mean it and feel it; you are an enchantress!"

"Italy is where you must have seen the pretty women!"

"Yes, there are many of them there; but I say again, they can't hold a candle to Parisian women in general, and to you in particular."

"Oh! hush! Are you no longer in love with my sister?"

"Your sister? Faith! no; she refused my hand; I bear her no ill-will for it; for, frankly, I am very glad of it now."

"Why so, pray?"

"Oh! I can't tell you here."

"Very well! then you must come to see me, and tell me."

"Do you give me leave to come to pay my respects to you?"

"More than that, I count upon it."

"You are adorable."

It seemed to Gustave that Fanny's conversation with the count was unconscionably long. He could not see all the coquettish little grimaces with which the widow accompanied her words, because she had taken pains to turn her chair so that she was not facing the man she was to marry; but he thought it very strange that Fanny could pass so long a time without thinking of him, without wanting him near her. The young man walked through the salon, gazing at the young widow, and sometimes stopping beside her. She did not appear to pay the slightest heed to him.

Being unable longer to control his impatience, he decided to interrupt their conversation, and said aloud to Fanny:

"My dear Fanny, I went to-day to see that apartment on Rue Fontaine—you know—that I spoke to you about this morning?"

The widow was perceptibly annoyed. However, she replied, with a surprised air:

"What! what apartment? I don't remember. Oh! yes, yes, I know what you mean."

"Well, the apartment is very well arranged and very attractive. I am confident that you will like it; but you must look at it immediately, for the chances are that it will be let very soon."

"Very well, very well; I will go to look at it.—Oh! Monsieur de la Bérinière, you went to Naples, didn't you? Did you see Vesuvius vomit flame? That is something I am very curious to see. Do tell me what a volcano is like?"

Gustave walked away, far from satisfied. It seemed to him that his future spouse was too deeply interested in Italy. He returned to Adolphine, lost in thought, and sat down beside her. She said nothing, but she looked at him and read his thoughts.

Monsieur Gerbault succeeded at last in talking with the count. Whereupon Gustave returned to Fanny, and said to her:

"Aren't we going? You said that you should go home early."

But the little widow, who did not choose to have the count see her go away with Gustave, replied:

"It's too early; my father would be angry if I should go now."

"But you said——"

"Mon Dieu! you seem to be in a great hurry to go!"

Gustave bit his lips and said no more. Monsieur Batonnin joined him, and said with a smile:

"You don't seem to be doing anything, Monsieur Gustave. Don't you play cards?"

"I don't care for cards, monsieur."

"You prefer to talk with the ladies—I can understand that. You have been travelling, too; and the ladies like to hear about travels. Have you seen any volcanoes?"

"No, monsieur."

And Gustave turned his back on Batonnin, who smiled at his own reflection in a mirror.

The count soon took his hat, and was about to withdraw, without a word, as the custom is in society; but Fanny, who had kept her eyes on him, found an excuse for standing in his path, and said to him in an undertone:

"I shall expect you to-morrow."

Monsieur de la Bérinière replied by a graceful inclination, and disappeared.

A few moments later, Fanny said to Gustave:

"Well, monsieur; if you want to go, I am at your service."

"I am at yours, rather, madame."

"Let us go."

Adolphine went up to Gustave of her own motion, and pressed his hand affectionately.

In the street, the young man began:

"Monsieur de la Bérinière's conversation evidently interested you very much? You talked with nobody but him; you left your sister and me, and forgot all about us."

"Why, I enjoyed listening to what he told me about Italy. He is very pleasant, and amusing to listen to. I didn't suppose that you would see any harm in that."

"I see no harm in the conversation; but I am horribly bored when you talk to anybody else for long. I am sorry that you don't feel the same way."

"Oh! what childishness! As if I were not always there!—How my head does ache! I shall have a sick headache to-morrow, I am sure."

"You will go to look at that apartment, won't you?"

"Yes, if my head doesn't ache; but if it does, I certainly shall not stir from my bed."

They arrived at Fanny's door, and the future husband and wife parted much more coldly than usual.

The next morning, the young widow gave these orders to her servant:

"If Monsieur le Comte de la Bérinière calls, you will admit him at once. If Monsieur Gustave comes, you will tell him that I have a sick headache, that I am asleep; and you will not let him in on any pretext. Do you understand?"

"Yes, madame."

Fanny took the greatest pains with her hair, her dress, and every part of her toilet; she omitted nothing

that was adapted to captivate, to dazzle, to seduce.

At one o'clock, Monsieur de la Bérinière was ushered into the pretty creature's boudoir, where she awaited him, seated in a graceful attitude on a sofa, and motioned him to a seat by her side.

"You see, fair lady, that I take advantage of the permission accorded me," said the count, gallantly kissing Fanny's little hand.

"It was presumptuous in me, perhaps, to tell you that I expected you; but I wanted to talk with you, and one has little chance to talk in society."

"You give me the most delicious pleasure—a tête-à-tête with you! It is a priceless favor to me. It is very true that in society it is difficult to say—all that one thinks; and last night, at your father's, there was a young man who seemed to be vexed at our conversation."

"Oh! Gustave.—He's an old play-fellow of mine."

"An old play-fellow? Isn't he something more than that?"

"What! what do you mean?"

"Stay, charming widow, I will explain my meaning without beating about the bush. Yesterday, when he told me that you were a widow, Monsieur Batonnin told me also that you were to marry again very soon."

"Mon Dieu! what a chatterbox that Monsieur Batonnin is! what business is it of his?"

"It is quite possible that he's a chatterbox; but, tell me, is it the truth? Are you going to marry Monsieur Gustave, your old play-fellow?"

"Yes, it is true that there has been some talk of marriage between us; but it's a long way from that to an actual marriage."

"Really—you are not actually engaged to him?"

"Engaged? Not by any means!"

"But—that apartment that he spoke about last night, that he asked you to go to look at?"

"Why, it's an apartment that he is thinking of renting for himself, and he wants my advice as to the arrangement of the rooms; because a woman understands such things better than a man, don't you see? But now it's your turn, monsieur le comte, to tell me why you are so anxious to know whether my hand is at my disposition."

"Why, charming creature! can't you guess why? Don't you remember what I said to you one day, at your own house, soon after your marriage? I said: 'Monléard has been smarter than I, he has got ahead of me; for, if it had not been for him, I would have asked you to be Comtesse de la Bérinière.'—Very good; what I could not do then, I should be very happy to do to-day. Now, you see, I don't propose to lose any time and let some other man get ahead of me; I go straight to the point. If you are not engaged, I offer you my name and my fortune; I will transform you into a fascinating countess."

"Oh! monsieur le comte, can I believe you? do you really mean what you say? I most certainly am not engaged—but my sister—you loved her?"

"I thought of your sister for a moment, solely with a view of entering your family. You cannot fear to make her unhappy by accepting my hand, since she refused it."

"True, the little fool! I wouldn't have refused it, I can tell you!"

"Very well; then you accept now—you consent to become a countess? Give me your hand, as a token of your consent."

Fanny pretended to be embarrassed, and lowered her eyes; but she gave her hand to the count, who threw himself at her feet, crying:

"I am the happiest of men!"

During this interview, Gustave had called and asked for Fanny; but the maid said to him:

"It is impossible for you to see her, monsieur; she has a sick headache; she is asleep, and told me not to wake her."

"And her order applies to me too?"

"Oh! yes, monsieur; you cannot see madame; her headache's very bad."

XLVIII

WOMAN CHANGES OFT

Gustave returned to his office sadly out of temper. He was surprised that for a headache Fanny should refuse to see him; he said to himself that, if he were ill, the presence of his loved one could not fail to do him good and cure him at once. Then, in spite of himself, he recalled Fanny's conduct at her father's, her evident pleasure in conversing with Monsieur de la Bérinière, while she barely listened to what he, Gustave, said to her. All this distressed and worried him. He could not be jealous of the count, who was sixty years old, but he was displeased with Fanny; and while he sought excuses for her, saying to himself that a young woman was not debarred from being a little coquettish, from liking to cut a figure in society, he feared, nevertheless, that she was not capable of loving as he loved.

We often hear of presentiments; but, in most cases, these presentiments are simply the assembling of our memories so as to form a new light, which enlightens our minds, destroys our illusions, undeceives our hearts. With the aid of this new light, we foresee the treachery that lies in wait for us, and we say: "I had a presentiment of it."

Gustave returned to Fanny's that evening; it was natural enough that he should be anxious to know whether the headache had disappeared. The servant informed him that madame had gone out.

"Gone out!" cried Gustave; "she is better, then?"

"*Dame*! yes, monsieur; it's evident that madame has got rid of her sick headache."

"Where has she gone?"

"I don't know, monsieur."

"And she left no message for me, if I came?"

"Not a word."

"Has she gone to her father's?"

"I said that I didn't know."

"Very well; I will come again. Ask her to wait for me, when she returns."

The young man hurried to Monsieur Gerbault's. He found Adolphine alone. She read at once on his face that he was suffering, and asked him as she took his hand:

"What has happened, my friend? Something is the matter."

"Why—— Have you seen your sister to-day?"

"No."

"You have not?"

"No, she hasn't been here. Why do you ask?"

"Because I haven't seen her to-day, either. This morning, I called on her; I was told that she had a headache and was asleep. But this evening I called again, and she had gone out."

"Well, she has probably gone to see some of her friends. She has retained some acquaintances from the time when her husband was living, and she goes to see them sometimes. I can see nothing disturbing in that."

"But, after a whole day without seeing each other, to go out in the evening without saying where she's going—without leaving a word for me!"

"Fanny is so thoughtless; she probably forgot."

"Dear Adolphine! you try to excuse your sister, but I am sure that you blame her, at the bottom of your heart. Don't you remember how unkind she was to me last night?"

"Why, I didn't notice——"

"Yes, yes, you did notice that she left us to go and talk with that Monsieur de la Bérinière. Who is that man? wherever did she know him?"

"He was a friend of her husband, and in that way became acquainted with father."

"Is he rich?"

"He has forty thousand francs a year."

"Married?"

"No, he's an old bachelor; he asked father once for my hand."

"And you refused him?"

"Yes."

"You thought him too old, didn't you?"

"That wasn't the reason; but I refused him."

"Do you know, Adolphine, I have no idea what is going on in Fanny's head, but all this isn't natural. At the point we have reached,—we are to be married in six weeks, and we are both free,—two people don't pass a whole day without exchanging a glance, or a grasp of the hand. I tell you, there's something wrong. Could she deceive me again? Oh! no, that isn't possible; it would be too ghastly! too shameless!—No, I blush for having had such a thought. I have no doubt that she is at home and waiting for me. Au revoir, little sister!"

"Gustave, if anything should happen, you would tell me at once, wouldn't you?"

But Gustave did not hear; he was already at the foot of the stairs, and he hurried away to Fanny's house. She had not returned; he remembered the apartment he had asked her to inspect, and, although it was hardly customary to look at apartments in the evening, he said to himself: "Perhaps she has gone there." And in a few moments he was in Rue Fontaine. He inquired of the concierge who had the keys to the apartment, and was told that no lady had come that day to look at it.

One more hope dashed to the ground: as Fanny had gone out, why had she not gone to inspect the apartment of which he had spoken so highly the night before, telling her that they must make haste lest it should be rented to others? Gustave said all this to himself as he returned to Madame Monléard's abode. She had not returned; but it was only nine o'clock; she must return sooner or later, and Gustave was determined not to go to bed until he had seen her and spoken to her, even if he had to pass half the night on sentry-go before her door. But a woman, unattended, was unlikely to stay out late; she could not have gone to a ball; ladies did not go alone to the theatre; so she must be at some small party; someone would probably escort her home, but he would find out who her escort was.

How many ideas pass through the mind of a jealous, worried lover in a few seconds! The imagination moves so fast that it does not know where to stop, or on what to decide. Every moment that passed without bringing Fanny added to Gustave's anxiety, his suffering, his suspicions. At last, about half-past ten, a cab stopped in front of the house. Gustave ran forward and was at the door before the cabman had alighted from his box. Fanny was in the cab, alone. When she recognized Gustave in the man who opened the door for her, she laughed heartily and cried:

"Ah! you open carriage-doors now, do you? Ha! ha! I congratulate you on your new trade."

This outburst of merriment seemed untimely, to say the least, to Gustave, who rejoined:

"I have no choice but to wait for cabs to arrive, as I fail to find you at home; as you go out without even leaving a line for me so that I may know where you are."

"Oh! mon Dieu! what a terrible crime! Am I no longer my own mistress—to go where I please without asking your leave? That would be very amusing!"

"You know very well, Fanny, that that isn't what I mean; you know that you are at liberty to do whatever you choose to do. So do not try to dodge the question. At the point we have reached, it is natural for us to tell each other what we do; for we ought to have no secrets from each other. I came here this morning, and you didn't see me on account of your headache."

"Well, monsieur, am I no longer allowed to have a headache? Pay the cabman, will you; I have come from Madame Delabert's.—Can I no longer visit my friends, I should like to know?"

"Come, come, Fanny, don't be angry; perhaps I was foolish to be anxious. But it would have been so easy for you to leave word for me! Remember that I haven't seen you at all to-day, and a whole day without seeing you seems very long now!"

"It isn't my fault if I have a sick headache. I can still feel the effects of it, so I am going to bed; I am very tired."

"Mayn't I come up with you for a moment?"

"Oh! I should think not! it wouldn't be proper, so late."

"It isn't eleven yet."

"But I tell you that I still feel the effects of my headache, and that I am going straight to bed."

"Why didn't you go to see that apartment I told you about—on Rue Fontaine, near Place Saint-Georges?"

"Why didn't I? Because I forgot all about it."

"How could you forget a thing of such importance? For, if it suits you, we must rent it at once."

"Oh! my dear friend, I am not anxious to stand here in the street any longer. What do we look like—talking like this on a doorstep?"

"Then let me come up a moment."

"No; I tell you that I am going to bed!"

"There's something wrong, Fanny. This isn't natural. You're not the same with me that you were two days ago."

"You can tell me all that to-morrow. Good-night!"

"Very well, until to-morrow, then, madame! I trust that you will be visible?"

"Mon Dieu! monsieur, I am always visible when I am not sick. But don't come too early; for I don't rise with the dawn."

Fanny knocked, and the door opened. She hurried in and closed the door on Gustave, who remained in the street, poor fellow, unable to make up his mind to leave his fair one's abode. He did not know what to believe. He asked himself if he had not done wrong to reproach Fanny; she had been to see one of her friends, and had returned alone: there was no great harm in that. And yet, he was ill at ease, he suffered; his heart told him that something was wrong, and that his love was not the same to him as before.

At last, after pacing back and forth in front of Fanny's door for nearly an hour, gazing at those of her windows which were lighted, he decided to go away when the lights went out.

"I wish to-morrow were here," he thought.

Gustave did not close his eyes that night; where is the lover who could sleep, in his position? Only a lover who is not in love. At eight o'clock, the young man went down to the office, where there were as yet no clerks; but he found his uncle, who was always at his desk early.

"The deuce!" said Monsieur Grandcourt; "you're on hand in good season! Was it love of work that woke you?"

"Yes, uncle; I have some accounts to look over."

"How pale you look, and exhausted! One would say that you had been up all night."

"I am just out of bed."

"I'll wager that you didn't sleep. Is there anything new in your love affair?"

"Why—no, uncle."

"Your dear Fanny hasn't played you some new trick?"

"Ah! uncle, at the point we have reached——"

"It wouldn't surprise me at all."

"You have a very bad opinion of her."

"When a woman has made a fool of a man once, she will make a fool of him again—she will always do it! However, it would be better before marriage than after. Come and breakfast with me."

"It's too early, uncle; I am not hungry. By the way, have you thought about Arthur?"

"Who's Arthur?"

"Arthur Cherami; a good, honest fellow who is looking for a place."

"Ah! your tall swashbuckler, who has such a scampish look—always ready to fly at you? Upon my word, you are not fortunate in your friendships! What sort of a place do you suppose anyone would give to that fellow? He doesn't inspire the slightest confidence in me. He was rich once, and he squandered his whole property: a fine recommendation!"

"I believe that you judge him too harshly. A man may have done foolish things, and have turned over a new leaf. With you, uncle, repentance counts for nothing."

"Repentance has one great defect in my eyes: it never comes till after the wrong-doing. If a man could repent before he went wrong, that is to say, stop before he fell, then I should have a much higher opinion of repentance. Well, where are you going? leaving the office already?"

Gustave could not keep still. He left the office, and ran all the way to Fanny's house; then stopped and looked at his watch. It was barely nine o'clock; impossible to call upon her so early. The young man walked up Faubourg Poissonnière and kept on past the barrier; little he cared where he went, so long as the time passed. Suddenly he ran into a tree, which his complete absorption in his thoughts had prevented his seeing. At that, he halted and looked about him, and was surprised to find that he was in the open country. But he felt that the air was keener and purer there, that it refreshed the mind and calmed the beating of the heart; and he sat down at the foot of the tree. He breathed more freely, he felt sensibly relieved. Ah! what a skilful physician the air is, and what marvellous cures we owe to it!

Gustave sat for a long while at the foot of the tree, which was bare of leaves; for it was late in October. He reviewed in his mind the whole of Fanny's conduct during the last two days, and wondered if his uncle were right after all. At last he rose and returned to Paris. It was nearly eleven o'clock when he reached the young widow's door. But he could wait no longer; he rang the bell violently, and the maid ushered him into her mistress's presence.

XLIX

THE SECOND TIME

Fanny was sitting by the fire, in a dainty morning gown; for she was a woman who never allowed herself to be surprised in déshabillé; but her expression was cold and stern, as of a person who had made up her mind and was prepared for a rupture.

"I have come a little early, I fear," said Gustave, taking a seat, and seeking in vain an affable smile on the widow's features; "but you will surely forgive my impatience, I was so anxious to see you. I had almost no chance to speak to you last night, and I had so many things to say!"

"I, too, wished to speak with you, monsieur. I, too, have several things to say to you."

"*Monsieur!* What! you call me *monsieur?* What does that mean?"

"In heaven's name, let us not quibble over words. If I call you *monsieur* now, I do so in consequence of certain reflections I have made since yesterday. Do you know that I don't like to be followed, spied upon; that a jealous man is an unendurable creature to me?"

"Ah! you are trying to quarrel with me, madame?"

"No, I am not; but I am telling you frankly the subject of my reflections; and the result of those reflections is——"

"Is what? go on, madame."

"Is that I am afraid that I shall not make you happy, Gustave. I am naturally giddy, frivolous,—but I cannot change,—and my temperament would not harmonize at all with yours. Consequently we shall do much better not to marry. Oh! I have come to this decision solely in my solicitude for your happiness."

Gustave sprang to his feet so suddenly that the little widow could not restrain a gesture of terror. He took his stand in front of her, with folded arms, and gazed sternly at her, saying:

"So this is what you were aiming at—a rupture! And you dare to accuse me of spying, to try to put me in the wrong! to accuse me, when my conduct was simply the consequence of your own! Oh! don't think to deceive me again. Some other motive is behind your action. You have formed other plans."

"That does not concern you, monsieur! I believe that I am entirely free! I trust that you will spare me your reproaches. Well-bred people simply part—they don't quarrel over it."

"Never fear, madame; I shall not forget that you are a woman. But to play this trick upon me again—ah! it is shameful! Fanny, is it true? did I hear aright? Only two days ago, you were forming plans with me for our life to come, your hand pressed mine, you asked me if I would always love you."

"Justine, bring me some wood; the fire's going out."

