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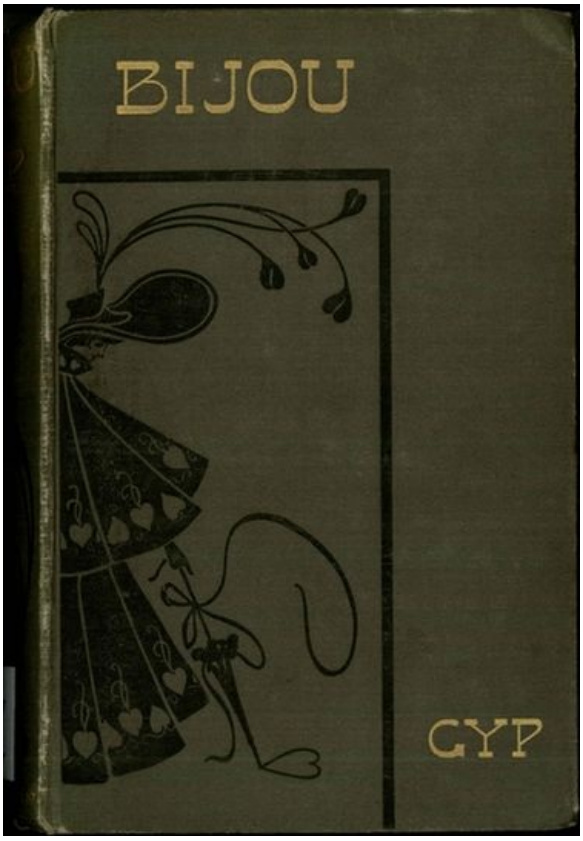

BIJOU

BY

GYP

TRANSLATED
BY

ALYS HALLARD.

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BIJOU.

[1]

I.

Madame de Bracieux was working for her poor people. She poked her thick, light, tortoise-shell crochet-needle into the ball of coarse wool, and putting that down on her lap, lifted her head and looked across at her great-nephew, Jean de Blaye.

"Jean," she said, "what are you gazing at that is so interesting? You stand there with your nose flattened against the window-pane, just exactly as you did when you were a little boy, and were so insufferable."

Jean de Blaye lifted his head abruptly. He had been leaning his forehead against the glass of the bay-window.

"I?" he answered, hesitating slightly. "Oh, nothing, aunt—nothing at all!"

"Nothing at all? Oh, well, I must say that you seem to be looking at nothing at all with a great deal of attention." [2]

"Do not believe him, grandmamma!" said Madame de Rueille in her beautiful, grave, expressive voice; "he is hoping all the time to see a cab appear round the bend of the avenue."

"Is he expecting someone?" asked the marchioness.

"Oh, no!" explained M. de Rueille, laughing; "but a cab, even a Pont-sur-Loire cab, would remind him of Paris. Bertrade is teasing him."

"I don't care all that much about being reminded of Paris," muttered Jean, without stirring.

Madame de Rueille gazed at him in astonishment. "One would almost think he was in earnest!" she remarked.

"In earnest, but absent-minded!" said the marchioness, and then, turning towards a young abbé, who was playing loto with the de Rueille children, she asked:

"Monsieur, will you tell us whether there is anything interesting taking place on the terrace?"

The abbé, who was seated with his back to the bay-window, looked behind him over his shoulder, and replied promptly:

"I do not see anything in the slightest degree interesting, madame." [3]

"Nothing whatever," affirmed Jean, leaving the window, and taking his seat on a divan.

One of the de Rueille children, forgetting his loto cards, and leaving the abbé to call out the numbers over and over again with untiring patience, suddenly perched himself up on a chair, and, by his grimaces, appeared to be making signals to someone through the window.

"Marcel dear, at whom are you making those horrible grimaces?" asked the grandmother, puzzled.

"At Bijou," replied the child; "she is out there gathering flowers."

"Has she been there long?" asked the marchioness.

It was the abbé who answered this time.

"About, ten minutes or a quarter of an hour, madame."

"And you consider that Bijou is not interesting to look at?" exclaimed the old lady, laughing. "You are difficult to please, monsieur!"