The tone in which the young woman summoned her maid, having apparently paid no heed to Gustave, capped the climax of his exasperation; he strode up and down the room two or three times, then went to Fanny as if to give full vent to his wrath; but he checked himself, and, having bestowed upon her a glance in which were concentrated all his outraged feelings, he abruptly left the room without looking back.

For several hours thereafter, Gustave was like a madman; he was so unprepared for the blow, that he could hardly believe in its reality. He returned home and locked himself in his room; he dreaded to meet his uncle and hear him say:

"I prophesied what has happened."

He preferred to be alone, so that he could abandon himself to his grief; and for some time he could not keep from weeping over his lost happiness, although he told himself that Fanny did not deserve the tears she caused him to shed. Then he cudgelled his brain to divine what could have caused this sudden change in her ideas.

He determined to leave Paris again, to go away without a word to anyone; but the next day he went to see Adolphine, to tell her of his new unhappiness.

Fanny's sister seemed to be expecting his visit; she held out her hand as soon as he appeared, saying:

"Poor Gustave! I know all! My sister has disappointed you again! It is horribly hard!"

"What! you know already that she refuses to marry me! Who can have told you?"

"Why, she herself; she came here yesterday to tell us that, as soon as her mourning is at an end, she is going to marry——"

"She is going to marry, you say?"

"Why, didn't you know it?"

"Finish, in God's name! She is going to marry——"

"The Comte de la Bérinière."

Gustave dropped upon a chair, repeating between his teeth:

"The Comte de la Bérinière!"

But there was more surprise than anger in his tone; for, on learning that it was a man of sixty to whom Fanny gave the preference, he realized that it was no newborn passion that had caused the change in her heart.

"So," he exclaimed, after a moment, "that woman is always guided by selfish considerations! it is a fortune, a title, which she prefers to me! For this man is rich, I suppose?"

"Yes, very rich! And as Fanny doesn't propose to be left in poverty if she should be widowed again, it seems that the count settles twenty thousand francs a year on her when he marries her. But do not believe, my friend, that we approve her conduct: when she told us of her latest plan, father told her that the way in which she was treating you was utterly disgraceful, and that he never wanted to see her again, countess or no countess."

"And what did she reply?"

"She said that she could not imagine how we could blame her, and she went away repeating that we cared nothing for her happiness. It seems that the count had courted her before, and declared that he deeply regretted her marriage to Auguste. That is why, when she saw him again——"

"Enough, my dear Adolphine; I don't care to know anything more. I was mistaken in thinking that she loved me. As if anyone would ever love me! No; there are some people who were born to love alone, never to meet a heart that understands them."

"Why do you say that to me, Gustave?"

"Well, what does it matter, after all? a man cannot change his destiny. Adieu, Adolphine!"

"Are you going away, Gustave? Where are you going?"

"Oh! I don't know, but I feel that I must leave Paris again. I cannot be here when she marries the count. I am a fool, I know it perfectly well; your sister deserves no regret; but one does not lose all one's illusions without suffering. Adieu! give my respects to your father."

"But you won't stay away so long this time, will you? and when you return, you will be able to come to see me without fear; you won't meet her here again."

"Yes, you will see me. Adieu!"

Gustave took leave of Adolphine, whose eyes were full of tears as she looked after him; but he did not understand their language. He went to his uncle, told him what had happened, and expressed a desire to go to England and stay there for some time.

Monsieur Grandcourt said simply:

"That woman will end by sending you round the world. But let us hope that this will be your last trip. Go to England, go where you please—but don't return unless you are cured of your idiotic passion."

Gustave soon completed his preparations for departure; he had but a few hours to remain in Paris, when he met Cherami.

"Where are we going so fast?" cried Beau Arthur, taking Gustave's hand. "What has happened? Our countenance is not so cheerful and happy as it was the last time? Can it be that anything has happened to interrupt the course of our loves?"

"My friend," replied Gustave, with a sigh, "there has been a great change, indeed, in my affairs since we last met. There is to be no marriage; the love affair is at an end. Fanny has betrayed me again. Ah! I ought to have expected it! But, no; it is impossible to conceive such perfidy in a woman who looks at us with a smiling face, who tells us that she loves us!"

"What's that you say, my boy? The little widow has slipped out of your hand again? Nonsense, that can't be so!"

"It's the truth. She is going to marry the Comte de la Bérinière, an old man, but very rich. She is to be a countess—she has no further use for me."

"Why, this is perfectly frightful! A woman doesn't play skittles like that with an honest man's heart! And you haven't killed your rival?"

"No; for that wouldn't make Fanny love me any more. But I am going away; I don't propose to be here again, as I was at her first wedding. No, indeed; once was enough."

"You are going away? where?"

"To England and Scotland; but I shall not be away so long."

"Sapristi! my dear fellow, don't go away; the affair can be fixed up, perhaps."

"No, no, it's all over, all over! Fanny will never be mine. Adieu, my friend! it's almost train time. Au revoir!"

Gustave hurried away, and left Cherami standing there bewildered by his sudden departure. He seemed lost in thought for a moment, then tapped his leg with his switch and said:

"Morbleu! my friend Gustave unhappy! the woman he loves snatched away from him a second time! and I am to endure it! I, his Pylades, to whom he loans money without taking account of it!—No, par la sambleu! I will not endure it. Ah! my little widow! you play fast and loose with a fine fellow like that! You think that you can make fools of people in that way! But, patience! I am on hand, and I have my cue!"

L

A GENTLEMAN IN BED

About noon the next day, Cherami was walking in front of Madame Monléard's house.

"I don't know where he perches—this Comte de la Bérinière, whom Gustave told me about yesterday; but by doing sentry duty in front of this house, I can't fail to find out; this count will undoubtedly come to pay his respects to the little woman he's going to marry; he's rich, he will come in his carriage, and I am an awkward fellow if I can't learn the master's address from a servant."

Everything happened as Cherami had anticipated: about one o'clock, a stylish coupé drew up in front of Fanny's door, and a gentleman, who was no longer young, alighted from it; despite his years, he was dressed in the latest fashion and exhaled a powerful odor of perfumery.

"That's my man!" said Cherami to himself; and, having watched the count enter the house, he accosted the footman, who was yawning against a post.

"Wasn't that Monsieur le Comte de la Bérinière whom I just saw get out of this carriage?"

"Yes, monsieur; it was he."

"Ah! I said to myself: 'Why, there's an old acquaintance of mine!' yet I was afraid of making a mistake, so I didn't dare to speak to him; but I will go and renew my acquaintance with him to-morrow morning. Where does the dear count live now?"

"Rue de la Ville-l'Évêque, just at the beginning, near the Madeleine."

"Very good; I can see it from here. How late can I find the count at home in the morning?"

"Monsieur gets up late. He seldom goes out before noon."

"Infinitely obliged. I am sure that the dear count will be delighted to see me to-morrow morning."

"If monsieur would tell me his name, I would tell my master."

"No; bless my soul, no! I want to surprise him; don't say anything to him about it."

Cherami returned to his Hôtel du Bel-Air, saying to himself:

"Gustave doesn't choose to fight with his rival, but I'll wager that it's from some lingering feeling of delicacy, of kindness for that little sinner of a Fanny! He says to himself: 'Let her be a countess, if that will make her happy.'—Infernal nonsense, I call it. And as I have no reason for being agreeable to that lady, I trust that I shall be able to prevent her putting this new affront on my young friend."

The next day, having dressed himself with care, Cherami took the Paris omnibus and exchanged into one for the Madeleine; at half-past ten, he arrived at the Comte de la Bérinière's door, recognized the footman of the preceding day, and said to him:

"Here I am; take me in to your master."

"Monsieur le comte is still in bed."

"Very well! wake him."

"He's awake, for he has already had his chocolate."

"As he's awake, there's no need of his getting up to receive me; I can talk with him perfectly well in bed. Go and tell him that an old friend of his wishes to see him."

"Your name, monsieur?"

"I have already told you that I wanted to surprise him; consequently, I don't choose to send in my name."

The servant went to his master and delivered the message. Monsieur de la Bérinière had not begun to think of rising; he had taken the young widow to the Opéra the night before, and had played the attentive gallant all the evening, and he was at an age when such service is very tiresome. So he was reposing in bed from the fatigues of the night.

"That young widow is an adorable creature," he mused. "Marriage will make me settle down; I shall lead a virtuous life, and it will do me good."

He was somewhat annoyed, therefore, when his servant announced an old friend who wished to speak with him.

"Neither old friends nor new ones ought to come so early," he exclaimed. "What the devil! they ought to let people sleep in peace. What's the name of this old friend who's such an early bird?"

"He refused to send in his name, in order to surprise monsieur."

"He deserves to be turned away without seeing me."

"He was in the street last night when monsieur went into Madame Monléard's. He recognized monsieur when he stepped out of the carriage."

"Well! let us see this man of surprises."

The servant ushered Cherami into his master's bedroom, and withdrew. Monsieur de la Bérinière, with his rumpled silk nightcap on his head, and his eyes still half-closed, was curled up in bed, covered to his nose by the bedclothes; and in that position he was entirely destitute of charms. So that Cherami, after eying him for a few seconds, said to himself:

"What! it was this old baked apple who was given the preference over my good-looking young friend Gustave! Damnation! women care even more for money than we men do! for our reason for wanting it is to get wives with it, while they take it to throw us over."

While Cherami indulged in this reflection, the count scrutinized his visitor with interest, and said to him at last in a slightly nasal voice:

"My dear monsieur, it's of no use for me to examine you from head to foot, or to search my memory: I do not recall any friend of mine who resembles you in the least."

Cherami bowed with an affable smile, and replied:

"Don't try, monsieur le comte, don't take that trouble; it would be a waste of time; for the fact is that this is

the first time I have had the pleasure of being in your company."

"What's that? deuce take me! what does this mean? In that case, you are not the old friend that you held yourself out to be?"

"That is to say, monsieur, I ventured to tell that little falsehood in order to be more certain of obtaining an interview with you this morning."

Monsieur de la Bérinière frowned and scowled, which did not add to his beauty; he scrutinized Cherami with evident suspicion, and rejoined sharply:

"What have you so important, so urgent, to say to me, monsieur, that you presume to disturb me so early, to resort to a trick in order to be admitted?"

"You shall know in a moment; but, first, allow me to sit. The matter in hand deserves that I should take the trouble to be comfortable."

Without awaiting a reply, Cherami took an armchair, placed it beside the bed, and stretched himself out in it. The ease of his manners, which did not lack distinction, began to dispel the suspicions which had assailed the count's mind for a moment; his curiosity was aroused by the whole aspect of the strange individual who sat facing him.

Cherami, being seated to his satisfaction, began thus:

"Monsieur de la Bérinière, you see before you Arthur Cherami, the intimate friend of young Gustave Darlemont. You know Gustave Darlemont, I believe?"

"Faith! no; but, stay! Gustave—— Do you refer to the young man who was an old play-fellow of Madame Monléard, and whom I saw at Monsieur Gerbault's the other evening?"

"The same; that is, I don't know whether Gustave was Madame Monléard's play-fellow, but I do know that he had become her heart's fellow. However, without going into that, he was on the point of marrying the young widow, when your appearance changed everything. You are a count, you are rich; the little woman is a flirt of the first order; she whirled about like a weathercock. By the way, this isn't the first time she has taken the same turn. King François I said: '*Souvent femme varie, bien fol est qui s'y fie.*'[D] Which proves that that king had made a careful study of the fair sex—a study which cost him rather dear! but, never mind that; thus you, monsieur le comte, are the cause of Madame Monléard's having abruptly given my friend Gustave the mitten, instead of marrying him. And now, do you begin to suspect what brings me here?"

"Why, yes, I fancy so; you are sent by this young Gustave, who desires to fight with me?"

"That isn't it exactly. You are burning, but you're not quite there. This is how it is: Gustave has no thought of fighting; not that he lacks courage; oh! he's brave enough, I would answer for him as for myself!—but he has such a soft spot in his heart for the widow that he's afraid that, by killing you, he might distress her. The poor boy is in despair; and when he's in despair, he leaves Paris, he goes abroad, seeks distraction in other climes—and what I don't understand is that he comes back as dead in love as when he went away; for I must tell you, monsieur le comte, that you're not the first to cut the grass from under his feet, as they say; he was to have married Mademoiselle Fanny Gerbault, when Monsieur Auguste Monléard came upon the scene; he had the prestige of wealth and fine social position, and poor Gustave was shown the door. To-day, therefore, we have a second performance of the same play, with this difference: that now my young friend has an excellent position in his uncle's banking-house; but that you have a title and a fine turnout, and are much richer than he."

"Well, monsieur, as your young friend doesn't think of fighting—which is very wise of him, by the way, for I fancy that it wouldn't increase the widow's affection for him; and, between ourselves, as he had been rejected once, I am a good deal surprised that he came forward a second time——"

"I agree with you, par la sambleu! I wouldn't have been the man to act in that way! A woman who had slighted me for another man—that's much worse than deceiving! Men are deceived every day, and it's forgiven; but slighted, disdained! However, what would you have! passions are passions! Gustave is to be pitied."

"I pity him with all my heart; but I return to my question: that being so, what can have brought you here?"

"Oh! mon Dieu! it's easily explained. I am Gustave's devoted friend; he forgives insult and treachery, but I do not choose that he shall be insulted or betrayed. The wrong that is done him wounds me, insults me; and as I have never swallowed an insult, I fight.—I have come, therefore, to demand satisfaction at your hands for the little widow's perfidy—of which you are the cause; that is to say, to speak more accurately, the little widow is the real and the only culprit in this affair. It was she who made a fool of Gustave in a much too indecent fashion; but as it's impossible to demand satisfaction of a woman, I have come to demand it of you, monsieur le comte, as her accomplice and representative in this affair."

The count put the whole of his head outside of the bedclothes, in order to obtain a better view of the person who had made this proposition to him; and, after scrutinizing him carefully, he replied, in a mocking tone:

"It makes no difference how closely I examine you, my dear monsieur, I do not know you at all."

"We will make each other's acquaintance by fighting."

"Why should you expect me to fight with you? You haven't insulted me in any way."

"If an insult is all that is necessary to induce you to fight with me, never fear, I'll insult you; but I confess that I should prefer to have the affair pass off quietly, courteously, as becomes well-bred people; and, although I am not, like you, monsieur le comte, of noble birth, I beg you to believe that you will not cross swords with a churl. I am of good family, I was well educated, I inherited a very pretty little fortune; but I made a fool of myself for that charming sex which is decidedly fond of cashmere shawls and truffles. I have ruined myself, pretty nearly, but I haven't forgotten how to use a sword; as poor Auguste Monléard had reason to know."

"What's that? you fought with my pretty widow's first husband?"

"The day after the wedding; and I gave him a very neat sword-thrust in the forearm."

"Ah! that fall that he claimed to have had on the stairs?"

"That was the result of our duel."

"Gad! monsieur, it seems that you have sworn the death of all the captivating Fanny's husbands."

"If she had married my friend Gustave, I promise you that I wouldn't have fought with him!"

"You will permit me to inform you, monsieur, that your conduct is utterly absurd."

"Why so, monsieur, I pray to know?"

"Because one doesn't take up the cudgels in this way for another man who is old enough to attend to his own affairs. Your friend Gustave doesn't see fit to fight; why should you take it into your head to fight for him?"

"I explained the reasons of my conduct a moment ago. If you didn't listen, I will repeat them."

"It's a waste of time, monsieur; I shall not fight with you."

With that, the count pulled up the bedclothes, turned his face to the wall, and curled himself up so that he made but a large-sized ball.

Cherami rose and paced the floor; then went to the fireplace and warmed his feet at the fire that burned briskly on the hearth, saying:

"It's quite sharp this morning; you were very wise to order a fire lighted in your bedroom; one takes cold so easily. To be sure, this room is tightly closed, but the least draught does the business so quickly!"

After a few minutes, annoyed to find that his visitor did not take his leave, the count turned over and sat up in bed.

"I say, monsieur," he exclaimed testily, "do you intend to pass the day in my bedroom? Do me the favor to go away and let me sleep."

"And do you, monsieur le comte, do me the favor to cover yourself with the bedclothes again; you'll take cold."

"A truce to jesting, monsieur! I have told you that I would not fight with you; I repeat it. There is nothing to keep you here, therefore."

"O my dear Monsieur de la Bérinière—I believe that is your name, De la Bérinière, is it not?"

"Yes, monsieur; that is my name."

"My dear Monsieur de la Bérinière, when I take it into my head to do a thing, I assure you that it has to be done. I have promised myself to fight with you—unless, however, you give me your word of honor to renounce your project of marrying Auguste Monléard's widow. In that case, I am content. Does that suit you?"

"On my word, this is too much!"

"What is it that's too much?"

"You disgust me,[E] monsieur!"

"Do I, indeed? Gad! you are not to be pitied, in such weather as this. So you won't give her up?"

"What do you take me for, in God's name?"

"Then you agree to fight?"

"Go to the devil!"

"In that case, I must resort to decisive measures."

And Cherami, raising his switch, caused it to whistle about the count's ears, but without touching him; that manœuvring sufficed, however, to make Monsieur de la Bérinière straighten himself up and cry, in a furious rage:

"You are a villain, monsieur!"

"Aha! you're awake at last, are you?"

"You will give me satisfaction for this indecent behavior, monsieur!"

"That is just what I have been asking you for, for the past hour."

"Leave your address; my seconds will call upon you to-morrow at eight o'clock; see that yours are there, also."

Cherami scratched his ear, muttering:

"My seconds! Do we need any seconds? Why not settle the business at once, between ourselves?"

"Oho! monsieur, so you never have fought a duel?"

"More than you have, I'll wager."

"Then you should know that people don't fight without seconds; it is forbidden."

"I am very well aware that it is customary to have them; but we don't always conform to custom. For instance, Monsieur Monléard and I fought without seconds."

"But, monsieur, as I have no desire to find myself with a wretched affair on my hands on your account, I tell you that I will not fight without seconds."

"So be it! As you insist upon it, we will have them."

"Your address, monsieur?"

"Here it is: Cherami, Hôtel du Bel-Air, Rue de l'Orillon, Belleville."

"Belleville! So you don't live in Paris?"

"I am in the suburbs. Does that disturb you?"

"It is a matter of absolute indifference to me; but my seconds will not call on you until ten o'clock, for I don't choose to make them get up at daylight."

"At ten o'clock, then, I will expect them. And now, monsieur le comte, permit me to offer you my respects."

"Good-day, monsieur, good-day!"

Monsieur de la Bérinière buried himself anew under the bedclothes, decidedly put out by the visit he had received. As for Cherami, he said to himself when he was in the street:

"I have my cue! He will fight—aye, but my seconds—I must have two; I absolutely must have them, or no duel. Where shall I find them? It's damnably embarrassing. I can't think of a solitary soul. Sapristi! where can I find two seconds? There's nothing to be said; I must have two, and two passably respectable ones, to-morrow morning!"

LI

THE DAY WITH THE RABBITS

On leaving Rue de la Ville-l'Évêque, Arthur Cherami followed the boulevard in the direction of the Bastille; he did not take an omnibus—first, because he was in no hurry; and, secondly, because he had reflected:

"If I could happen to meet in the street some old friend, some good fellow, I would ask him to be my second. On a pinch, if it was necessary, I would sacrifice myself so far as to pay for his breakfast or dinner—but at a soup-kitchen only."

But Cherami arrived at Boulevard du Temple, without falling in with what he sought.

"Shall I go home?" he thought; "what's the use? My hôtel is not the place to find what I want; the poor devils who lodge there seldom wear coats. I am sure that this Comte de la Bérinière will send me two very distinguished gentlemen; they will turn up their noses enough when they see the Widow Louchard's hôtel; I must confront them with men who represent—— Damnation! I haven't my cue! it's infernally embarrassing! The devil take the obstinacy of that count, who insists on having seconds!"

As he walked on, Cherami saw a short man coming toward him, armed with a pretty cane of cherry wood.

"Here comes a grotesque figure which reminds me of a clown I have seen somewhere or other," he said to himself. "Pardieu! it's Courbichon. I must catch him on the wing."

The little bald man was speechless with surprise when he found his passage barred by a tall man; and he seemed by no means pleased when he recognized the gentleman with whom he had dined on the Champs-Élysées.

But Cherami seized his hand and shook it warmly.

"A lucky meeting!" he said; "it is my dear Monsieur Courbichon! *Bone Deus!* So we are no longer in Touraine?"

"Ah! monsieur, I have the honor—no, as you see, I am in Paris."

"And fresher and lustier than ever! I am tempted to repeat the fable: 'How pretty you are! how handsome you look to me!'"

"You don't need to: I know it."

"That's a pretty cane you have there. It isn't the same one, is it?"

"No, monsieur; it certainly isn't the one you broke."

"Didn't you have it mended?"

"It wasn't mendable, monsieur."

"Nonsense! why, they even mend porcelain! This is cherry, I see; let me look at it."

Cherami put out his hand for the cane, but Monsieur Courbichon hastily put it behind his back.

"No, no," he cried; "I have no desire that you should break this one too; one was quite enough."

"Oh! mon Dieu! my excellent and worthy friend, who said anything about breaking your cane? There is nobody throwing skittles at your legs at this moment, and I fancy that this switch is worth quite as much as your cherry stick."

"Did this one come from China, too?"

"No, my boy. Do not revive my sorrow! My Chinese switch will never be replaced; but enough about canes. I have a very great favor to ask of you, my dear Monsieur Courbichon, one of those favors which a man of honor never refuses to grant."

"I have no money with me at this moment, monsieur; and it would be impossible for me——"

"Who the devil said anything about money? Mordieu! do I look like a man who borrows money?"

Monsieur Courbichon examined Cherami, who had made himself as fine as possible for his visit to Monsieur de la Bérinière; and he took off his hat, murmuring:

"I beg your pardon; indeed, I had not noticed—— But what is the favor you wish to ask me, monsieur?"

"A nothing, a mere bagatelle—to act as my second in a duel, to-morrow."

"A duel! it's about a duel! and you dare to propose to me to take part in it! What have I done to you, monsieur, that you should suggest such a thing to me?"

"I tell you, Monsieur Courbichon, it's a mere matter of form; the seconds don't fight."

"I, be present at a duel! Understand that I never fought a duel, monsieur! I would rather die than fight!"

"You are like Gribouille, then, who jumped into the water for fear of the rain."

"It's an outrage, your proposition to me! I will request you, monsieur, not to speak to me hereafter. I do not consort with men who fight duels, not I! Don't detain me, or I shall call for help."

The little bald man almost ran away. Cherami shrugged his shoulders, saying to himself:

"Old guinea-hen! I might have guessed that the simple word *duel* would frighten him! He won't be my second. Sapristi! I haven't my cue!"

Cherami was almost at the end of Boulevard Beaumarchais, when he heard a voice exclaim:

"Yes, yes, it's him; there he is—the man who keeps us waiting for dinner, and never comes! God bless my soul! it takes you a long time to smoke your cigar."

At the sound of those familiar accents, Beau Arthur turned, and saw Madame Capucine, attended as always by her two brats; the elder still wearing his Henri IV hat, with the feathers falling over his eyes; the younger eating gingerbread, and finding a way to stuff his fingers into his nose at the same time.

"Ah! upon my word, it's the lovely Madame Capucine," said Cherami, joining the group.

The stout woman, glancing at her debtor's fashionable attire, smiled amiably, as she rejoined:

"I ought not to speak to you again, by good rights! That was a very pretty trick you played us at Passy: to leave us on the pretext of smoking a cigar! Oh! monsieur would only be gone a few minutes; and it was eleven months ago!"

"I was blameworthy, I know it; I treated you badly! But if you knew what events were in store for me that day in the Bois de Boulogne!"

"My aunt bears you a grudge! Oh! she's furious with you."

"I will make my peace with the venerable Madame Duponceau. And the first time that I go to the Bois de Boulogne——"

"No, no; you needn't go to the Bois de Boulogne for that. My aunt isn't at Passy now; she didn't like it there. It's a place where you have to dress too much; it's enough to ruin you."

"Ah! so the dear aunt has changed her villa once more? She is just a little bit fickle. And whither has she transported her sheep—that is to say, her rural Penates?"

"To Saint-Mandé. You see, we're just going to take the omnibus to go there."

"What! you are going to your aunt's? How funny! It seems to be written that I shall always meet you, lovely creature, when you are on your way to your aunt's. But this isn't Saturday?"

"No; but to-morrow is my aunt's birthday, Saint Élisabeth's day; and it's our duty to go to wish her many happy returns."

"Ah! yes, I understand; Madame Duponceau's name is Élisabeth."

"Do you want to make your peace with her? Here's an excellent chance. Come with us; you can congratulate my aunt, and dine at Saint-Mandé. My husband is coming to join us there at five o'clock."

Cherami reflected for some minutes. He remembered that Capucine was a corporal in the National Guard, and thought that he might perhaps consent to act as his second. That hope decided him; he smiled at his stout friend, and replied:

"You do whatever you please with me. I had important business in Paris; but your husband can help me about it, I think. I am at your service. Ho for Saint-Mandé!"

"Good! you are very obliging. If you go on as you have begun, I will forgive you, too."

These words were accompanied by a languishing glance of immeasurable length. It made Cherami shudder.

"I am terribly afraid," he thought, "that she would like me to take up Ballot's duties."

Madame Capucine called Jacqueline. An old servant, all twisted and bent, came limping along, with an enormous basket on her arm.

"Tudieu!" thought Cherami; "here's a soubrette who will hardly divert the attention of the haberdasher's young clerk."

"Is the 'bus there, Jacqueline?"

"It's just comin', madame."

"Let's hurry up and get seats, Monsieur Cherami. Will you take Aristoloche by the hand?"

"With pleasure."

"My! what a pleasant surprise this will be for Aunt Duponceau! She's very fond of you, you fickle man!"

"She has no ingrate to deal with, in me."

They entered the omnibus, and Cherami agreed to hold young Aristoloche on his knees, in order to save his mamma six sous. She tried to provide for Narcisse in the servant's lap, but the conductor declared that he must pay, which seemed to cause Jacqueline the keenest satisfaction. At last they started, and in due time arrived at Saint-Mandé.

Madame Duponceau's latest purchase was at the entrance to the avenue. The house was even smaller than that at Passy; and there was no garden: it was replaced by a courtyard in which naught could be seen, in any direction, save rabbit-hutches; it was a veritable library of rabbits.

The aunt appeared, shaking her head as always. She uttered a cry of surprise when she saw Cherami, then offered him her cheek, saying:

"Kiss me; I forgive your disappearance at Passy."

The penalty seemed to Cherami a little severe, but he submitted to it; and while he was in training, Madame Capucine offered him her cheek.

"Do the same for me," she said; "I forgive you, too."

"The devil! this dinner comes pretty high!" said Beau Arthur to himself, after kissing both ladies.

"You must come and see what a pretty little place I've got," said Madame Duponceau; "what a pity that you always come in winter!"

"I don't see what difference that makes here, as you have no garden."

"But I have rabbits."

"Are they finer in summer than in winter?"

"No; but they show themselves more, because they ain't cold."

"They show themselves quite enough as it is, in my opinion. I should be glad of a little refreshment."

"And then you must tell us what happened to you at Passy that kept you from coming back to dinner with us."

Cherami allowed himself to be taken all over the house; he was not even spared an inspection of the attic. He found everything charming, admirable, even the lean-to where the servant slept. At last, when the inspection was at an end, they begged him to tell them his adventures in the Bois de Boulogne. He told the whole story, taking care not to mention names; and when he had finished, Madame Duponceau cried:

"That's what it is to fight a duel with pistols!"

"Corbleu de mordieu!" thought Cherami; "what an idiot I am to take the trouble to tell anything to such mummies! This will teach me a lesson; I ought to have told them about Blue Beard."

The dinner hour arrived, but Monsieur Capucine did not. They waited another half-hour; but the two boys complained so loudly of hunger, that it was decided to adjourn to the table.

First came a thin soup, then a rabbit-stew, then a roasted rabbit.

Cherami, seeing nothing but rabbit, made a wry face, and muttered under his breath:

"Apparently they are on a rabbit diet here. And that miserable Capucine doesn't come! To have nothing to eat but rabbit, and not obtain a second! what, in God's name, did I come to this hole for?"

By way of vegetables, of which there were none, a dish of minced rabbit, stuffed with chestnuts, was served.

"It's very strange that my husband doesn't come!" said the corpulent dame; "he must have had some order to be filled in a hurry."

"And then, perhaps he doesn't like rabbit?" suggested Cherami.

"Oh! yes, he eats it."

"What's that? Par la sambleu! I eat it, too, and I've been eating it for an hour, but I don't like it any better for that."

"You don't like it? What a pity! there's more of it coming!"

"A rabbit-cream, perhaps?"

"No, a pie."

"Thanks; if you will allow me, I will take some cheese, as a pleasant substitute. Gad! I don't wonder that your yard is carpeted with rabbit-hutches; they are productive evidently."

"Much more so than fruit trees."

"Well, well! I see that you will end by preserving them. But your wine is good, that's something."

"Here's my aunt's health!"

"With great pleasure. Vive Élisabeth!"

"Aristoloche and Narcisse, now recite your congratulations."

"What! have the dear children learned something by heart?"

"Yes, aunt; we'll show you."

"Oh! the dear loves, how sweet of them! Who wrote them?"

"My husband, aunt; they are in poetry!"

"Your husband writes poetry? I didn't know he had that talent; how long has he been a poet?"

"Since we have had for a customer a literary man who writes mottoes; he brings us some every time he comes to the house. Come, Aristoloche, begin. Go and stand in front of your aunt; and pronounce your words plain."

LII

MADAME CAPUCINE'S LITTLE SONS

The little fellow tried first of all to obtain possession of the visitor's stick, and to gallop round the table astride it; they could not succeed in making him behave except by promising him that, if he would repeat his verses nicely, he should play with a rabbit which was very gentle and which was sometimes brought into the salon to entertain the company.

At last, Master Aristoloche took his stand in front of his great-aunt, and recited without stopping to take breath:

"'Ah! quel bonheur, en ce beau jour,
De vous prouver tout mon amour!
Du plaisir, je suis dans l'attente,
Quand je dois aller chez ma tante!
En amour comme en amitié
Sachez tout mettre de moitié.'"

"It is easy to see that our papa knows a maker of mottoes," thought Cherami.

"What do you think of my husband's poetry?" asked Madame Capucine.

"It is the more ingenious in that it can be adapted to any possible occasion."

"And you, aunt?"

Madame Duponceau was delighted with the verses, and said to the boy, after giving him a kiss:

"Go and find the maid, and tell her to give you Coco to play with."

Master Aristoloche disappeared; it was his brother's turn to recite his congratulations; but young Narcisse was sulky; he rebelled.

"Well, monsieur," said his mother, "come and repeat your poetry to your aunt."

"No, I won't; it makes me sick."

"What do I hear, Monsieur Narcisse? What is the meaning of that answer?"

"I mean what I say; you always let Aristoloche play with Coco, and never let me."

"Will you hold your tongue—a great tall boy like you! just beginning to learn to write. You, want to play with the little rabbit!"

"Yes, I like rabbits, and I want to play with 'em."

"It seems to me," said Cherami, "that you ought not to be too hard on the child for liking rabbits; this is a good school for that. By dint of eating a thing, one sometimes ends by acquiring a taste for it. When I was a boy, I remember, I could not endure bread-soup, but they made me eat it every day to force me to like it."

"And you ended by liking it?"

"No; I detest it!"

"Come, Narcisse, come and recite your poetry to your dear aunt—if you don't, she won't give you another beautiful hat with feathers."

"I don't want any more of her feathers; they make me blind. Somebody told me that I looked like a trained dog in that hat."

"Look out, Monsieur Narcisse, or we shall be cross with you! Your poetry, this minute!"

"No, I won't!"

"Ah! we'll see about that, you little rascal!"

Madame Capucine left the table, seized Cherami's switch, which was standing in a corner, and advanced upon her son; but young Narcisse, when he saw what he was threatened with, began to run around the table, thus compelling his mother, still armed with the formidable switch, to run after him, striking blindly in every direction. Thinking that she was chastising her son, she twice brought the switch down on Cherami's shoulders, who found the manœuvre executed by the stout woman and her son far from amusing, although it reminded him somewhat of a circus performance.

At last, seeing that he was on the point of being captured, Narcisse changed his tactics, and slipped under the table. Madame Capucine, although disconcerted for a moment by this evolution, soon found a way to profit by it; she thrust her switch under the table, striking at random to right and left. Thereupon, the old aunt began to cry out: her niece was switching her legs. Luckily, Cherami succeeded in pulling Narcisse out from under the table; he was forced to stand in front of Madame Duponceau; and his mother stationed herself by his side, with her stick in the air, saying in a threatening tone:

"Your poetry, quick!"

Master Narcisse, although still in the sulks, decided to obey, and muttered in a drawling voice:

"'Ah! que je suis—Ah! que je suis donc content!
De vous—de vous—de vous——'"

"*De vous*, what, idiot?"

"I forget."

"You just wait, and I'll freshen your memory, you bad boy!"

"'De vous fêter, objet charmant——'"

"It can't be *objet charmant!* I know that's wrong."

"Why do you think it can't be *objet charmant*, niece, I should like to know?" said Madame Duponceau, pursing up her lips.

"Because, aunt, I am perfectly sure it's something else."

"In my judgment," interposed Cherami, "*objet charmant* should be allowed to remain; the expression is most appropriate."

The old aunt was so delighted by the compliment, that she left her seat and embraced her guest again.

"That will teach me to hold my tongue!" said Cherami to himself.

"Come, monsieur; go on with your poetry," continued Madame Capucine.

"'De vous—de vous—fêter en ce moment,'"

began Narcisse.

"You see!" cried Madame Capucine; "I knew it wasn't *objet charmant.*"

"It's hardly worth while to interrupt just for that, niece. Go on, my boy."

But young Aristoloche had entered the dining-room, holding in his arms a little white rabbit, which he was tickling with a stick. That spectacle sadly distracted the attention of Master Narcisse, whom his mother continued to threaten with the switch to make him finish his lines. But Narcisse, as he recited, kept turning to look at his brother.

"'Quand je me trouve à votre table—à votre table——'

I'll fix you, if you don't give me the rabbit when I get through."

"No, they gave the rabbit to me—see!"

"'À votre table—à votre table—
Ah! que le temps——'

I'll box your ears——

'est agréable!'"

"Mamma, brother says he'll lick me!"

"Don't listen to him, darling; he's the one who'll be licked, if he doesn't say his poetry better for his aunt. Come, Monsieur Narcisse."

"'Voulez-vous lire dans mon cœur——'

Wait till you want my battledore again!"

"I don't want it; papa'll give me another."

"'Dans mon cœur——'

Let Coco go."

"No, I won't let him go."

"All right; I'll fix you in a minute——

'Dans mon cœur—vous y verrez mon ardeur.'"

"You said that as badly as you could, monsieur! but you'll have to say it better at breakfast to-morrow."

"Oh! mamma, mamma; he's trying to take Coco away from me."

Narcisse, having finished his congratulations, had run after his brother and was trying to obtain possession of the rabbit; Madame Capucine, to put an end to the dispute, turned her elder son out of the dining-room, with an accompaniment of kicks in the posterior; then returned to her seat beside Cherami.

"And, after all," she said, "my husband didn't come!"

"And he probably won't come now, for it's almost nine o'clock. I am very sorry for that; I wanted to speak to him."

"About that little bill? Oh! there's no hurry about that."

"It was about something else."

"Well, I am going to have a very uncomfortable night of it. You must know that I'm very timid in the country. It's foolish of me, I know that well enough; for nothing ever happens to my aunt, who lives here alone with her servant; but what can I do? one can't control those things. When my husband's in bed beside me, that gives me courage, and I can sleep a little. But without him—why, I can't close my eyes. If we only had a man in the house; but nothing but women and children! What would become of us if we should be attacked?"

"What's the meaning of this attempt to entrap me?" thought Cherami, stroking his whiskers; "I can see myself passing the night here, to eat more rabbit to-morrow morning! On the contrary, I can't be off soon enough."

"Well, Monsieur Cherami," continued Madame Capucine, with a tender glance at her neighbor, "do you refuse to watch over us to-night? You are your own master; what is there to prevent you from sleeping here? If you would, I should feel perfectly safe, and I should have a quiet night. There's a guest-chamber just opposite mine."

The last words were accompanied by a sidelong glance ending in a sigh. Cherami began to cough in a significant fashion, and whispered:

"On the same floor?"

"Yes; you can understand what a relief it will be to me."

"I understand perfectly."

"Then you'll stay with us, won't you? When the children have gone to bed, we'll play a game of loto."

"That is a very seductive prospect."

"You shall draw the numbers."

"You will see how well I do it!"

At that moment, Madame Duponceau's servant rushed into the dining-room and exclaimed in dismay:

"O madame! madame! if you knew!"

"What is it, then, Françoise, for heaven's sake? You frighten me!"

"There's reason enough!"

"Is the house on fire?"

"Is it robbers?"

"No; but your rabbits. That little scamp of a Narcisse has opened all the hutches, and the rabbits are all loose; they're running everywhere—into the yard, and the cellar, and upstairs."

"Oh! mon Dieu! what do you mean? We must catch them! Niece, Monsieur Cherami, come quick, I beg you! Bring candles! Oh! my poor rabbits!"

Everybody hurried into the yard. In the confusion, Cherami did not fail to take his hat and cane; but, instead of going to the yard, he headed for the front door, crying:

"There go two of them into the road! I'll run after them."

"Do you think so?"

"I saw them."

"How could they have got out?"

"Under the gate. They scratched till they made a hole. But don't be disturbed; I'll catch them, if I have to chase them to Vincennes!"

And Cherami ran out into the road, leaving the ladies and the servant to hunt the rabbits.

LIII

CHERAMI'S SECONDS

Cherami went across fields to the village of Bagnolet, thence to Belleville, and returned to his domicile, consigning the Capucine family and its rabbits to the evil one.

"No seconds," he said to himself, as he went to bed; "and the count's will be here at ten o'clock to-morrow! No matter; let's go to sleep; it will be light to-morrow."

At seven o'clock, Cherami rose, dressed, and went to his window. It was just daylight, and Rue de l'Orillon was deserted. About eight o'clock, a water-carrier's cart came along. It stopped in front of Madame Louchard's house, and the master carrier and his man came upstairs with their pails.

Cherami opened his door, and scrutinized the two men closely as they came up.

"There are two stout fellows," he mused. "Sapristi! such seconds would just do for my affair! Why not? Pardieu! by making a slight sacrifice; and this is no time for economizing, but for going through with my duel in a dignified way. Gad! I am inclined to think that it's a good idea; I see no other way of obtaining seconds."

Cherami waited for the two men to come down the stairs; he stopped them as they passed, asked them into his room, and said to them:

"I have a favor to ask of you, messieurs."