Abbé Courteil, who had not been long in the family, and who was incredibly shy, blushed from the neck-band of his cassock to the roots of his fair hair, and stammered out in dismay:

"But, madame, when you asked if anything interesting were taking place on the terrace, I thought you meant—something—something extraordinary, and I never thought that the presence of Mademoiselle Bij—I mean, of Mademoiselle Denyse—as she always gathers her flowers there at this time every day—I never thought that you would consider that as—" [4]

The sentence ended in an unintelligible way, whilst the abbé, very much confused, continued shaking the numbers about in the bag.

"That poor abbé," said Bertrade de Rueille, very quietly, "you do frighten him, grandmamma."

"Nonsense! nothing of the kind! I do not frighten him; you exaggerate, my dear."

And then, after a moment's reflection, Madame de Bracieux continued:

"The man must be blind then."

"What man?"

"Why, your abbé! Good heavens, what stupid answers he makes."

"But, grandmamma—"

"No! you will never make me believe that a man could watch Bijou at work amongst the flowers, and not consider her '*interesting to look at*!'—no, never!"

"A man, yes; but then the abbé is not exactly a man." [5]

"Ah! what is he then, if you please?"

"Well, a priest is not—"

"Not exactly like other men in certain respects! no, at least I hope not; but priests have eyes, I suppose, and you will grant that, if they have not eyes like those of other men, they have eyes such as a woman has, at any rate. Will you allow your abbé to have eyes like a woman?"

"Why, yes, grandmamma, I will allow him to have any kind of eyes he likes."

"That's a good thing. Well, then, any woman looking at Bijou would perceive that she is charming. Why should an abbé not perceive that too?"

"You do not like our poor abbé."

"Oh, well, you know my opinion. I consider that priests were made for the churches and not for our houses. Apart from that, I like your abbé as well as I do any of them. I like him—negatively; I respect him."

Bertrade laughed, and said in her gentle voice:

"It scarcely seems like it; you are very rough on him always."

"I am rough on him, just as I am rough on all of you."

"Yes, but then we are accustomed to it, whilst he—" [6]

"Oh, very well, I won't be rough on him again. I will take care; but you have no idea how tiresome it will be to me. I do like to be able to speak my mind. It was a strange notion of yours, to have an abbé for your children."

"It was Paul; he particularly wished the children to be educated by a priest, at any rate, to begin with. He is very religious."

"Well, but so am I—I am very religious, and that is just why I would never have a priest as tutor. Yes, don't you see, if he should be an intelligent man, why, just for the sake of one or two, or even several children—but anyhow only a small number, you make use of his intelligence, which his calling had destined for the direction of his flock, and you prevent him from teaching, comforting, and forgiving the sins of poor creatures, who, as a rule, are much more interesting than we are. If, on the other hand, the priest should be an imbecile, why, he just devotes himself conscientiously to distorting the mind of the little human being entrusted to him, and in both cases you are responsible, either for the harm you do, or the good you prevent being done—-Ah!

here's Bijou, let me look at her; I shall enjoy that more than talking about your abbé," and the marchioness pointed to her grand-daughter, who was just entering the room, and who looked like a walking basket of flowers. [7]

Denyse de Courtaix, nicknamed Bijou, was an exquisite little creature, refined-looking, graceful, and slender, and yet all over dimples. She had large violet eyes, limpid, and full of expression, a straight nose, turning up almost imperceptibly at the end, a very small mouth, with very red lips going up merrily at the corners, and showing some small, milky-white teeth. Her soft, silky hair was of that light auburn shade so rarely seen nowadays. Her tiny ears were shaded with pink, like mother-of-pearl, and this same pinky shade was to be seen not only on her cheeks, but on her forehead, her neck, and her hands. It shone all over her skin with a rosy gleam. Her eyebrows alone, which crossed her smooth, intelligent forehead with a very fine, and almost unbroken dark line, indicated the fact that this frail and pretty little creature had a will of her own.

Bijou, who looked about fifteen or sixteen years of age, had attained her majority just a week ago, but from her perfect and dainty little person there seemed to emanate a breath of child-like candour and innocence. Her charm, however, which was most subtle and penetrating, was distinctly that of a woman, and it was this contrast which made Bijou so fascinating and so unlike other girls. Such as she was, she infatuated men, delighted women, and was adored by all. [8]

As soon as she entered the room, all rosy-looking in her pink dress of cloudy muslin, with a sort of flat basket filled with roses, fastened round her neck with pink ribbon, everyone surrounded her, glad to welcome the gaiety which seemed to enter with her, for until her arrival the large room had felt somewhat bare and empty.