The master, a tall, robust Auvergnat, replied, in the accent of his province:

"A pail to fill?"

"No."

"Do you want some water?"

"It is something out of your regular line. It will be a change for you."

"We must serve our customers."

"Listen to me first. If your customers should be served a little later than usual for once, it won't kill them. I have a duel to arrange for. Do you know what a duel is?"

"It's a clock that strikes the hours, ain't it?"

"You are a long way off."

The apprentice, a young Piedmontese, nearly six feet tall, suddenly exclaimed:

"Yes, yes, I know the vendetta, basta! I've seen friends who'd been out to fight with fists."

"Your young man understands rather better; yes, a duel's a fight, but not with fists."

"Where do you fight?" rejoined the Piedmontese.

Cherami made a wry face, muttering:

"Sapristi! I prefer the Auvergnat accent to that jargon.—Look you, messieurs, I just want you to be my seconds; I expect my opponent's seconds here at ten o'clock, and you must both be here then. I will give you a hundred sous each for the morning; and you will be free at half-past ten; for the fight will not come off till to-morrow, I fancy."

"All right! five francs; all right!"

"What have we got to do?"

"In the first place, my boy, you will be good enough not to speak at all; for you have a way of pronouncing your t's and s's which will produce a very bad effect. Your master can say that you're a Pole, and that you don't know a word of French. That's your rôle, then—to say nothing. But I must dress you, my friends; I can't have seconds in short jackets. Do you own a coat, my boy?"

"No, but I've got a much better jacket."

"I don't want seconds in jackets. My landlady must have some coats that belonged to her late husband; we will get one of them. Have you a hat?"

"I have a new cap."

"How you run your words together! We'll find a hat somewhere in the house.—And you, master—what's your name?"

"Michel."

"Good! well, Michel, have you any good clothes?"

"*Dame!* I should say so; my new frock-coat—only three years old—which comes down to my heels."

"Then I'll make an old soldier of you. You must put on a black stock. Go and dress. Put your cask in a safe place, and come back at once with your man, whom I will dress. Be here at half-past nine, and I will tell you what you have to do; it will be very simple. You will agree to whatever is proposed by the men who come here."

"We will agree, if they'll pay for something to drink."

"There's no question of taking anything to drink. However, I shall be here; I'll prompt you. Go, and make haste."

"And the five francs?"

"Here they are; I pay in advance; you see that I have confidence in you."

"Oh! never fear; our word's sacred.—Come, Piedmontese. Let's go and take care of the cask."

"Where'll you put it?"

"In the next yard."

The water-carriers departed, and Cherami went down to his landlady.

"Have you a man's hat to loan me for this morning and to-morrow?" he asked her.

"A man's hat? What do you want it for?"

"Don't be alarmed; I don't propose to make an omelet in it, as the prestidigitators do; I want it for someone to wear."

"Yes, I have a hat that belonged to Louchard, which I am keeping to give my godson when he grows up."

"Do me the favor to loan it to me; I will take the best of care of it."

"I trust you will."

Madame Louchard left the room, and soon returned with a felt hat in reasonably good condition.

"Look; I call that rather fine, myself!"

"The devil! it's gray."

"Well! it's all the more stylish."

"I don't say it isn't, in summer; but in November gray hats are not worn much."

"If you don't want it, leave it."

"Never mind; I'll take it. A Pole may like gray hats at all seasons. Now, Madame Louchard, I must have either an overcoat or a frock-coat."

"I have nothing but a green sack-coat of Louchard's, which I also intend for my godson."

"A sack-coat! that's risky, because it shows the trousers! But, no matter! give it to me."

"You'll be responsible for it?"

"I'll be responsible for everything."

Cherami returned to his room with the clothes; at half-past nine, the water-carriers appeared. The Auvergnat wore a long blue overcoat that reached to his heels, a collar that came to the bottom of his ears, and a three-cornered hat. He was a perfect type of a laundryman going out to dinner. The Piedmontese was still in his jacket; but he had on a white striped waistcoat and olive-green trousers. Cherami bade him put on the green coat, which was too short in front and showed half of the waistcoat. By way of compensation, the late Louchard evidently had an enormous head, for the gray hat came down so far that it almost concealed the young water-carrier's eyes. These preparations completed, Cherami, having examined his two seconds, exclaimed:

"What in the devil will they take you for? However, damn the odds!—You, Piedmontese, will bow whenever anyone speaks to you, but you must not say a word in reply."

"Never fear! what would I say to them, anyway?"

"Very good! You are Monsieur de Chamousky, a Polish nobleman."

"No; for I was born in Piedmont."

"Hold your tongue; I make you a Pole!—You, Michel, are a wealthy land-holder from Auvergne; at all events, you will be rightfully entitled to your accent."

"Yes, yes, I have some land at home, and all planted with chestnuts."

"The gentlemen who are coming will tell you what weapons the count proposes to fight with, also the time and place; to whatever they propose, you will reply: 'Very well, we agree.'—Do you understand?"

"Pardi! that ain't very hard: 'Very well; that hits us!'"

"I didn't say: 'That hits us,' but: 'We agree.'"

"Bah! it amounts to the same thing."

"No, no! Sacrebleu! it doesn't amount to the same thing! Don't you go making mistakes; no foolishness! Ah! mon Dieu! I hear a carriage stopping in front of the house; two gentlemen are getting out—they are the ones. Attention! I leave the door unlocked, so that they can open it themselves. I go into this little dark closet for a moment; I want them to think that I have more than this one room. Now: a serious face, heads up, and be cool!"

Cherami disappeared. The two water-carriers stared at each other in speechless amazement to see themselves so finely arrayed. Soon there was a knock at the door; then, as no one answered, the door was opened, and Monsieur de la Bérinière's two seconds entered the room.

One was a man of some fifty years, tall and thin, with a decidedly unamiable manner, a rigid bearing, and a severely simple costume. The other, who was at least fifteen years younger, with a pleasant face, and dressed in the height of fashion, had all the manners of a modern Don Juan. He entered the room first, and, having glanced about, exclaimed:

"This isn't the place; it can't be; the woman directed us wrong."

"But there are some people here," said the other; "we had better inquire.—Monsieur Cherami, if you please?" he continued, addressing the Auvergnat, who stood in the centre of the room.

The water-carrier buried his chin in his cravat, and answered, without hesitation:

"Very well; we agree."

The old gentleman turned to his companion, who said:

"He did not understand you."—Whereupon he, in his turn, addressed the Auvergnat: "We desire to know, monsieur, if this is where Monsieur Cherami lives."

Again Michel replied in his deep voice:

"Very well; we agree."

At that, the young man burst out laughing.

"Gad!" he exclaimed; "this is evidently a joke, a wager! What do you think about it, Monsieur de Maugrillé?"

"I think that we did not come here to joke, and if I knew that there was any purpose to make fools of us——"

Cherami, who was listening, and saw that his seconds were in a fair way to wreck the whole business, hastily left the closet, and saluted the new-comers with much courtesy, saying:

"Pardon, messieurs, a thousand pardons! I crave a little indulgence for my seconds,—most respectable persons, by the way,—one of whom, being a Pole, recently arrived in France, is not able as yet to express his thoughts in our language. As for the other, Monsieur de Saint-Michel, a wealthy land-holder in the outskirts of Clermont, in Auvergne—he is not yet at home in all the details of affairs of this sort. However, messieurs, as I have determined in advance to agree to what Monsieur de la Bérinière may suggest, it seems to me that

your mission is very much simplified, and that the affair will settle itself; my seconds are here only as a matter of form."

"Ordinarily, monsieur, the details of a meeting are not arranged with the adversary himself, but with his seconds."

"I know it, monsieur. Pardieu! you cannot teach me how affairs are managed in duels; this isn't the first time I have fought."

"In that case, monsieur," queried the younger man, with a smile, "why did you select seconds who apparently have no understanding of what is going on?"

"Because I found no others at hand, in all probability," retorted Cherami, biting his lips wrathfully. "Come, messieurs, let us come to terms. Is it such a difficult matter, pray, to tell us where, when, and how the count proposes to fight?"

"I beg your pardon, monsieur," observed Monsieur de Maugrillé; "but, as I, for my part, insist that everything shall be done in accordance with the established etiquette of duels, I will tell your seconds, and no one else."

"Tell my concierge, if you choose; it makes confounded little difference to me, after all."

"What does that tone mean, monsieur?"

"It means that you make me very weary with all your nonsense; and if you're not satisfied with the tone I adopt, why, I'll give you satisfaction as soon as I have done with the count; or before, if you choose."

"Monsieur!"

The discussion was on the verge of ending in a quarrel, when the Auvergnat, seeing that things seemed to be approaching a crisis, shouted in stentorian tones:

"Very well, *fouchtra!* very well! We agree, I say!"

This outburst was delivered in such unique fashion by the water-carrier, that the younger of the count's seconds roared with laughter again, and Cherami himself could not keep a sober face. He turned his back and put his handkerchief to his mouth. The old gentleman alone retained an air of displeasure; but his young companion said to him earnestly:

"Come, Monsieur de Maugrillé, let us not have trouble over an affair which really seems to me quite simple.—Monsieur de la Bérinière selects swords; he wishes to fight to-morrow, about nine o'clock, in Vincennes Forest; we will meet at the entrance to the forest, near Porte Saint-Mandé, on the highroad. Those are our conditions, messieurs; are they satisfactory to you?"

Then or never was the time for the water-carrier to repeat the phrase he had been taught; but, just as it frequently happens on the stage, that, when an actor has begun his lines too soon, he is silent when he ought to speak, so did the Auvergnat look stolidly at the others and utter never a word.

Cherami, who was gazing at him impatiently, at last walked up behind him and struck him in the side, crying:

"Well, Monsieur de Saint-Michel, have you suddenly lost your voice?"

"Ah! bless my soul! what was I thinking about?—Very well, very well! We agree to everything," said the water-carrier.

Thereupon the young man took his companion's arm and led him from the room, laughing still, and saying in his ear:

"I think that we may retire, now that everything is settled."

Cherami saluted them, and escorted them to the door.

"Be sure, monsieur," he said, "that we shall be on hand promptly at the rendezvous; we shall not keep you waiting. By the way! it will be very kind of you to bring swords for both, for I broke mine recently and have not yet replaced it."

"Very good, monsieur; we will do so."

The younger man bowed with much affability; his older associate bent his head almost imperceptibly, retaining his ill-humored expression; then they left the house and returned to their carriage.

LIV

TWO!

"Sapristi!" cried Cherami, when the count's witnesses had gone; "I thought that we weren't going to get out of that hole; they had difficulty in swallowing my seconds, and I don't wonder."

"Ain't you satisfied with us?" inquired the water-carrier; "I should say that I said just what you told me to."

"That is to say, you said it when you shouldn't have, and held your tongue when you should have answered."

"I didn't say a single word," observed the Piedmontese.

"It's lucky you didn't! That would have been the last straw! Well, that's all for to-day; you may go back to your cask; but be here to-morrow at half-past seven sharp, dressed just the same; don't forget it!"

"For five francs more apiece?"

"Of course, as that's what we agreed."

"We won't fail."

The next day, the two water-carriers appeared at seven o'clock, each in his costume of the preceding day: the Piedmontese in the late Louchard's green sack-coat and gray hat, which he was obliged to push up from his face every minute, so that he could see where he was going. Cherami dressed in haste; he paid particular

attention to his toilet, which presented a striking contrast to that of his two seconds; then he requested his landlady to send for a cab. Madame Louchard was much disturbed when she recognized the coat and hat of her deceased husband on the water-carrier.

"Why have you rigged that fellow up like that?" she asked her tenant. "He'll just ruin my husband's things. I wouldn't have lent 'em to you, if I'd known you wanted 'em for him. Are you going to a wedding so early in the morning?"

"Widow Louchard, I will be responsible for your chattels—don't bother us! Your man's cast-off clothes are more fortunate than they deserve, to be present at such a festivity.—Get in, messieurs."

Cherami pushed the water-carrier and his man into the cab, and shouted to the driver to take them to Porte Saint-Mandé; then, taking a seat beside his seconds, he said to them:

"Listen carefully to my instructions for this morning, and, ten thousand cigars! try not to make any mistakes; I am going to fight with a third gentleman, whom you didn't see yesterday."

"Ah! you ought to fight with your fists; that's our way; we're good hands at it; eh, Piedmontese?"

"Yes, just let me get a crack at 'em! I'd like that better than to stand and say nothing, like a stuffed goose!"

"Nevertheless, you must make up your mind to that, my boy. I didn't bring you with me to fight, but to be my seconds. I am to fight with a sword. You will simply measure the two swords, to make sure that they're of the same length."

"What with? I didn't bring a rule."

"You measure two swords by putting them side by side. It's simple enough."

"And must I say again: 'Very well; we agree'?"

"No, there's no need of it. You must say: 'Everything is ready, let them proceed.' If I am wounded, you will bring me back to this cab, which will wait for us, and take me home. If it's the other who is wounded,—and it will be,—you will help his seconds to take him to his carriage. Do you understand?"

"That's all right."

They arrived at Porte Saint-Mandé, where they alighted from the cab and walked into the woods. It was a cold, dull morning; it was not nine o'clock, and they met nobody.

"We are ahead of time," said Cherami, "but I prefer to be. Above all things, my boys, be very polite to the men we are waiting for: take your hats off and bow, and don't put them on again till after they do."

"What if they don't put 'em on at all?"

"Never fear—they will. Now, we have nothing to do but walk back and forth and wait."

"Why don't we go and take a glass of wine at the nearest inn, while we wait?"

"*Dame!*" said the apprentice; "I'm with you for a glass of wine!"

"But I am not with you, not by any means, messieurs. After the fight, you shall drink as much as you please, but not before."

"We might treat the others to a glass when they come; that's polite, you know!"

"The gentlemen who are coming don't drink at wine-shops!—No fool's tricks, sacrebleu! or you'll compromise me! But, see! that carriage coming along the road yonder is probably bringing our adversaries. It's a private carriage—the count's, no doubt. Yes, those are they. Attention, my seconds! Well, well, what in the devil are you doing? Taking off your hats before the gentlemen have left their carriage!"

"You told us to be polite."

"I didn't tell you to bow to the horses."

The count and his seconds alighted and came toward Cherami. The grotesque aspect of the latter's attendants seemed greatly to amuse Monsieur de la Bérinière, who could not take his eyes from the two water-carriers. They, at a sign from Cherami, hastily removed their hats when the new-comers were close at hand. But the Piedmontese, in his eagerness to uncover, forgot that his hat was too large for him, and struck Monsieur de Maugrillé in the nose with it, that gentleman happening to be directly in front of him.

The old gentleman made an angry gesture. But the tall youth, as he picked up his hat, cried:

"Excuse me! I didn't do it a-purpose! it slipped out of my hand."

The count glanced at his seconds. They looked at Cherami. And he, hardly able to resist the temptation to plant his foot in the apprentice's posterior, struggled to restrain himself, as he said:

"Monsieur is a Pole; he speaks French very badly! indeed, he fairly murders it."

"So we observe," rejoined the count, with a smile. "But it's none too warm here, and I am anxious to have done with this affair. It seems to me that we shall be very well placed behind this low wall."

"I agree with you, monsieur le comte."

They walked a short distance, and halted behind a wall which would serve to conceal the combatants from any chance passers-by. While the principals removed their coats, the younger of the count's seconds handed to the water-carrier two swords which he carried out of sight under his overcoat. The Auvergnat measured them so long that Cherami went to him and took one out of his hands.

"They're all right!" he exclaimed; "they're exactly alike! I will take this one, unless monsieur le comte prefers it."

But Monsieur de la Bérinière at once took the other, while his older second grumbled:

"In God's name, who are these two idiots of seconds who know absolutely nothing as to what they are doing?"

Cherami at once stood on guard, saying:

"At your service, monsieur le comte, whenever you choose."

"I am here, monsieur."

Monsieur de la Bérinière had been a very good fencer in his youth, but years had impaired his agility and

strength. It was easy to see that Cherami was sparing his adversary, to whom he observed, as he parried his thrusts:

"Well done, monsieur le comte! very pretty work, indeed! You must have been a fine fencer formerly."

But these compliments, instead of flattering the count, stung and irritated him, because he saw that his opponent was playing with him; and he suddenly cried:

"What the devil! in God's name, monsieur, attack! you confine yourself to parrying! Do you think you're fighting with a novice?"

"Is that your wish, monsieur le comte? Solely to comply then——"

And Cherami, suddenly striking down his adversary's sword, plunged his own into the count's right side.

Monsieur de la Bérinière staggered a moment, then fell.

"*Fouchtra!* he's got his reckoning!" cried the Auvergnat, while the count's witnesses ran forward to help him and carry him off the field. But, at a sign from Cherami, the tall Piedmontese lifted the wounded man in his arms as if he were a child, and carried him to the elegant equipage, in which a surgeon was waiting, who had come with the gentlemen, but whom they had not thought it necessary to take with them to the field of battle.

"There's one job done!" said the young water-carrier.

The count's seconds could hardly keep up with him. In the end, they seated themselves by the wounded man's side in the carriage, which drove away at a walk.

"The wound can't be dangerous," said Cherami to his seconds, when they were alone; "it's in among the ribs. He will be laid up a fortnight or three weeks, unless I touched some vital part. Ah! they forgot to take away their sword. I will carry it back myself, and that will give me an opportunity to inquire for the count."

"Ah! *fouchtra!* you're a smart one! how you run on!"

"Now it's all over, ain't we going to have a glass of wine at the nearest wine-shop, to refresh us?"

"My boys, here's a hundred sous for each of you. Go and refresh yourselves all you choose; I am going to take the cab and go home. Do you prefer to ride back?"

"No, no! Riding makes us sick; eh, Piedmontese?"

"Yes, yes, I prefer to walk."

"But don't forget, my boys, to bring that coat and gray hat back to Madame Louchard."

"Don't you be afraid; we're just going to have a little fun with our hundred sous."

"Have all the fun you can, my boys. Good-day!"

"Say, Monsieur Cherami, you're satisfied with us, ain't you? We did what you wanted us to."

"Yes, my friends, I am very well satisfied.—But God preserve me from ever having you as seconds again!" added Cherami, as he drove away.

LV

CHERAMI CHANGES HIS TACTICS

On the day after the duel, Cherami, concealing under his coat the sword which had been loaned to him the day before, betook himself to the count's abode and asked the concierge how his master was. The concierge replied, with a profound sigh:

"Would you believe, monsieur, that, in spite of his years—for although monsieur le comte dresses like a young man, it's easy to see that he isn't one; his valet tells me he's past sixty—well, in spite of his years, he fought a duel yesterday."

"A man fights a duel when the occasion arises; there's no prescribed term for that."

"No, monsieur; no, a man doesn't fight—and with swords, above all—when his wrist is no longer firm; and it seems that Monsieur de la Bérinière's opponent was a great, tall rascal—a professional—one of those fellows who pass their time fighting. A fine profession!"

Cherami pushed the sword still farther under his coat, stared at the concierge as if he would swallow him, and said in a sharp tone:

"Your reflections tire me; I am going up to the count's apartments."

"But, monsieur, you can't go up; monsieur le comte is very badly wounded, so it seems. He is forbidden to read or talk."

"I don't mean to speak to him, but to his valet, who isn't so much of an ass as you, I trust."

And Cherami rapidly ascended the stairs, opened the door of the reception-room by turning the knob, and found there the valet, who knew him. He handed him the sword, saying:

"Here, my friend, is a sword which your master loaned to the person with whom he fought yesterday, and which that person requested me to return to him, and at the same time to inquire as to his condition. Is the count's wound dangerous?"

"No, monsieur. The surgeon said that it wasn't mortal, and that monsieur would recover."

"Ah! so much the better! I am very glad to hear that."

"But it may take a long time; he'll have to be very careful. Monsieur has lost a great deal of blood; he is very weak, and, between ourselves, he's no longer young."

"Between ourselves, and between all the rest of the world, too."

"He is forbidden to speak or to receive visits to-day."

"And I have no intention of asking to be admitted; I simply wanted to know how he was; he will get well,

that's the main point. What does it matter whether it's a long recovery or not? The count is rich; he can coddle himself in bed as long as it's necessary."

"True, monsieur; but, still, this wound comes at a very bad time; for—I can safely tell you; it's no longer a secret—my master's on the point of being married."

"Married!"

"Yes, it's a fact; and to a young lady, a very pretty one."

"Well, my boy, to marry, at your master's age, is much more dangerous than a sword-thrust—especially when the bride is young and pretty—aggravating circumstances!"

"Ha! ha! I fancy monsieur is right."

"Good-morning! I will call again to inquire."

"And now," said Cherami to himself, "if I knew where Gustave is, I would tell him that his rival is on his back. I think I will go to his house to inquire. He has separate apartments; and, at a pinch, if the concierge can't tell me anything, I will brave once more the uncle's winning countenance."

Gustave's concierge knew that he was not in Paris, but he knew no more than that. Cherami decided to make his way once more into the banker's private office; he was always sure to find him at his desk in the morning.

Monsieur Grandcourt frowned when he recognized his visitor. But Cherami was even more carefully dressed than on the occasion of his last visit. With the thousand francs he had received from Gustave, and by virtue of his newly-adopted system of economy, Beau Arthur had reached the point where he was no longer an ex-beau, and had almost recovered his former air of distinction.

He saluted the banker with the ease of manner which was natural to him, but to which his dress imparted additional charm. Monsieur Grandcourt replied with a cool nod. As he did not leave his armchair, Cherami took a seat and began by making himself comfortable. The two men looked at each other for several minutes without speaking: the banker retaining his scowling expression, Cherami smiling as if he were at the Théâtre du Palais-Royal, listening to Arnal.

"How are you this morning, my dear Monsieur Grandcourt?" began Cherami, lolling back in his chair.

"Very well, I thank you, monsieur. Is it to inquire for my health that you come to my office to-day?"

"Oh! if I should say *yes*, you wouldn't believe me."

"True. But I remember that my nephew told me that you wished to find employment. You appear, however, monsieur, to be more fortunately placed than you were when I first saw you?"

"It is a fact, monsieur, that my condition has improved somewhat. But that does not interfere with my seeking a—suitable place. I am beginning to tire of doing nothing. I am really desirous to have something to occupy my time."

"That desire comes a little late!"

"You know the proverb: better late than never. And then, after all, I am only forty-eight; I am not an old man. You are fully as old as that, and yet you work!"

"But I have always worked, monsieur; it's a habit with me, a necessity. I didn't have to make a study of it—a study which is often repellent when one begins it late in life."

"Have you any place to offer me, monsieur?"

"No, I have not."

"Well, then, why do you ask me all these questions? I do not imagine that it is your purpose to make sport of me."

"Is it yours to pick a quarrel with me?"

"No, no! sapristi! I am not picking a quarrel with you—Gustave's uncle, and he my best friend! Oh! if you weren't his uncle, I don't say that—but you are his uncle.—Let us come to the point; I came to ask you where your nephew is at this moment."

"My nephew is travelling: he is in one place to-day, in another to-morrow."

"Oh! I see that we are going to have the same old song over again! You will not give me his address?—But if I want to write to him, to tell him something which will give him great pleasure, which will make him happy?"

"Tell me, and I'll write it to him."

"That isn't the same thing. But, no matter, I will tell you. You know, I suppose, that his *passion*, whom he thought he was surely going to marry this time, has thrown him over again, in favor of a very rich old count?"

"I know all that, monsieur."

"Good! but what you don't know is that I don't propose that my friend shall be played with with impunity. That is why I hunted up this Comte de la Bérinière; I insulted him; we fought a duel, and he is now in his bed with a famous sword-thrust in his right side."

Monsieur Grandcourt jumped from his chair and struck his desk a violent blow, crying:

"Is it possible? You have done that?"

"As I have the honor to tell you. Do you wish to embrace me?"

"On the contrary, monsieur, I am much more inclined to throw you out of the window!"

"Indeed! well, as we are on the ground floor, if that will give you pleasure——"

"Why, monsieur, this is a horrible thing that you've done! And you call yourself Gustave's friend! You seem to be trying to wreck his life. Can't you see that this Fanny is an infernal coquette, who cares for nothing but money and pleasure, and who never had the slightest feeling of love for my nephew?"

"As far as that goes, I am entirely of your opinion."

"Very well! do you think, then, that marriage with such a woman would make Gustave happy?"

"*Dame!* since he adores her——"

"Why, monsieur, do I need to tell you that love doesn't last forever? Besides, what purpose does that sentiment serve in a household when it's not reciprocated? Gustave is kind-hearted, sensitive, affectionate—much too affectionate. What he needs is a sweet, modest, loving helpmeet."

"That is true!" murmured Cherami; "and I know one of that sort."

"And you would have him marry a woman who has spurned him twice? Why, to miss being this Fanny's husband was the most fortunate thing that could happen to him! All his true friends ought to congratulate him on it. And you, monsieur, you set about removing the obstacle which had risen between my nephew and that widow! You fight with the man she preferred to Gustave! Ah! monsieur, cease to call yourself his friend; for his bitterest enemy would not have acted otherwise!"

Cherami paced the floor of the office with long strides, and bit his lips, muttering:

"Sacrebleu! that is all true. There is good sense in what you say. On the impulse of the moment, I didn't reflect. I saw but one thing to do—and that was to prevent the little widow's making a fool of Gustave."

"Oh! monsieur, she would do it much more effectively if he should marry her."

"After all, I didn't kill the count—a sword-thrust in the side is nothing; he will get well; the doctor said so."

"That is possible; but who can say that this duel will not change his plans, his ideas? At the count's age, a wound, an illness, sometimes ages a man ten years; and then love takes flight, and with it all thought of marriage."

"Oh! the count was dead in love, and when a fire gets started in an old house it burns faster than a new one."

"Do you still consider, monsieur, that it's very important to tell my nephew of your fine exploit? Have you any wish to see him rush to that wretched Fanny's side again?"

"You have changed my ideas entirely, dear uncle. I'm a hot-headed creature; but I am not pig-headed. When I feel that I've done a foolish thing, I admit it."

"That's something."

"But, I tell you again, the count's wound is not dangerous; he will recover."

"I trust so, monsieur; and above all things that he will marry this Fanny."

"In that case, you will no longer feel inclined to throw me out of the window?"

"In that case, I will forgive you for this last escapade."

"Adieu, dear uncle! Look you: you are hard with me; but in my heart I don't lay it up against you, because I see that you love your nephew."

"Ah! have you just discovered that?"

"I shall take pains to keep you informed as to the health of our venerable lover. As soon as he is on his legs again, I will come to tell you. And then, if he should try to back out of marrying the little widow, why, par la sambleu! he will have to draw his sword again."

"I beg you, monsieur, don't interfere any more; that's the only way to have the thing end satisfactorily."

"You haven't much confidence in me, dear uncle; but I will compel you to do me justice."—And Cherami took leave of the banker, saying to himself: "That devil of a man is right. I made an ass of myself; but I'll go to work differently now."

LVI

IMPATIENCE WITHOUT LOVE

While these things were taking place, Madame Monléard was in a state of feverish unrest.

Since the Comte de la Bérinière had definitely offered her his hand, which she had not refused, he came every day to pay his respects to her. The ten months of widowhood, which the conventionalities demand, had passed. The count, who was in haste to witness the coronation of his flame, was already arranging the preliminaries of his marriage. Among them were gifts,—jewels and cashmere shawls,—and, on the day preceding that on which he had received Cherami's visit, he had passed the whole day taking Fanny about to see the latest styles in gowns and shawls, so that he might understand her tastes and govern his purchases accordingly. And the pretty widow had shown no embarrassment about riding in the carriage which was soon to belong to her.

During the day following Cherami's challenge, the count, having to seek seconds for his duel, had had no time to call on Fanny. He did not see her until evening, and, like the well-bred man he was, had taken care not to mention the affair which he had on his hands because of her. The next day, his seconds had called on his adversary, and had then reported to Monsieur de la Bérinière that the time and place and all the details of the duel had been agreed upon. That had given the count further food for thought. He was no coward, and yet the duel was exceedingly disagreeable to him; his interviews with the pretty widow had shown the effects of it; he had been less amorous, less affable, and less cheerful in her presence.

When the following day came and went without a call from the count, Fanny was first surprised, then vexed, then alarmed. Twenty times she went to her mirror, which told her that she was as pretty as ever, and that her elderly adorer ought to be only too happy that she condescended to pretend to love him. Meanwhile, the day passed, and the evening, and the count did not appear.

"He means to make me some beautiful present," said Fanny to herself; "and he wants to bring it himself; but all these shopkeepers are so little to be depended on! He probably waited in vain, and didn't want to come without his present. I shall have it to-morrow."

On the morrow, the clock struck twelve, one, two, and no sign of the count.

"This isn't natural," thought Fanny. "Something must certainly have happened. I remember, now, that

Monsieur de la Bérinière was distraught, preoccupied, the last two evenings that he was here. I charged him with it, and he said I was mistaken. But I was not mistaken!—Justine, go down and ask the concierge if there isn't a letter for me; if a message hasn't come from the count. Those people often forget to tell you when anyone calls."

Justine soon returned, and informed her mistress that there were no letters and that no one had called. Fanny placed herself at the window, and still there was no arrival.

At five o'clock in the afternoon, unable to remain inactive any longer, she said to her maid:

"Take a cab by the hour; here is Monsieur de la Bérinière's address; go there, and find out from the concierge if anything has happened to him; if he is ill, ask to see him, and tell him how deeply interested I am in his health. Go quickly, so that I may know what to think."

Justine went off in her cab. The pretty widow counted the minutes and kept looking at the clock. At last her servant returned. Her breathless, dismayed air made it evident enough that she had something to tell; and as she entered the room, she cried out, wringing her hands:

"Ah! madame, indeed there is something new. Oh! the poor count! what a calamity!"

"Heavens! Justine, is he dead?"

"No, madame; he isn't dead yet, but very near it!"

"What accident has happened to him, then?"

"No accident, madame; but a fight with swords—a duel, in fact!"

"The count has been fighting a duel?"

"Yes, madame; and yesterday morning they brought him home wounded. A bad sword-wound in the side, which might have been mortal! But it seems he's going to get well; the doctor hopes he will, but doctors are mistaken so often!"

"Oh! mon Dieu! Why, this is horrible! With whom did he fight?"

"His valet doesn't know, madame. The count didn't take him with him."

"Well, I will find out, I will find out. A duel! Who besides Gustave could have had the idea of fighting with Monsieur de la Bérinière? That fellow was born to be the bane of my life.—So you didn't see the count?"

"No, madame; the doctor said that nobody must see him to-day; but to-morrow, perhaps, that order will be changed."

"The poor count! if only he doesn't die! Just think, Justine, what an awful nuisance for me!"

"So it is. But if madame were a countess, it wouldn't be but half bad."

"You say the doctor promises that he will recover?"

"So the valet told me."

"Well, I will go myself to-morrow; but I must see my sister first."

"I thought that madame did not go to her father's now?"

"Oh! because in an outburst of anger he told me not to come again. As if he remembered that! Besides, it isn't my father that I want to see, but Adolphine."

The next morning, at eleven o'clock, Madame Monléard was ushered into the presence of her sister, who uttered a cry of surprise when she saw her.

"What! is it you, Fanny?"

"To be sure; Madeleine told me that father had just gone out; I am glad of that."

"Oh! never fear; his anger has passed away. It never lasts long with him, you know."

"But I am the one who is angry now."

"You! with whom?"

"With everybody. You pretend to be surprised; but you must know what has happened?"

"No. What can have happened to irritate you so?"

"I have good reason for it. Monsieur de la Bérinière fought a duel the day before yesterday, and was badly wounded; a little more and they'd have killed him for me!"

"Mon Dieu! with whom did he fight, in heaven's name?"

"Do you ask me that? You know well enough; indeed, it's easy enough to guess."

"I certainly cannot guess."

"Who but Gustave, in his rage, because I preferred the count to him?"

"Gustave? why, that is impossible. He left Paris a week ago; he came to say good-bye to us, and Monsieur de Raincy, who has just come from England, met him there."

"Is it possible that it wasn't Gustave? Then who could it have been—unless it was that tall swashbuckler who fought with Auguste?"

"Yes, it must have been he."

"That's it! that fellow seems to have the very devil in him! As soon as I am married, or when someone thinks of marrying me, he appears with his long sword. Why, it's a perfect outrage! Ah! that Monsieur Cherami! And I have been so polite to him, too—asked him to come to see me!"

"What! you asked him to come to see you? A man who had fought with your husband?"

"Well! what has that to do with it? You know perfectly well that they made it up. But I must go to inquire for the poor count. Perhaps I can see him to-day, and find out how this duel came about. Ah! mon Dieu! if Monsieur de la Bérinière should die, I should be a widow a second time, and without being a countess!"

Fanny left Adolphine much disturbed and agitated by what she had heard. The young widow drove to Monsieur de la Bérinière's house, and found that the doctor had revoked his orders of the day before; she could see the count, on condition that she would not let him talk much.

The young woman entered the sick-room with every manifestation of the keenest interest; she uttered heartfelt exclamations, sighed profoundly, and winked her eyes so often that she succeeded in making them very red. The count smiled at his pretty visitor and held out his hand, which she seized and pressed to her bosom.

"If you had been killed," she cried, "I should not have survived you! But who was the savage? How did this duel come about?"

"I am forbidden to talk," murmured the count, in a weak voice.

"Oh! of course, excuse me. My curiosity is very natural, however. Just a word: was it my old play-fellow with whom you fought?"

"No; it was a friend of his—named Cherami."

"Monsieur Cherami? Oh! the miserable wretch! It was he before—with Auguste. But what, in God's name, have I ever done to that man? or, rather, what have they whom I love done to him? However, my dear count, you will recover, there's no doubt of that; and then, by dint of love and loving attentions, I hope to make you forget an incident of which I was the first cause."

"You think it isn't serious?"

"No, certainly not; it will amount to nothing. God! if the wound had been dangerous—if I had had reason to fear for your life—I don't know what would have become of me! Ah! when anything happens to those who are dear to us, that is the time we feel—how dear they are to us!"

"You are too kind."

"Are you in pain?"

"Only a little; but I am exceedingly weak."

"I will go, for I am capable of talking to you too much, in spite of myself, and that would tire you. Au revoir, my dear count! I will come every day, or send to inquire for you."

"Thanks a thousand times!"

"May the thought of me be some company to you, as the thought of you will be a sweet consolation to me!—Mon Dieu! how hideous he is in bed!" said the little woman to herself as she left the room.

LVII

CHERAMI ATTEMPTS TO REPAIR HIS MISTAKES

Three weeks passed. The count was beginning to sit up and to walk about his room; but he was still very weak, and the blood that he had lost seemed to have carried away all that he had still retained of youthfulness, activity, and amiability. Fanny had been to see him almost every day, although she was sadly bored all the time that she was with the wounded man; she was very careful, however, to conceal her ennui and to dissemble her yawns; on the contrary, she feigned to be more affectionate than ever; but his convalescence seemed to her interminable, especially because she did not fail to notice the change that had taken place in the humor of her future spouse, who seemed to have aged ten years in a fortnight.

Soon the count was able to drive out; whereupon Fanny murmured, lowering her eyes:

"I think that we might now fix the day which is to unite us forever."

But Monsieur de la Bérinière shook his head.

"I am not strong enough yet," he replied.

And the young widow said to herself:

"I am very much afraid that he never will be strong enough again!"

Things were at this point, when Madame Monléard's maid informed her mistress one morning that Monsieur Cherami requested the honor of an interview with her.

"Monsieur Cherami!" cried Fanny. "What! that man dares show himself at my house! my evil genius! But, no matter! I am curious to know what he can have to say to me.—Show the gentleman in."

Cherami, who had not omitted to make an elaborate toilet, came forward with a smiling face, saying:

"Madame Monléard did not expect a call from me?"

"No, monsieur, most assuredly not. After what has taken place between you and Monsieur de la Bérinière, I did not expect to see you here; but, since you are here, I trust that you will be good enough to tell me why you challenged a man you did not know, and who had not injured you?"

"Mon Dieu! madame, surely you can guess. I wished to avenge poor Gustave, whom you have played with like a macaroon."

"Great heaven! monsieur, what is the meaning of this frenzy of yours for taking up the cudgels for Gustave? He doesn't think of fighting duels himself, you see! he takes things as they come; he's a good boy, and doesn't lose his head; he goes away, and that's the end of it. But you! And your conduct is all the more blamable because, when I met you not long ago, you made me all sorts of offers of your services. You assured me that you would be overjoyed if you could be agreeable to me in any way; and, in order to be agreeable to me, you go to work and challenge Monsieur de la Bérinière, for no reason at all; you compel him to fight; and you run your sword into him just when he was going to marry me! If that's the kind of service you meant to offer me, I excuse you from obliging me hereafter."

"I begin by confessing, madame, that I realize my mistake. I followed the first impulse; but I was wrong. I have realized since that I made an awful blunder; and I have come humbly to beg your pardon."

"You confess your wrong-doing; that is well enough! but what is done is done, none the less."

"The count has recovered; he goes out to drive; I am sure of that."

"Yes, the count is beginning to go out; but he is not the same man; his humor has completely changed; he has lost his light, playful tone. He was a young man, now he's old. When I mention our marriage, he replies: 'My strength doesn't seem to come back.'—In short, he no longer acts as if he were in love with me; and you, monsieur, you are the cause of it."

"Very well, madame; as I have done the mischief, I propose to remedy it. The count shall become amorous again, and of a cheerful humor, and eager to marry you; for I want him to marry you now, and, par la sambleu! I will succeed! I have my cue!"

"You have a cue?"

"That's just a little phrase I'm in the habit of using; I mean that I have my scheme."

"Are you telling me the truth, monsieur? Do you really desire now to see me marry Monsieur de la Bérinière?"

"Madame, women have often deceived me; but I have always been honest with them—in order not to resemble them. I have no reason for lying to you."

"And how do you propose to set about making the count what he was?"

"Rely on me! But it is necessary that Monsieur de la Bérinière should consent to receive me. If I call on him, it's not certain that he will see me. You must have the kindness to say a few words to him in my favor—that I realize my mistake and would be glad to apologize to him; that I have asked you to intercede for me."

"If that is all that is necessary, all right. I shall go to see the count soon; come to-morrow morning, and I will tell you what he says. Suppose it is favorable?"

"A week hence, it will all be over, and you will be a countess."

"Really? but what method do you propose to employ?"

"Don't you be disturbed; I have my cue, I tell you."

LVIII

THE COUSIN'S SPECIFIC

About midday, the pretty widow paid her customary visit to Monsieur de la Bérinière, whom she found installed in his easy-chair *à la* Voltaire, drinking herb tea.

"How are you to-day, my dear count?" she inquired, taking a seat by the convalescent's side.

"I am getting on very slowly, thank you, fair lady; the wound has entirely healed, but my strength doesn't return very fast."

"What are you drinking there?"

"An infusion of linden leaves."