Paul de Rueille, who was playing billiards with his brother-in-law, Henry de Bracieux, came to ask for a rose from her basket, whilst Henry, who had followed him, took one without asking.

The de Rueille children, leaving the abbé, who continued calling out the loto numbers in a monotonous tone, went sliding across to the young girl, and hung about her. Their mother called them back.

"Leave Bijou alone, children; you worry her!"

"Robert! Marcel! come here," said the abbé, getting up.

"Oh, no," protested Bijou, "let them alone; I like to have them!"

She took the basket from her neck, and was just about to put it down on the billiard-table, when she suddenly stopped. [9]

"Oh, no! I must have mercy on the game."

"Isn't she nice? she thinks of everything," murmured Henry de Bracieux, quite touched.

"Come and kiss me, Bijou," said the marchioness.

Denyse had just put her basket down on a divan. She took from it a full-blown rose, and went quickly across to her grandmother, whom she kissed over and over again in a fondling way as a child.

"There," she said, presenting her rose, "it is the most beautiful one of all!" Her voice was rather high-pitched, rather "a head-voice" perhaps, but it sounded so young and clear, and then, too, she spoke so distinctly, and with such an admirable pronunciation.

"You have not seen Pierrot, then?" asked the marchioness.

"Pierrot?" said Bijou, as though she were trying to recall something to her memory. "Why, yes, I have seen him; he was with me a minute or two helping me to gather the flowers, and then he went away to his father, who was shooting rabbits in the wood." [10]

"I might have thought as much; that boy does not do a thing."

"But, grandmamma, he is here for his holidays."

"His holidays if you like; but, all the same, if a tutor has been engaged for him, it is surely so that he may work."

"But he must take some rest now and again, poor Pierrot—and his tutor too."

"They do nothing else, though. Well, as long as my brother knows it, and as long as it suits him—"

"It suits him to-day, anyhow, for he told them to join him in the wood."

"He told *them*?" repeated the old lady; and then she continued slily, "and so the tutor has been gathering roses, too?"

"Yes," replied Denyse, with her beautiful, frank smile, and not noticing her grandmother's mocking intonation, "he has been gathering roses, too."

"He probably enjoyed that more than shooting rabbits," said the marchioness, glancing at a tall young man who was just entering the room, "for if he went to join your uncle in the wood, he did not stay long with him anyhow!"

"Why—no!"—said Bijou in astonishment, and then leaving her grandmother, she advanced to meet the young man. [11]

"Did you not find uncle, Monsieur Giraud?" she asked.

"Oh, yes, mademoiselle," he replied, turning very red. "Yes, certainly, we found M. de Jonzac; but—I—I was obliged to come in—as I have some of Pierre's exercises to correct." And then, doubtlessly wanting to explain how it was that he had come into that room, he added, slightly confused: "I just came in here to see whether I had left my books about—I thought—but—I do not see them here—"

He had not taken his eyes off Bijou, and was going away again when the marchioness, looking at him indulgently, and with an amused expression in her eyes, called him back.

"Will you not stay and have a smoke here, Monsieur Giraud? Is there such a hurry as all that for the correction of those exercises?"

"Oh, no, madame!" answered the tutor eagerly, retracing his steps, "there is no hurry at all."

The old lady leaned forward towards Madame de Rueille, who was silently working at a handsome piece of tapestry, and said to her with a smile: "He is not like the abbé—this young man!"

Bertrade lifted her pretty head and answered gravely:

"No!" [12]

"You look as though you pitied him?"

"I do, with all my heart."

"And why, pray?"

"Because the poor fellow, after coming to us as gay as a lark a fortnight ago, and winning all our hearts, will go away from here sad and unhappy, his heart heavy with grief or anger."

"Oh, you always see the black side of things; he thinks Bijou is sweet, he admires her and likes to be with her; but that is all!"

"You know very well, grandmamma, that Bijou is perfectly adorable, and so attractive that everyone is fascinated by her."

The marchioness pointed to her great-nephew, Jean de Blaye, who, ever since he had left the window, did not appear to be taking any notice of what was going on around him.