"Do you think that that stuff will ever bring back your strength?"

"My doctor says that it's an excellent thing. It's very soothing."

"It seems to me that you are quite calm enough. Look you, count, I haven't much confidence in your doctor."

"But, you see, he has cured my wound."

"Your wound would have healed of itself; that wasn't a disease; but now, instead of giving you something to build you up, he puts you on herb tea and slops; he treats you like a child!"

"Perhaps you are right, dear lady. It's a fact that he is keeping me to this diet a good while, on the pretext that I must be prudent."

"If you listen to him, you'll be under the same treatment six months hence. But enough of that subject; I am intrusted with a singular errand to you."

"What is it, dear lady?"

"The man with whom you fought this duel——"

"Monsieur Cherami?"

"Exactly. Monsieur Cherami called on me this morning——"

"The deuce! did he undertake to challenge you also?"

"Oh, no! far from it! He came to ask my pardon for his conduct. He realizes his mistake; he is in despair at what he did; and he wishes, as a great favor, to be allowed to come to offer you his apologies and tell you how delighted he is at your recovery."

"Pardieu! he's an extraordinary mortal! He insists upon fighting for his friend——"

"Yes; it was in a moment of exasperation."

"And now he's sorry for it! But I bear the fellow no ill-will at all. He fences very well; ah! he's an excellent blade!"

"And you will allow him to come to offer his apologies?"

"Willingly; but listen: only on condition that he will tell me who the two seconds were that he brought with him. You can't form an idea, madame, of those two men, who certainly had never assisted at such a performance before! It was enough to make you burst with laughing. De Gervier was much amused; but De Maugrillé was on the point of losing his temper; he wanted to fight them. It was altogether funny, I assure you."

"Then you are willing that Monsieur Cherami should come to see you?"

"Yes, on the condition I have suggested."

"He will readily agree to that, I fancy; he is to come to me to-morrow morning to learn your reply, and I will

send him to you."

"Very good! I must say that this Monsieur Cherami seemed to me no less clever than original."

Cherami did not fail to return to Madame Monléard's on the following day; she told him that Monsieur de la Bérinière consented to receive him, on condition that he would tell him who his seconds were.

"And now," said the widow, "how do you propose to restore the count's health and good-humor?"

"Never fear, madame," replied Beau Arthur; "that is my business; the count needs to be set up mentally, as well as physically. He's like an old clock that won't go; but as long as the mainspring isn't broken, there's a way out of the difficulty; I'll set him going."

On leaving Fanny, Cherami took a cab and drove to the Palais-Royal, where he went into Corselet's and purchased a half-bottle of the finest chartreuse; then he removed the label, the seal, and everything which could lead to the identification of the liqueur, put the bottle in his pocket, and repaired to Rue de la Ville-l'Évêque, saying to himself:

"It comes high; but one cannot make too many sacrifices when it's a question of ensuring a friend's happiness. I have only a hundred and fifty francs left of Gustave's thousand; but I will spend them with the best will in the world, if I can by that means induce our elderly lover to marry the little widow."

Monsieur de la Bérinière was informed that Monsieur Cherami craved the favor of an interview.

"Show him in," said the count.

Cherami, fashionably dressed and perfumed as in his halcyon days, presented himself before the count, who stepped forward to meet him.

"I beg you, monsieur le comte, do not rise! I understand that you are still weak; and I am too fortunate in being allowed to pay my respects to you and to offer my apologies for my insane behavior toward you."

"Let us say no more about it, Monsieur Cherami; you wanted a duel with me, and you had it—it's all over with now. Pray be seated, and just tell me, between ourselves, who those two individuals were who acted as your seconds? You will agree that their aspect—their whole manner—was very comical; and I would stake my head that it was the first time they were ever present at a duel."

"Faith! that's the truth, monsieur le comte; but what would you have? Everybody that I relied upon failed me, and I had no choice; I persuaded, albeit with much difficulty, those two men of business to attend me on the field of honor."

"Who were the fellows?"

"The elder, monsieur le comte, deals in water from Mont-Dore on a large scale; the younger is his clerk."

"Are they Auvergnats?"

"Yes, monsieur le comte."

"I would have bet anything on it. However, the younger one is as strong as an ox, apparently, for they tell me that he carried me in his arms to my carriage."

"That is true; he is very strong.—Is monsieur le comte's wound entirely cured?"

"Yes, it has cicatrized. But our meeting was six weeks ago, and my strength doesn't come back."

"Monsieur le comte, will you allow me to make you an offer?"

"What sort of an offer is it?"

"I have fought duels quite often in the course of my life."

"Oh! I believe it."

"I have been wounded several times."

"You fence very well, however; but one sometimes thrusts awkwardly."

"Well, monsieur le comte, a dear old cousin of mine, who was very fond of me in spite of my escapades, made me a present of a liquid, by the aid of which I was always on my feet in a very short time, even after the most severe wound."

"The deuce you say!"

"I have used it whenever I have been wounded, and it has never failed me yet."

"What is it made of?"

"I have no idea; that was my old cousin's secret, and she died without confiding it to me. But it must be very healthful, as it always cured me."

"Have you still got any of this liquid?"

"I have kept a few half-bottles of it, as a priceless treasure; and here is one of them, which I have taken the liberty of bringing, in the hope that monsieur le comte will have confidence in me."

"Faith, why not?"

"I shall have the honor to taste it first with monsieur le comte, to make sure that it isn't spoiled."

Monsieur de la Bérinière ordered liqueur-glasses to be brought. Cherami filled them with the superfine chartreuse, and swallowed a glass himself.

"That's good, very good!" said the count, after drinking his glass. "But it seems to me that it has just the same taste as chartreuse."

"It is true, monsieur le comte, that there is a little similarity while you are drinking it; but afterward the bouquet, the taste, is not the same at all."

"Possibly not. I never drank much chartreuse; I take liqueur very rarely."

"Then this will have all the more effect. It is a decoction of simples, of strengthening herbs, I fancy. My old cousin used often to go botanizing."

"It smells of liverwort too."

"It does, and that is very strengthening."

"It feels very warm in the chest. I seem already to feel stronger, more lively."

"It works very quickly."

"How much must I drink to be entirely cured?"

"Why, you must take this half-bottle."

"In how long a time?"

"In three days."

"Drink all that in three days!"

"Oh! this bottle doesn't hold much. Drink four small glasses to-day; to-morrow, five; the day after to-morrow, six or seven; and that will take it all. But don't mention my old cousin's remedy to your doctor. He would be sure to sneer at it; doctors are never willing that you should be cured with things that they don't prescribe."

"I know that. But, upon my word, I do feel much better."

"Take a second glass at once, and the others after dinner."

"Well, I will submit to your prescription. Yes, it has a very different taste from chartreuse; it's sweeter."

"The more you drink of it, the better you will like it."

"It is delicious; your old cousin left you something of great value."

"She passed all her time compounding remedies. This will give you an appetite too. You can eat a lot, and everything; it would digest a stone."

"Enchanting! On my word of honor! I feel my legs twitching. It seems to me that I could dance."

"The day after to-morrow, you will be in a condition to dance. Permit me to return a few days hence, monsieur le comte, to inquire for your health?"

"Whenever you choose, Monsieur Cherami; you are an excellent doctor, and I feel better already for your medicine."

"Au revoir, then, monsieur le comte! follow my prescription carefully."

"Oh! I shall take good care not to forget it."

Cherami took his leave, saying to himself:

"It can't possibly hurt him; it will warm him up a little, that's all; and he needs it, he was turning to pulp."

LIX

WHAT WAS SURE TO HAPPEN

The young widow was preparing to call on the count on the day following that on which she had sent Cherami to him, being very curious to know if he had already improved her fiancé's health, when her maid announced Monsieur de la Bérinière.

Fanny could not restrain a cry of surprise when the count entered her apartment as briskly as before his duel. It was the second day of the chartreuse treatment, and the count had taken three glasses before leaving home; that liqueur, which is really very strengthening when used with moderation, had restored his vigor; it had revived his mental powers; and Monsieur de la Bérinière, overjoyed at a change which he took as evidence of a return to his normal condition, had determined to go in person to inform the young widow of it.

Fanny expressed all the joy she felt at finding him restored to health.

"Yes, I am feeling very well," said Monsieur de la Bérinière. "My strength is coming back with a rapidity that surprises me. Would you believe, dear lady, that our good friend Monsieur Cherami is the one to whom I owe it all?"

"Can it be? Is he a doctor?"

"No; but he has a potion left him by an old cousin, which restores convalescents to full health in a twinkling. I have been taking it only two days, and I am a different man. To-morrow, Tuesday, I shall finish the bottle; and at the end of the week, I will lead you to the altar. I will make all my arrangements accordingly."

"Oh! how happy I am to have you entirely well again! You have recovered your former amiability, your merry humor."

"Yes, I have recovered a lot of things; and when I have taken the rest of my elixir, you'll have a husband of twenty-five!"

"Indeed, you seem hardly more than that to-day."

"Really, you are too kind! I preferred to come myself to tell you of this blessed change. Now I must leave you, to go to my banker's. I must make him give me a lot of money, for I propose to cover you with jewelry and fine clothes."

"Oh! monsieur le comte, don't be foolish, I beg!"

"It's not foolish, simply to try to please you. Ah! to-morrow, what quantities of things I will buy, and perhaps I shall not have the pleasure of seeing you; but expect me the day after to-morrow, about noon, with all my little gewgaws."

"You are always welcome, monsieur le comte."

Monsieur de la Bérinière took his leave after kissing the young widow's hand; while she abandoned herself without reserve to the most intense delight.

"At last," she cried, "I am going to be a countess! Oh! that Monsieur Cherami is a delightful man! And when I am a countess and have my carriage and forty thousand francs a year, which I won't lose by speculating in

stocks, then father won't think that I did wrong to refuse a second time to marry Gustave; for, in this world, it seems to me that it is one's duty to think of one's self first."

When the count woke on the third day of the new treatment, he was amazed to find that he felt almost as weak as before he began to drink the precious liquid; he did not realize that the strength which it gave him was purely artificial and vanished with the spirits which it contained. He summoned his valet, bade him give him the precious bottle, drank two glasses in quick succession, and soon felt revivified.

"I will drink it all to-day!" said the count to himself, while his valet was dressing him.—"How many more glasses are there in the bottle, François?"

"I should think there were at least six, monsieur le comte, besides the two you have drunk."

"That will make eight; but I shall be as lively as a cricket."

"Doesn't monsieur think that it may excite him too much?"

"No, no! Mere herbs! they're very strengthening! Give me a glass."

"Here it is, monsieur le comte."

"Ah! it's good! I am beginning to like it much. It's an extraordinary thing, the good it does me. I feel like pirouetting, François."

"Don't do it, monsieur; it would make you dizzy."

"Let us see: I have a lot of errands to do to-day, tradesmen to see, gifts to buy for my bride that is to be; for I am to be married on Saturday, François!"

"Indeed! so much the better, monsieur."

"I am going to make a list of the things I want to buy. I shall have a tiresome day. Give me another glass, François."

"Yes, monsieur."

"I don't know just where I shall dine to-day. I think I shall not come back here."

"At Madame Monléard's, perhaps?"

"Oh, no! that would embarrass her. I will dine at a restaurant, with the first friend I happen to meet. Have you ordered the carriage?"

"Yes, monsieur; it is waiting for you."

"I am off. Pardieu! another glass before I go."

"Monsieur is very much flushed now."

"So much the better! That's my natural color coming back. Just put the bottle in the carriage; I will finish it while I do my errands."

The count swallowed his fifth glass of chartreuse, made a demi-pirouette, and almost fell, because he was very dizzy; but his valet held him up, and he finally succeeded, after much bumping against walls, in reaching his carriage, into which he threw himself, saying:

"Deuce take me! I believe I am quite capable of climbing a greased pole!"

The day was passed by the future bridegroom in visiting emporiums of jewelry, laces, and shawls; he gave his orders, and from the multitude of those pretty trifles which are said to be necessaries of life, and with which ladies adorn their whatnots, he made a selection well calculated to flatter her who was to bear his name. This took a great deal of time, but he found leisure to finish the bottle he had brought with him; he had an unfamiliar burning sensation in his breast; he was tremendously thirsty, and said to himself:

"I will drink seltzer with my dinner."

About five o'clock, as he was leaving a famous fancy-goods shop, he spied his two seconds, Messieurs de Maugrillé and de Gervier, coming toward him arm in arm. He went forward eagerly to meet them.

"Good afternoon, messieurs! Where are you going?"

"Why, we are going to dine."

"With friends?"

"No; at the first restaurant we see, provided that it's a good one."

"Then you will give me the pleasure of dining with me; we will celebrate my recovery and my approaching marriage."

"So be it."

"Get into my carriage; we can sit close together. I will take you to Philippe's; will that suit you?"

"Perfectly; one can dine very well there."

They entered the carriage. As they drove along, Monsieur de Maugrillé glanced very often at the count. Finally, he said to him:

"Are you completely cured?"

"As you see."

"Your face seems to me very much flushed; your eyes gleam with supernatural brilliancy."

"That's the result of the medicine I have been taking; a very agreeable remedy, I give you my word."

"Something that your doctor prescribed?"

"No; I got it from my opponent, Monsieur Cherami."

"Your opponent! You have seen him again?"

"To be sure; we are the best of friends. He's a hot-head, but a very good fellow."

"Did you ask him who those two Mohicans were who acted as his seconds?"

"Yes; one was a rich landed proprietor of Auvergne, who sends water here from Mont-Dore; the other was his clerk."

"Ah, yes! the so-called Pole, Monsieur de Chamousky. I shall know those two worthies again."

They arrived at Philippe's. The count ordered a dainty dinner, with wines of the finest vintages; and as he felt very thirsty, he deemed it advisable to begin with champagne frappé. His guests celebrated the count's recovery, and drank to his future bride; Monsieur de Gervier, who was in very high spirits, insisted on drinking to Cherami's seconds, whom he felt sure of meeting some day, when he proposed to buy some Mont-Dore water of them. The count did not spare himself, but tossed off glass after glass of champagne, crying:

"This is the end of my bachelor life!"

"Be careful, my dear De la Bérinière," said Monsieur de Maugrillé; "for a convalescent, you go rather fast; you don't spare yourself at all."

"I have never felt so well."

Suddenly Monsieur de Gervier, who had gone to the window for a breath of air, burst into a roar of Homeric laughter, and shouted:

"There they are; yes, those are they; I recognize them."

"Who, pray?"

"The dealers in Mont-Dore water. Come, look at them! they're going along the street, and their cask with them."

Monsieur de Maugrillé looked out, and exclaimed in dire wrath:

"Water-carriers! they were water-carriers!"

The count, having also looked out, declared that he did not recognize them; at last, Monsieur de Gervier observed:

"Oh, well! to be sure, it isn't Mont-Dore water that they sell; but, after all, it's a kind of water that's even more indispensable. For my part, this makes the affair all the more amusing, and that duel will be one of my most delightful recollections."

Monsieur de Maugrillé made a wry face and held his peace, and the count returned to the table.

"Come, messieurs," he said, "this need not prevent our drinking to my approaching happiness; it's extraordinary how thirsty I am to-night!"

The dinner lasted until a late hour, but at last they left the table and parted: Monsieur de Gervier going to see his Dulcineas, Monsieur de Maugrillé to play his game of whist, and the count to bed; he was very tired.

It was Wednesday, and the pretty widow was awaiting all the gifts which her fiancé had promised her.

"I flatter myself that it won't be to-day as it was that other time," she thought; "I shall not wait in vain. He won't have another duel on his hands; there's nobody to challenge him now. Monsieur Cherami is on my side; he wants me to marry the count. It's strange how he has turned about; perhaps he has had a row with Gustave; the main point is that he has kept his promise; he has restored Monsieur de la Bérinière's health, and that's a service I shall not forget."

But the clock struck twelve, and one, and two; and neither the bridegroom nor his presents appeared. Fanny paced her room impatiently, muttering:

"Oh! what a bore it is to wait! It may not be the count's fault, but for some time past it has seemed as if I were destined to be vexed and thwarted all the time."

When the clock struck four, the young woman could restrain her impatience no longer.

"Justine," she said to her maid, "you must hurry to Monsieur de la Bérinière's again and find out what has happened, what prevents him from coming. I can't pass my whole life waiting for that man. Go quickly, take a cab by the hour. I am ruining myself in cabs for him; it's to be hoped that he will make it up to me."

Justine obeyed her mistress; but when she returned, it was with a woe-begone face, as before.

"Mon Dieu! what has happened now?" cried Fanny.

"Monsieur le comte returned home late last night, about ten o'clock, madame, with a violent headache; he had been dining at a restaurant. He was hardly in bed when he had an attack of fever, followed by delirium; they sent for the doctor, who said that he had indigestion, inflammation of the intestines, and also of the lungs. In fact, he's very ill."

"Oh! Justine, what an unlucky creature I am! The idea of having indigestion just when you are going to be married!"

"It's inexcusable, madame."

"And to think that it has come just when everything was ready! There are people with him, I suppose?"

"Oh! yes, madame."

"Do you think that I might go there this evening?"

"What's the use, madame, when he is delirious? He wouldn't know you."

"All right! I will go to-morrow. Ah! I am really greatly to be pitied."

Three days later, on Saturday, Cherami betook himself to Rue de la Ville-l'Évêque, to see what effect the tonic had had on the count.

"It was on Sunday that I gave it to him," he reflected; "he must be vigorous and lively now, or else he never will be."

According to his custom, Cherami did not stop to speak to the concierge; he went up to the count's reception-room, and found there the valet de chambre holding a handkerchief to his eyes.

"What's the trouble, my friend; how's your master?"

"Monsieur le comte died last night," the valet replied, with a sigh.

"Died!" cried Cherami. "What do you mean? Dead so soon! What in the devil did he die of?"

"Inflammation, indigestion. He took to his bed on Tuesday night, and the doctor said at once there was no hope."

"Poor count! Ah! that really causes me great distress.—It may be," thought Cherami, as he went away, "that we heated the oven a little too hot."

LX

THE RETURN OF ULYSSES

A month had passed since the Comte de la Bérinière's death. Was it from grief? was it from anger? Madame Monléard had shut herself up in her apartment ever since, and had been to see no one, not even her father or her sister. She must have known, however, that Adolphine would be the first to sympathize with her woes; but unfeeling persons never believe in the keen sensibility of others; and if anybody seems to pity them, they are always convinced that, in reality, that person rejoices in their misfortune. The proverb rightly says that we judge others by ourselves.

Monsieur Batonnin, who was always the first to be informed of anything that happened to disturb his friends or acquaintances, learned of the count's death very soon after it occurred, and went at once to Monsieur Gerbault's.

"Have you heard of the cruel accident, the misfortune that has befallen your elder daughter?" he said. "The Comte de la Bérinière is dead, and before he had married her."

"I should say," rejoined Monsieur Gerbault, "that the misfortune was the count's, not my daughter's."

"Oh! of course; but, after all, the count was no longer a young man; while your daughter was going to be a countess and have forty thousand francs a year; and I believe that the count agreed to make a will when he married her, making her his heir. A woman doesn't find such a husband every day."

"Monsieur Batonnin, it's a sad business to speculate on the death of the person one marries!"

"That is true, it's very sad; but still it's done."

"You may say what you please; I do not pity my daughter."

"You astonish me!"

Adolphine, finding that her sister did not come, went to see her; but the concierge always said to her: "Madame Monléard has gone out;" and the girl understood at last that her sister did not choose to see her.

One morning, Cherami was preparing to go out, when Madame Louchard came up to his room, and said, with an air of mystery:

"There's a person below who wants to know if you are visible; and I came up to make sure that you were dressed from top to toe."

"Who is this person, pray, who makes so much fuss about coming to my room?"

"A pretty young woman."

"A pretty young woman coming to call on me! Ah! my excellent hostess, methinks I have returned to the days of my early prowess!"

"I'll go and tell her to come up."

"One moment! Let me brush my hair a little, straighten the parting, and see if my whiskers are well combed."

"Look at the flirt!"

"It is never wrong to beautify one's self. Go, show this lady up. I have my cue!"

A lady of small stature, very well dressed, and of distinguished bearing, soon entered Cherami's room; when she was sure that he was alone, she raised her veil, saying:

"Good-morning, monsieur! do you recognize me?"

"God bless my soul! it's Madame Monléard, the fascinating widow. Pray be seated, fair lady; excuse me if I do not receive you in a palace, but for the moment I have only this hovel at my disposal. To what am I indebted for the honor of your visit?"

"I desired to have a little conversation with you. Such a melancholy thing has happened since we last met."

"Don't speak of it! The poor count's death upset me completely; I couldn't believe it."

"Especially as he seemed to be entirely restored to health. What was it that you gave him to take, in heaven's name?"

"Mon Dieu! just plain chartreuse—an excellent, strengthening liqueur. But it seems that he dined with two friends, that he did not spare himself, that the champagne made him ill, and——"

"Well, he's dead; we must make the best of it. But it is doubly unfortunate for me. I lose a great fortune, a title, which I had in my grasp."

"True; you lose all that!"

"And then I—I also lose—I lose—the husband with whom I broke off relations—in order to become a countess."

"True—you lose both. You are almost thrice a widow."

"And yet, it seems to me that I was excusable for being blinded for a moment by ambition. Mon Dieu! who in this world has not been? We all want to raise ourselves."

"That is the first thing to which we aspire when we are born."

"Monsieur Cherami, are you still on friendly terms with Gustave?"

"With Gustave? Oh! ours is a friendship for life and death; there will never be any break in our friendship. He's a man for whom I would throw myself into the fire."

"Ah! that is very fine. And tell me, do you know whether he will return to Paris soon?"

"Hum! I see what you are driving at!" thought Cherami, stroking his whiskers.

"Why, no, I don't," he replied. "According to what I learned at his uncle's house, it seems that Gustave, instead of returning to France, is going to Russia, where he will probably stay a long time—perhaps a year or two—or four."

Fanny made a gesture of disgust.

"What an idea! To go to Russia, where you freeze all the time! When one can be so comfortable in France—especially in Paris!"

"Oh! I beg your pardon; the women in Russia aren't frozen. It seems that there are some very pretty ones there, and some immensely rich! Gustave is a good-looking fellow, he'll turn some high-born damsel's head there, and make a marriage set in diamonds."

The little widow rose abruptly, lowered her veil, and said:

"Adieu, Monsieur Cherami! I must leave you."

"What! already? Had madame nothing else to say to me?"

"No. Frankly, I came because I wanted to learn something about Gustave; but what you have told me——However, perhaps he will change his mind; he won't stay in Russia, he'll be bored to death there. In any event, if you learn anything about him, if you find out just where he is, it will be very good of you to let me know."

"Madame, I shall always be delighted to be able to gratify you."

"Adieu, Monsieur Cherami!"

Cherami looked after Fanny as she went away, saying to himself:

"I think I see myself telling her where Gustave is, even if I knew! I believe, God bless me! that she is inclined to go after him, that she hopes to catch him in her net again! Gad! he must either be stupid or bewitched. But there are some men, men of intelligence, too, whom love makes as stupid as earthen pots. I lied to the little widow when I told her that Gustave was going to Russia. On the contrary, when I went to ask about him, the day before yesterday, the concierge, who knows me now, told me that he expected him in a few days. Par la sambleu! I guess I'll go again; he may have come."

Cherami lost no time in making his way to the banker's house, where the concierge said to him:

"Monsieur Gustave Darlemont returned yesterday; he's at home."

Thereupon our friend scaled the stairs; in a few seconds he was at his young friend's door, and began by throwing himself into his arms. That first outburst of emotion passed, Cherami looked at Gustave and suddenly ejaculated:

"Ten thousand devils! What does that mean?"

That exclamation was drawn from him by the sight of a great scar, which started from the young man's forehead, crossed his left eyebrow, and came to an end at the lower part of the cheek.

"That?" replied Gustave, with a smile. "That is the result of a duel with swords with an Irish officer. You fought my battles here, my dear Cherami; the least I could do was to look after my own affairs across the channel."

"What! have you heard? But let me embrace you again! That scar is tremendously becoming to you, and I am delighted that you have had this duel, in which your adversary evidently didn't fight with a dead arm. Damnation! what a slash!—Ah! people won't say now that I fight instead of you; this will put a stopper on all the sneering tongues. But what did you fight about?"

"It was the sequel of a breakfast party of artists, business men, and this one Irish officer. We had plenty to eat and drink. The conversation fell on women, that inexhaustible subject of conversation among young men; I said that the French women, even those who were least pretty, always outdid the women of other countries in dress and carriage; thereupon the Irishman lost his temper, and called me a greenhorn. I threw my napkin in his face; after that, a duel with swords—that was the weapon chosen by my adversary; and this wound healed very slowly and kept me in bed six weeks; otherwise, I should have come home long ago."

"Dear Gustave! Ah! what a noble scar! It is very becoming, and I congratulate you again."

"But I have no congratulations for you, but reproaches! Pray tell me why you challenged that poor Comte de la Bérinière? what had he done to you?"

"Nothing, to me; but he had done something to you, having stolen your promised bride from you."

"Oh! my friend, if you reflect a moment, you certainly must feel that, on the contrary, he did me a very great service. But for him, I should have married a woman who never had the slightest affection for me, and who did not hesitate to toss me aside like a coat which you discard when you see an opportunity to get a handsomer one at the same price. That woman, who, as a reward of my constancy and the suffering she had caused me, did not hesitate to be a traitor to me a second time! Ah! my friend, I know her now, and I appreciate her at her real worth. A hard, selfish heart, overflowing with vanity, caring for nothing but money, recognizing no merit except that of wealth, incapable of the slightest sacrifice for others, and considering that everything is rightfully due to her. That's the kind of wife I should have had! Should I not be profoundly grateful to the man who was the cause of my rupture with her?"

"Is it really you that I am listening to, Gustave? You, talking in this strain of Fanny? Why, then you must be cured at last of your passion for her?"

"Oh, yes! radically cured; indeed, Cherami, what would you think of me if I still loved her after her last outrage?"

"I should think that she had cast a spell on you, although I haven't much belief in magic. But you have ceased to love her, that's the main point. You know that the poor count died before he had married her? but not of his wound; he had an attack of indigestion."

"It is very unfortunate for her; but I confess that I don't pity her."

"There is one thing that you don't suspect—that she is now contemplating running after you."

"Let her run, my dear fellow; I promise you that she will never catch me."

"You are quite sure of yourself?"

"Oh, yes! perfectly sure."

"You see, she is a damnably shrewd little wheedler, is the widow! I should feel surer of you if you loved somebody else."

"Somebody else! You must admit, Cherami, that my love for Fanny hasn't resulted in a way to encourage me."

"All women are not Fannys; there are some who are tender-hearted, sweet, affectionate; who would be so happy to be loved by you."

"Happy to be loved by me! What, in heaven's name, makes you think so?"

"I think so—because I am sure of it."

"You are sure that there is someone who would love me?"

"Oh! better than that; I am sure that someone does love you—cherishes a secret passion for you—a sentiment which she has always hidden, kept locked up in the depths of her heart; because it was hopeless, because she was simply the confidante of your love for another."

"Mon Dieu! what do you mean?" cried Gustave, as if his eyes were suddenly opened; "you think that Adolphine——"

"Ah! you have guessed—so much the better; that proves that you had thought of the thing before."

"No, indeed. What makes you think that Adolphine ever gives me a thought?"

"If you hadn't been in love with another woman, you would have discovered it yourself long ago. I had already guessed it from a multitude of little things: the way she looked at you—for a woman doesn't look at the man that she loves in the same way as at other men; I have studied that subject; but what proved conclusively to me that she loved you was what happened when I went to Monsieur Gerbault's to tell him of poor Auguste's unhappy end. I was embarrassed about telling the story, and I didn't make my meaning clear; Mademoiselle Adolphine thought that it was your death I was trying to tell them of. Instantly she gave a shriek of despair, and fainted; we had a great deal of difficulty in reviving her, and I had to keep saying again and again: 'It isn't Gustave who is dead!' before she recovered her senses. So that I whispered to myself: 'It's this one, and not the other, who cares for my young friend;' and I have a shrewd idea that Papa Gerbault reasoned just as I did."

"Why did you never tell me all this, Cherami?"

"Because it wasn't worth while to sing a pretty tune to a deaf man; you were daft then over your Fanny, you wouldn't have listened to me."

"Thanks, my friend, thank you for having observed it all. You cannot conceive the emotion it causes me."

"Why, yes, it's always pleasant to know that one has turned the head of a pretty young girl."

"Poor Adolphine! If it were true! If she really does love me!"

"Why, think of all the offers she has refused! I think I have heard that the count himself wanted to marry her; and a Monsieur de Raincy, and many more. What reason had she for refusing everybody who came forward, if she hadn't love for somebody in her heart? and that somebody was you—and yet she had no hope of marrying you. Oh! what a difference between her and her sister! Well, I've told you what I had to tell you; now, you may act as you please.—But, at all events, you are back again. I trust that you're not going to start off to-morrow?"

"Oh! I shall not go away again; I've had enough of travelling; I am going to settle down in Paris now."

"Good! *vive la joie!* But do you know that your uncle is still unrelenting to me? He received me very coldly when I asked him for employment."

"Never fear, my friend; I am here now, I will look about for you, and we will arrange all that."

"Very good; I will go, for you must have much to do; when shall I see you again?"

"Come in a few days, and I will tell you—yes, I will tell you what I have done."

"Agreed. Au revoir! My friend has returned; I have my cue!"

LXI

LOVE REWARDED

Gustave remained for a long time buried in thought; what Cherami had said to him on the subject of Adolphine had moved him profoundly. With a heart so easily touched, a heart made to love, Gustave had as yet met with nothing but falsehood and perfidy. He remembered now a thousand occasions on which Fanny's sister had shown the deepest interest in him; she was always kind to him, always had some consolation to give him; he recalled, too, her habitual melancholy, her sad smile, and the sighs which she tried in vain to restrain when he held her hand. Having passed in review all these memories, the young man hastily left the house, saying to himself:

"I will go to see her; I will read in her eyes whether she really loves me."

Adolphine was in her room, working at her embroidery frame; Madeleine was hovering about her mistress, pretending to arrange the furniture. Madeleine was an excellent girl, who had divined that her mistress was in love. She had noticed that she never smiled or seemed happy, except when Gustave came to see her; but she had heard it said that he was going to marry her mistress's sister, whereupon Adolphine had become more melancholy than ever. Later, it was said that the marriage was broken off, and yet Adolphine never

smiled; to be sure, the young man who always brought a smile to her lips had ceased to come.

Madeleine would have been glad to have her young mistress confide her secret to her; but she confined in the lowest depths of her heart a passion which she believed to be well hidden. However, the maid succeeded occasionally, by dint of beating about the bush, in extorting a few words, which she made the most of.

"Mamzelle," said Madeleine, "isn't it very strange that madame your sister never comes to see you now?"

"My father was angry with her, you know."

"That didn't prevent her coming here when she wanted to find out who had had the audacity to fight with her count. She was sure it was Monsieur Gustave. But you told her she was mistaken, and you were right. Why should Monsieur Gustave fight for her, I should like to know, when she keeps making sport of him? A man doesn't fight, except for a person he loves; and I am very sure, for my part, that Monsieur Gustave never gives your sister a thought now."

"You think not, Madeleine?"

This question was asked with an eagerness which would have betrayed Adolphine's secret, if her maid had not already guessed it.

"But Fanny isn't married!" murmured Adolphine sadly, a moment later.

"Well, mamzelle, for my part, I am glad of it! She'd have kicked up altogether too much dust if she had been a countess."

"But when will Gustave come back?"

"Why, you don't suppose that he will still want to marry your sister, do you?"

"Why not? He loved her so much!"

"Well, I'll bet that he won't. Think of it, mamzelle, after two such affronts as that! for you told me it was the second time she had broken with him. Why, he would have to be a downright fool for that. Is Monsieur Gustave a fool?"

"Oh, no! far from it."

"Well, then——"

At that moment the bell rang; Adolphine started, without knowing why, and Madeleine cried:

"There, suppose it was him? Speak of the devil——"

It was, in fact, Gustave, and Madeleine's face was wreathed in smiles when she announced him to her mistress. The young man entered with more or less embarrassment, caused by Cherami's disclosures. But Adolphine held out her hand, and he pressed it in his with such force that the girl was deeply moved; for Gustave had never manifested so much pleasure at sight of her.

In a moment she spied the scar, and exclaimed in dismay:

"Mon Dieu! Monsieur Gustave, you are wounded!"

"No; it is all healed."

"But you surely have been terribly wounded. What was it?"

"A sword-cut."

"You have had a duel?"

"Yes, with an Irish officer. I was in London then."

"And why? For—whom did you fight?"

"Oh! it was for a mere trifle. A quarrel following a hearty breakfast."

"Mon Dieu! if you had been killed!"

"I shouldn't be with you now."

"Was the wound serious?"

"Yes, it kept me housed six weeks. But for that, I should have been at home more than a month ago."

"More than a month! Ah! then you were anxious to return at once as soon as you learned—what had happened?"

"What do you mean?"

"Why, the thing that caused—oh! surely you know?"

"No, I do not know. I intended to return, because I had finished my uncle's business, because I was horribly bored in England, and because I had no reason for staying away from Paris any longer."

"Was that all?"

"To be sure. What other reason are you thinking of, pray?"

"Don't you know that the Comte de la Bérinière is dead?"

"Certainly I know it."

"And that he died before he had married my sister?"

"I know all that."

"You do? and that wasn't what brought you home?"

"Oh! mademoiselle, is it possible that you think that I can love your sister still! Oh, no! you cannot think it, for you would despise me if you had such an opinion of me as that."

"What! can it be possible? Gustave, Monsieur Gustave, you no longer love my sister? Oh! what joy! Mon Dieu! I don't know what I am saying. I mean that I think you will be happier now; and you have been sad and unhappy so long!"

"Yes, for a long, long time. And don't you think that I deserve to be rewarded for my constancy by finding at last a heart that does understand me, a woman who has—a little love for me?"

"A little? Oh! you will find one who loves you dearly! At least, I should think so, because you deserve it so

well!"

"Dear Adolphine! Oh! I beg your pardon, mademoiselle, for presuming still to address you in that way."

"Why, it doesn't offend me—far from it."

"You have always been so kind to me! If you knew what pleasure it gives me at this moment to be sitting beside you again, looking at you, and reading what is written in your lovely, soft eyes! Oh! do not look away! Let me seek in them the hope of a sincere affection and an untroubled happiness!"

"Oh! mon Dieu! you make me tremble. Oh! pray don't say such things to me, if you don't mean them; for, you see, I too have been unhappy for such a long time! I have suffered in silence; for I dared not avow my sentiments; and I had to look on at the happiness of another, who was loved, adored, although she did not deserve such good-fortune; and I—I had to conceal all that I felt!"

Gustave seized Adolphine's hands and fell at her feet.

"Then it is true!" he cried; "you do love me? Ah! my whole life will be too short to pay you for this love! How many days of happiness I owe you in exchange for the torments I have caused you!"

"But it wasn't your fault, Gustave; you could not guess that I loved you. Besides, you loved my sister then; but now you don't love her any more, do you? Oh! tell me again that you don't love her!"

"As if it were possible for me to love her! Ah! my heart does not divide its allegiance, and now it is yours, yours only!"

"Mon Dieu! I must be dreaming, I am so happy!—Madeleine! Madeleine! come here! It is I whom he loves, it is I whom he wants to marry—and he knows that I will never refuse him!"

Madeleine was not far away. Servants are never far from people who are talking. She came skipping into the room like a crazy person, for she was really happy in her mistress's happiness.

"We were just talking about you when you came, monsieur," she said to Gustave; "I often talk about you to mamzelle, because I have found that that's the best way to make her listen to me. *Dame!* I'm from the country, but I guessed, all the same, what made mamzelle so sad; and now I'm sure that she'll be happy like me! and that she'll sing and dance like me!"

Monsieur Gerbault's arrival put an end to Madeleine's antics. He was surprised, as usual, to find Gustave in his house; but he was especially impressed on this occasion by the joy and happiness which he read on every face.

"Bless my soul!" he said, shaking hands with Gustave; "are you just back from the war, my friend? At all events, you have received a wound which proves that you don't turn your back on the foe."

"No, monsieur; it's the result of a duel. I am not quarrelsome, as you know, but a man cannot always be sure of himself."

"Have you returned to Paris for some time?"

"For always! I have no further desire to travel. My uncle, who is good enough to say that I understand the business very well, told me yesterday that he would make me his partner."

"The deuce! that's very nice, indeed; for your uncle's business is very extensive, I believe?"

"His profits never fall below sixty thousand francs a year."

"Of which you will have half. That makes you a rich *parti!*—Talking of *partis*, Adolphine, I have another one to propose to you; and this time perhaps you will accept, for you surely don't intend to die an old maid."

Adolphine looked anxiously at her father; Gustave himself had a vague feeling of apprehension. Monsieur Gerbault eyed them both with a sly expression, and continued:

"Yes, my child; a new suitor has come forward. He will never see twenty-five again, and he is not very rich; but he has a competence and an honorable position in society. It is Monsieur Batonnin."

"Monsieur Batonnin! Oh! I won't marry him. I won't marry anybody—that is to say—any of those who——"

Gustave made haste to interrupt Adolphine, and, going up to Monsieur Gerbault, said to him with the utmost seriousness:

"Monsieur, a long time ago I was to have been your son-in-law. Circumstances prevented it, and, if I must confess it, I think that I have every reason to thank destiny therefor. To-day, I come once more to ask your permission to become a member of your family. Mademoiselle Adolphine has consented to be my wife, and something tells me that she will not retract her word."

"Yes, father, yes.—Oh! I can't refuse Gustave. And you are willing that he should be my husband, aren't you?"

"Especially," replied Monsieur Gerbault, as he embraced his daughter, "especially as you have loved him for a long time!"

"What, father! you knew it? How strange! I never told anyone my secret."

"But a father's eyes are sharp-sighted, dear heart; and now I trust that you will recover your good spirits."

"Oh! father, I am so happy!"

"Take her, Gustave; she will not throw you over for another man. For, even when she could not possibly hope to be your wife, she refused all offers in order to be at liberty to love you. As for Monsieur Batonnin, I was sure beforehand of your reply; but, in order to soften your refusal, I will tell him that he came too late, because you are going to marry Gustave."

LXII

TERTIA SOLVET

The marriage of Gustave and Adolphine had been decided for four days; and as they were in great haste to

be united and to make sure at last of a happiness which had constantly eluded the grasp of one, and which the other had never hoped to attain, they were hurrying forward the indispensable preliminaries to the celebration of their union.

Monsieur Grandcourt did not make a wry face when his nephew told him of the new choice he had made; on the contrary, he congratulated him.

"That one is all right," he said; "she's a charming girl, with all the good qualities which her sister lacks; therefore, she has a great many."