"Everyone?" she said, almost angrily; "no, not everyone. Look at Jean, he is as blind as the abbé!"

Jean de Blaye was sitting motionless in a large arm-chair; there was an impassive expression on his face, and a far-away look in his eyes. He appeared to be in a reverie, and the younger lady glanced across at him, as she answered:

"I am afraid that he is only acting blind!"

"Oh, nonsense!" said Madame de Bracieux delighted, "do you think that Bijou could possibly [13] interest Jean enough, for instance, to keep him, even for a time, from his actresses, his horses, his theatres, and the stupid life he generally leads?—You really think so?"

"I do think so!"

"And how long have you thought this?"

"Oh, only just now. When he told us with such conviction that '*he did not care all that much about being reminded of Paris,*' I felt that he was speaking the truth. I began to wonder then what could have made him forget Paris. I wondered and wondered—and I found out."

"Bijou?"

"Exactly."

"So much the better if that really should be so. For my part, I do not think it looks like it. He takes no notice of her."

"When we are watching him—no."

"He seems low-spirited and absent-minded."

"He would be for less cause than this. Jean never does things in a half-and-half way. If he were in love, I mean seriously, he would be desperately in love; and if he were to be desperately in love with Bijou, or if he were to discover that he was falling in love with her, it certainly would not be a thing for him to rejoice over. He cannot—no matter how much he might wish it—he cannot [14] marry Bijou. It is not only that he is her cousin, but he is not rich enough."

"He has about twenty thousand pounds. Bijou has eight thousand, to which I shall add another four thousand, that makes twelve thousand—total between them thirty-two thousand."

"Well, and can you imagine Bijou with an income of about nine hundred pounds a year?"

"No. I know that *she* would consider it enough. She makes her own dresses; everyone says they do that, but, in this case, it is a fact. Then she is very industrious and clever; she understands housekeeping wonderfully well, and for the last four years has managed everything both here and in Paris; but I could not possibly reconcile myself to the idea of seeing her enduring the hardships of a limited income—and it would be limited. Good heavens! though, I hope she will not go and fall in love with Jean."

"Oh, I do not think she will."

"You see, he is charming, the wretch; and it appears he is a great favourite?"

"Yes, certainly; but then Bijou is made so much of. She is surrounded and adored by everyone, so that she has not much time to fall in love herself!" [15]

"And then, too, she is such a child!" said the marchioness, glancing at her grand-daughter with infinite tenderness.

Bijou was standing near the billiard-table watching the game, and laughing as she teased the players.

At a little distance from her, the young professor was also standing motionless, watching her with a rapturous expression in his eyes.

Suddenly Jean de Blaye rose abruptly, looking annoyed, and moved away in the direction of the door that led to the flight of steps going down to the garden.

"Wait a minute!" called out Denyse, "wait, and let me give you a flower!"

She went to the basket, and taking out a yellow rose scarcely opened, she crossed over to her cousin, and put it in his button-hole.

"There!" she said, stepping back and looking satisfied, "you are very fine like that!" And then turning towards the tutor, she said in the most winning way, and with perfect ease: "Monsieur Giraud, will you have a rosebud too?"

The young man took the flower, and, almost trembling with confusion, tried in vain to fasten it in his coat.

"Ah! you can't do it!" said the young girl, taking it gently from him. "Let me put it in for you, will you?" [16]

He was so tall that, in order to reach his button-hole, she was obliged to stand on tip-toes. She slipped the flower through slowly, and with the greatest care, and when she had finished she gave a little tap to the shiny revers of the old coat, which were all out of shape and faded.

"There, that's right!" she said, smiling pleasantly; "like that, it is perfectly lovely!"

The marchioness, her eyes shining with affection, was looking at her.

"What do you think of her? isn't she sweet?" the old lady said to Bertrade, who seemed to be admiring Bijou also.

Madame de Rueille looked at the young tutor, who was standing still in the middle of the room.

"Poor fellow!" she said.

"What, still! Well, decidedly, Monsieur Giraud appears to interest you very much!"

"Very much indeed! I am sorry for people who are sensitive and unhappy; for, you see, I am one of the merry ones myself!"

"Oh!—I don't know about that. You said just now that Jean was acting blind; well, I should say you were acting merry. You are merry, for instance, when anyone is looking at you." [17]

The young wife did not answer, she only pointed towards Bijou.

"She is one of the genuinely merry ones, at any rate, is she not, grandmamma?"

Bijou had just given the children some flowers, and was now speaking to the Abbé Courteil.

"And you too, monsieur, I want to decorate you with my flowers! There, now, just tell me if that rose is not beautiful? Ah, if you want a lovely rose, that certainly is one."

She was holding out to him an enormous rose, which was full blown, and looked like a regular cabbage.

The abbé had risen from his seat without loosing the bag containing the loto numbers. He looked scared, and stammered out as he stepped back:

"Mademoiselle, it is indeed a superb flower; but—but I should not know where to put it. The button-holes of my cassock are so small, the stalk would never go through. I am very much obliged, mademoiselle, I really am. I—but there is no place to put it—it is—"

"Oh, but there is room for it in your girdle," she answered, laughing. "There, monsieur, look there —it is as though it had been made for it!" [18]

Standing at some little distance away, she pushed the long stalk of the flower between the abbé's girdle and cassock.

He thanked her as he bowed awkwardly.

"I am much obliged, mademoiselle, it is very kind of you; I am quite touched—quite touched."

At every movement the rose swung about in the loose girdle. It moved backwards and forwards in the most comical way, with ridiculous little jerks, showing up to advantage against the cassock which was all twisted like a screw round the abbé's thin body.

"Now, I am going to arrange my vases," remarked Bijou, when she had adorned everyone with flowers.

"Where?" asked M. de Rueille.

"Why, in the dining-room, in the drawing-room, in the hall, here, everywhere."

"We will come and help you!" exclaimed several voices.

"Oh, no!—instead of helping me you would just hinder me."

She picked up her basket and went away, looking very merry and fresh. Her muslin dress fluttered round her, as pink and pretty as she herself was. As soon as she had disappeared, it [19] seemed as though a veil of melancholy had suddenly spread itself over the large room. No one spoke, and there was not a sound to be heard except the knocking together of the billiard-balls, and the rattling of the numbers, which the abbé kept shaking all the time, bringing into this game, as into everything else, the methodical precision which was habitual to him.

"Grandmamma," said Henry de Bracieux at length, "you ought not to allow Bijou to give us the slip like this, especially at Bracieux. In Paris it is not so bad, but here, when she leaves us we are done for; she is the ray of sunshine that lights up the whole house."

The marchioness shrugged her shoulders.

"You talk nonsense; you forget that very soon Bijou will *give us the slip*, as you so elegantly put it, in a more decisive way."

"What do you mean? She is not going to be married?"

"Well, I hope so."

"You have someone in view?" asked M. de Rueille, not very well pleased.

"No, not at all; but, you see, the said someone may present himself one day or another—not here, of course, there is no one round here who would be suitable for Bijou; but it is very probable that [20] this winter in Paris—"

Henry de Bracieux, a fine-looking young man of twenty-five years of age, with a strong resemblance to his sister Bertrade, was listening to the words of the marchioness. His eyebrows were knitted, and there was a serious expression on his face. He missed a very easy cannon, and his brother-in-law was astonished.

"Oh, hang it!" he exclaimed; "it is too warm to play billiards. I am going out to have a nap in the hammock."

His sister watched him as he left the room, and then turning towards the marchioness, she whispered:

"He, too!"

The old lady replied, with a touch of ill-humour:

"Bijou cannot marry all the family, anyhow. Ah! here she is, we must not talk about it."

Just at that moment the graceful figure of the young girl appeared in the doorway leading to the stone steps.

"How many people will there be to dinner on Thursday, grandmamma?" she asked, without entering the room.

"Why, I have not counted. There are the La Balues—" [21]

"That makes four."

"The Juzencourts—"

"Six."

"Young Bernès—"

"Seven."

"Madame de Nézel—"

"Eight."

"That's all."

"And we are ten to start with, that makes eighteen. We can do with twenty; will you invite the Dubuissons, grandmamma? I should so like to have Jeanne."

"I am perfectly willing. I will write to them."

"It isn't worth while. I shall have to go to Pont-sur-Loire to get things in, and I can invite them."

"My poor dear child! you are going to the town through this heat?"

"We *must* see about the things for this dinner. To-day is Tuesday—and then I want to speak to Mère Rafut, and see if she can come to work. I have no dresses to put on, and there will be the races, and some dances."