More than once, while her young mistress was trying on the gowns and jewels which were brought to her, Madeleine cried:

"Oh! mamzelle, how lovely you will look as a bride! But there's your sister! When she knows who you're going to marry, won't she make a row?"

"Hush, Madeleine, don't talk about my sister! I have a sort of feeling that she is going to interfere with my happiness again."

"Nonsense! There's no danger of that, mamzelle; I'll answer for Monsieur Gustave!"

They were conversing one morning in this same strain, when someone rang the doorbell violently.

"Mon Dieu! if it were she!" exclaimed Adolphine.

"Your sister? Well, if it is, she won't eat us."

It proved to be Fanny, who entered her sister's room with an insolent air, crying:

"What does this mean? Who ever heard of such a thing? Monsieur Gustave in Paris a whole week, I hear, and no one lets me know! And that tall scamp of a Cherami assured me that he was going to Russia! Ah! I'll fix him when I see him! Haven't you seen Gustave? Hasn't he been here?"

"Why, yes," Adolphine replied, trying to conceal her emotion, "he has been here. He comes every day."

"And you couldn't send me word?"

"I have been to your house several times. You are always out."

"You might have written me a line."

"But I could not guess that you were so anxious to see Gustave, after your treatment of him."

"Oh! my dear girl, I beg you not to bore me by going all over that! What has passed is a dream; but what has not been done may still be done."

"I don't understand you."

"I understand myself, and that's enough. How is Gustave now? still sad and depressed?"

"Oh! not at all. He is cheerful and light-hearted; he's not the same man. You wouldn't recognize him."

"Indeed! he's cheerful, is he?"

"And then, he has a beautiful scar across his face; it gives him a martial air, it's very becoming to him."

"Perhaps that is what makes his spirits so good. So he has been fighting duels, has he?"

"Yes, with an Irish officer."

"Everybody seems to be duelling, nowadays! He must have wanted to follow his friend Cherami's example. What about his business?"

"His uncle has just made him his partner. Gustave will have at least forty thousand francs a year for his share."

"Is it possible! he's a lucky fellow! And he's been in Paris a week, and I had no idea of it! Hallo! everything seems to be topsy-turvy here! Have you been buying all these things?"

"Yes."

"Are you going to a ball?"

"Better than that: I am going to a wedding."

"To a wedding! and I am not invited! Who's to be married, pray?"

Adolphine was hesitating over her reply, when the door opened and Gustave appeared. When she saw the man whom she had twice promised to marry, Fanny dropped into an easy-chair, threw back her head, and pretended to faint. Adolphine became deathly pale; but a glance from Gustave reassured her. He went to her side, took her hand, and pressed it affectionately in his.

Fanny, seeing that nobody thought of coming to her assistance, decided to recover; so she straightened herself up, and said in a tremulous voice:

"Ah! mon Dieu! Monsieur Gustave, your presence caused me such a thrill of emotion! I almost fainted."

Gustave bowed gravely to Fanny, saying, in an indifferent tone:

"Madame is well, I trust?"

"Why, no, I have been ill, I have suffered a great deal. You must find me changed, do you not?"

"I fancy we shall have fine weather to-day," said Gustave, turning to Adolphine, who whispered:

"She knows nothing."

"Very well! we will give her a surprise."

"What does this mean? He doesn't listen to me," thought Fanny.

She sprang to her feet and went up to the young man, saying:

"I have a great deal to say to you, monsieur. I have some important explanations to make to you. I hope that you will be kind enough to escort me home, where we can talk without disturbing anyone."

Adolphine clung to Gustave's arm, as he replied with perfect tranquillity:

"Madame, I am very sorry to refuse; but I have determined never to enter your house again, and I do not require any explanation."

The little widow bit her lips in her wrath, while Adolphine breathed more freely.

"What, monsieur! Do you mean that you are afraid to come to my house?" said Fanny, trying to smile.

"I know very well, madame, that I have nothing to fear from your presence now. But I have no reason for calling upon you. Allow me to say, further, that I have every reason to be surprised at your invitation."

Fanny paced the floor, with every indication of the most intense annoyance; at last she returned to Gustave, and said in a determined tone:

"I tell you again, monsieur, that I must speak to you alone, that I have some things to make known to you, which I can tell only to you. As you absolutely refuse to come to my house, I will speak to you here. My sister will be good enough, I trust, to leave us for a moment.—Oh! I will not abuse monsieur's good-nature."

Adolphine was sorely disturbed; she seemed not at all inclined to leave her sister alone with Gustave; but he took her hand and put it to his lips, saying:

"Since madame insists upon it, go, my dear Adolphine; but don't go far, for our interview will not be a long one."

"How gallant he is to my sister!" said Fanny to herself, as Gustave escorted Adolphine to the door. "Well! we'll see about it!"

"We are alone, madame, and I am listening," said Gustave.

Instantly Fanny threw herself at the young man's feet, crying in a tone which she tried to make heart-rending:

"Gustave! forgive me! Oh! in pity's name, forgive me, or I shall die here at your feet!"

"Rise, madame, I beg; I do not understand this scene at all."

"Ah! you do not choose to understand me; but I will not shrink from accusing myself! Yes, I was guilty, very guilty! Ambition, the longing to bear a title, had turned my head. I did not know what I was doing; I was mad. You must know that it was not love which attracted me to the count. Poor man! No, I have never loved but one man, and that man—was you; yes, you—despite my idiotic conduct. And then—I don't know—but the last time that you found fault with me, it seemed to me that you were jealous. I am too sensitive; I lost my temper all of a sudden. But, I tell you again, I didn't know what I was doing! Gustave! my dear Gustave! I will not rise until you have granted my pardon!"

"Have you said all that you have to say, madame?" rejoined Gustave, with a calmness which disconcerted the little widow and induced her to rise.

"Yes, of course. I think that I have fully expressed my regret and my remorse, at least."

"Very well, madame, your wish is gratified; I forgive you—all the more freely, because, by not marrying me, you actually did me a very great service."

"What do you mean by that, monsieur? Surely that answer of yours is far from gallant."

"Oh! madame, you have given me the right not to be gallant to you. Observe that I am not reproaching you; God forbid! But, frankly, you might well have spared yourself this last comedy. I can understand that you must have a very poor opinion of my sense—I have given you the right. But, after all, there are bounds to everything; and I didn't suppose that you considered me an absolute idiot. It seems that I flattered myself too much."

"What do you mean by *comedy*, monsieur? What is the significance of this tone, this satirical air?"

"Oh! let us not lose patience, madame; and to put an end to the discussion, allow me to present my wife."

As he spoke, Gustave stepped to the door and opened it. Adolphine appeared with a radiant face, for she had heard every word. She gave her hand to Gustave, and they both bowed to the little widow, who became white, red, and green, in turn, and who cried at last:

"Ah! so you are to marry my sister! I might have suspected as much! As you please, monsieur. In fact, you will suit each other admirably. Accept my congratulations."

"Won't you come to my wedding, Fanny?" said Adolphine, offering her sister her hand.

"Go to the devil!" she retorted, pushing the hand away. And she rushed from the room, exclaiming: "I'd much rather you would marry him than I, for I think the fellow's perfectly frightful with his scar!"

On returning home from Monsieur Gerbault's, Gustave found Cherami waiting for him.

"Well! how is everything?" inquired Beau Arthur, when Gustave appeared. "Simply by looking at you, my dear fellow, I can see that everything is satisfactory."

The young man replied by throwing his arms about Cherami and crying:

"Ah! you had guessed right. Adolphine loved me; Adolphine still loves me. In three days she will be my wife, and I shall owe my happiness to you; for without you I should never have discovered her secret."

"What a charming fellow! He will be persuading me that he is the one who owes me gratitude! Dear Gustave! so at last you are going to be as happy as you deserve! Par la sambleu! I am satisfied! I may fairly say that I have my cue! And the uncle?"

"My uncle doesn't laugh at my love now; on the contrary, he approves my choice."

"He's a man of sense."

"He has taken me into partnership."

"Bravo!"

"And now, as you may imagine, I am going to look out for you. You must have a lucrative and agreeable place."

"Get married first! you can attend to me afterward."

"No. I have an idea that I want to suggest to my uncle."

"Your uncle thinks that I am not good for anything."

"He'll get over his prejudice. I am going to talk with him about you this very day. Come again, about noon,

to-morrow; I shall have a favorable answer for you, I am sure."

"All right; noon to-morrow. Here, or at your office?"

"At my office. By the way, I have changed my office. You pass my uncle's private room, go to the end of a long corridor leading to the cashier's office; turn to the left, and my door is in front of you."

"Very good: a long corridor, then turn to the left. I will find it. Until to-morrow, my dear Gustave! By the way, shall I be invited to the wedding?"

"Will you be? you, who made the match! You, who called my attention to that angel, whom my idiotic passion had hidden from me! Why, if you were not there, something would be lacking in my happiness."

"Ah! that's very prettily said! Never fear; I will do you honor, and I will make myself agreeable to everybody."

LXIII

THE PORTFOLIO

As soon as Cherami had left him, Gustave went to Monsieur Grandcourt.

"Now that I am to be married, my dear uncle," he said, "you can understand that I don't care about travelling any more. But, in our business, we always need someone to represent us in foreign countries. Wouldn't it be possible——"

"I see what you are coming at," interrupted the banker, shaking his head; "you are going to talk to me again about your Monsieur Cherami."

"Well, yes. Am I wrong about it; hasn't he given me proof enough of his friendship and his devotion? He had shrewdly guessed that Adolphine loved me."

"Why didn't he tell you sooner, then?"

"Would I have listened to him?—Come, uncle, you are so good to me! You overwhelm me with kindness. You give me an interest in your business. Will you do nothing for a man who is my friend? He was wild and dissipated in his youth; now he has reformed."

"Where's the proof of it?"

"Why, his most earnest desire is to find a place; and I assure you that he is capable of filling it."

"I don't doubt that. The fellow is intelligent and talented, and has excellent manners when he chooses, but ——"

"But what?"

"Well, he doesn't inspire me with confidence; and, to represent us, we must have a man of honor, above all things."

"You have an erroneous opinion of Cherami. He may have borrowed money, have incurred debts which he hasn't paid, but solely from lack of means. In a word, he has been very unfortunate. Do you impute it to him as a crime that he has endured poverty cheerfully, and has had confidence in the future? Poor fellow! And I led him to hope for a favorable answer, and told him to come here for it to-morrow!"

Monsieur Grandcourt made no reply; he seemed to be lost in thought. Gustave was distressed by the ill-success of his attempt. Suddenly his uncle exclaimed:

"Did you say that Monsieur Cherami was to come here to see you to-morrow?"

"Yes, uncle."

"Where are you to meet him, in your room or your office?"

"At my office."

"Did you indicate to him exactly that he was to follow the corridor, then turn to the left?"

"Yes, uncle."

"At what time is he to be here?"

"At noon. He will be prompt; he never fails to keep an appointment."

"Very well; about two o'clock to-morrow, I will give you a definite answer on the subject of your protégé."

"And it will be favorable, will it not, uncle?"

"I can't tell you yet. By the way, I shall be obliged to you if you will not be in your office at noon."

"Not be there, uncle? But Cherami is coming!"

"Don't be disturbed about that; that's my affair. Go to pass the morning with your fiancée."

"Oh! I ask nothing better."

"And return about two o'clock. I will tell you then my decision as to Monsieur Cherami."

The clock had just struck twelve when Cherami entered the banking-house on the following day. He cherished no vain hopes; he did not anticipate a favorable reply; but, with his customary philosophy, he said to himself:

"That won't prevent me from going to Gustave's wedding and enjoying myself."

As he was perfectly familiar with the way to the offices, Cherami entered the vestibule on the street floor; at the right was a door leading to the general offices, and in front, the door of a long corridor on which several other doors opened. That was the corridor he was to take to reach Gustave's office. Cherami passed through the door and walked straight ahead. He had just passed Monsieur Grandcourt's private office, when his foot struck something of considerable size; he stooped, looked to see what it was, and picked up a portfolio.

His first impulse was to examine what he had found. It was a very simple portfolio, of green morocco, with

no monogram or initials; but in one of the compartments was a thick package of banknotes. Cherami counted them; they amounted to twenty-five thousand francs. He looked through all the other compartments, but found no letters, no papers, nothing to tell him to whom it belonged.

"Par la sambleu! this is a find!" said Cherami to himself. "Twenty-five thousand francs! A very pretty little sum! Who can have lost it? I don't see anybody; but I mustn't forget that Gustave is waiting for me."

He put the portfolio in his pocket, and kept on to the end of the corridor; then turned to the left, took another short corridor, saw a door in front of him, and turned the knob; but the door did not open.

"What's this? locked? Yes, it is locked," said Cherami to himself. "Gustave must have forgotten the appointment. When he's just on the brink of matrimony, it's quite excusable. I may as well go. But that portfolio? Let's go and inquire at the cashier's office."

The counting-room was at the end of the long corridor. Cherami had passed it once without noticing that it was closed: it was Sunday, a holiday.

But as he turned back toward the door of the counting-room, Cherami exclaimed:

"Upon my word! everything is closed to-day! It's very strange! One would say that circumstances conspired to enable me to appropriate this portfolio with impunity!"

He walked back along the corridor as far as the banker's door; there he halted, saying:

"Let's see if this one is locked, too."

But that door yielded to his pressure, and Cherami found Monsieur Grandcourt in his usual seat. He could not master a slight movement as Cherami appeared, but he instantly repressed it, and greeted him with the customary cool nod, and without rising.

"I have come once more to bore you, monsieur," said his visitor; "I had no intention of doing so, however; but Gustave made an appointment with me for this noon, and I do not find him."

"I don't know where he is, monsieur."

"He was to give me an answer about—about something. I can guess that he had nothing favorable to tell me; that is why he is not here."

"In that case, monsieur, what do you want of me?"

"Oh! mon Dieu! nothing, except to hand you this portfolio, which I found in your corridor; and as the person who lost it will probably come here in search of it, you will please return it to him. If I had found anybody in the counting-room, I would not have disturbed you, I promise you!"

As he spoke, Cherami took the portfolio from his pocket and placed it on the banker's desk. The latter's expression had changed completely; the liveliest satisfaction was depicted on every feature. However, he strove to conceal his pleasure, as he said:

"Aha! you found this, you say—near here?"

"In the corridor. I knocked at several doors, but they are all locked."

"Do you know what it contains?"

"Yes; twenty-five thousand francs in banknotes. Count them, and you will see. Nothing else: no letters, no address, nothing to indicate to whom it belongs."

"Do you know, monsieur, that this is very well done of you?" said Monsieur Grandcourt, turning to Cherami, and looking at him for the first time with a kindly expression.

"Well done of me! because I return a portfolio that I found? Tell me, in God's name, did you take me for a thief, for a man who keeps what doesn't belong to him? Sapristi! I don't propose that people shall hold that opinion of me, and you must——"

"Come, come! cool down, hot-head! I haven't a bad opinion of you. Do you propose to pick a quarrel with me?"

"You seem surprised that I do a perfectly simple thing—that I am honest!"

"Let us forget that.—Now, do you care to accept the position of our travelling man? The duties are simply to go to see our correspondents abroad, and keep us informed as to their orders. As you see, it's by no means an unpleasant post. We will give you six thousand francs a year and all your expenses paid. Does that suit you?"

"Does it suit me! why, it delights me beyond words! Dear uncle of my friend! Permit me—no, it's foolish for men to kiss—give me your hand, that's better."

"There it is, Monsieur Cherami; and henceforth you can number me among your true friends."

"Their number isn't very great: you and Gustave, that's all."

"Permit me also to advance you two thousand francs on your salary; you may have purchases to make, some troublesome little debts to pay."

"Faith! I have, indeed. I will pay Capucine and Blanquette, two creditors of long standing, who have not been very troublesome. I am sure that they were never anxious; but they have waited long enough. This evening, I will send them what I owe them. They will be surprised; but they'll take it."

A few days later, Gustave married Adolphine, who obtained at last the reward of the sincere and devoted love which she had hidden so long in the bottom of her heart.

Fanny never saw her sister after she became Gustave's wife. The little widow could not forgive herself for having refused a man who eventually had more than forty thousand francs a year; especially as nobody else came forward to take his place.

Monsieur Batonnin was greatly vexed by the rejection of his hand. When he learned that it was Gustave who was preferred to him, he was tempted to make ill-natured remarks, because he, in common with many others, thought that Gustave must be a coward, as he allowed Cherami to fight for him. But when he came face to face with Adolphine's beloved, when he saw the scar of the famous sword-cut, Monsieur Batonnin became smiling and soft-spoken once more, and congratulated Gustave on his new choice.

Some months after Gustave's marriage, Cherami, who had become a dandy once more in respect to dress, happening to pass the omnibus office near Porte Saint-Martin, met Madame Capucine and her two boys. He greeted the corpulent dame cordially, saying:

"Do you happen to be going to your aunt's again? But, no; this isn't the direction."

"Excuse me; she isn't at Saint-Mandé now, she's gone back to Romainville; she feels better there."

"Does she eat as many rabbits?"

"No, too many were stolen; she got sick of 'em."

"Then, I will call again to see dear Madame Duponceau."

"Oh! yes, as you did before; when you leave the house, that's the last we see of you. Come now, with us."

"I can't possibly to-day; I see two young ladies yonder looking for me."

Cherami had caught sight of Mesdemoiselles Laurette and Lucie at the corner of the boulevard, where they had stopped to stare at him, and were saying to each other:

"Is it really him? How finely he's dressed now!"

"Yes, it certainly is him. Don't you see, his nose is still crooked."

"But now he's dressed so fine, that don't look very bad; he has a very stylish air, I tell you."

Cherami approached the two friends, and saluted them with a gracious bow, saying:

"Really, this square is very good to me; for I remember, mesdemoiselles, that it was in front of this same omnibus office that I first had the pleasure of seeing you."

"That is true, monsieur; but we are still simple working-girls, while you, monsieur, you seem to have made your fortune."

"No, mesdemoiselles; I haven't made my fortune. I have just straightened myself out, reformed a bit, and I have found a place which I am determined to fill satisfactorily. Twice before, when I met you, I invited you to dine; and I should have been sadly embarrassed if you had accepted, for I hadn't a sou in my pocket. To-day, my pocket is well lined, and yet I shall not repeat my invitation, because I represent the firm of Grandcourt & Nephew, and, as such representative, I have determined to change my mode of life. But that will not prevent me from offering each of you a bouquet, for the most virtuous man is always at liberty to be gallant."

With that, Cherami purchased, from a flower-girl at the corner, two superb bouquets, which he bestowed upon Mesdemoiselles Laurette and Lucie. Then he saluted them anew and took his leave of them, saying to himself:

"I behaved like Cato! And I am the more inclined to congratulate myself, because, in my new lodgings on Rue de Richelieu, I have, on the same floor, a charming neighbor—well dressed, with a distinguished air—a widow with a modest competence—who has responded to my salutations with the most gracious smiles; and, faith! I have my cue!"

FOOTNOTES:

[A] Chienlit is the equivalent of the gibing expression "shirt hanging out" used by urchins among ourselves. It also signifies the strip of paper surreptitiously fastened to the clothes to render a person a laughing-stock; or, again, it alludes to the eccentric fashions of certain Carnival masqueraders.

[B] *Cher ami* means "dear friend."

[C] Blanquette, in its culinary acceptation, signifies a "ragout."

[D] "Woman is forever changing, and he is a great fool who trusts her."

[E] Vous me faites suer; literally, "you make me sweat," which explains Cherami's retort.

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