"Oh!" said the marchioness, evidently annoyed, "you are going to have that frightful old woman again."

"Why, grandmamma, she's a very nice, straightforward sort of woman, and then she works so well." [22]

"That may be; but her appearance is terribly against her."

"Yes, grandmamma, that is so, she is not beautiful—Mère Rafut is old and poor, and old age and poverty do not improve the appearance; but it is so convenient for me to have her; and she is so happy to come here, and be well-paid, and well-fed, and well-treated, after being accustomed to her actresses, who either pay her badly or not at all."

By this time Bijou was standing just behind Madame de Bracieux's arm-chair. She added in a coaxing way, as she threw her pretty pink arms around the old lady's neck:

"It is quite a charity, grandmamma; and a charity not only to Mère Rafut, but to me."

"Have her then," answered the marchioness, "have your frightful old woman—let her come as much as you like!"

"Well, then, good-bye for the present."

"How are you going?—in the victoria?"

"No, in the trap; I shall be quicker if I take the trap—I can go there in twenty-five minutes.

"And *you* are going to drive?"

"Why, yes, grandmamma." [23]

"And with the sun so hot? You'll have a stroke."

"Shall I drive you, Bijou?" proposed M. de Rueille. "I want to get some tobacco, and some powder, and two fishing-rods to replace those that Pierrot broke. I shall be glad to go to town."

"And I shall be delighted for you to drive me."

"When shall we start?"

"At once, please."

Just as they were going out of the room, the marchioness called out to them:

"Beware of accidents. Don't go too quickly downhill."

"You can be quite easy, grandmamma, I never lose my head."

II. [24]

In the evening as they were driving through Pont-sur-Loire on their way back to Bracieux, M. de Rueille said to Denyse:

"There is no mistake about it, Bijou, my dear with you there is no chance of passing by unnoticed. Oh, dear, no!"

She glanced at the foot-passengers, who were turning round to look at her with intense curiosity, and answered:

"It's my pink dress that—"

"No, it is not your dress, it is you yourself."

Her large violet eyes grew larger with astonishment as she asked:

"I, myself? But why?"

"Oh, Bijou, my dear, it is not at all nice of you to act like that with your poor old cousin."

"You think I am acting?" she exclaimed, looking more and more astounded.

"Well, it appears like it to me; it is impossible for you not to know how pretty you are. In the first [25]
place, you have eyes, and then you are told often enough for—"

"I am told?—by whom?"

"By everyone. Why, even I, although I am nearly your uncle and a settled-down respectable sort of man."

"'Nearly my uncle.' No—considering that Bertrade is my first cousin; and, as to the rest—" She stopped abruptly, and then finished with a laugh. "You flatter yourself!"

"Alas, no! I shall soon be forty-two."

She looked at him in surprise.

"Oh, well! you don't look it."

"Thank you! There now! Do you see how all the natives are gazing at you? I can assure you, Bijou, that when I come to do any shopping alone, they do not watch me so eagerly."

"I tell you it is this pink dress that astonishes them."

"But why should they be astonished? They are accustomed to that, because you often come to Pont-sur-Loire, and you always wear pink."

Ever since she had left off her mourning for her parents, who had died four years ago, Denyse had adopted pink as her only colour for all her dresses. The reason was, she said, because her grandmother preferred seeing her dressed thus. Anyhow, this pink, a very pale, soft shade, like [26]
that of the petals of a rose just as it begins to fall, suited her to perfection, as it was almost exactly the same delicate colour as her skin.

She always wore it, and when the weather was cold or gloomy she would put on a long, gathered cloak, which covered her entirely, and on taking this dark wrap off, she would come out, looking as fresh and sweet as a flower, and seem to brighten up everything around her.

Her dresses were always of batiste, muslin, or some soft woollen material, comparatively inexpensive. The greatest luxury to which she treated herself now and again was a *taffetas* or surah silk. And then, nothing could be more simple than the way these dresses were made—always the same little gathered blouses and straight skirts, and never any trimming whatever, except, perhaps, in the winter, a narrow edging of fur.

"Yes, that's quite true," she said thoughtfully, "I am always in pink. You don't like that?"

"Not like it? I—good heavens!—why, I think it is perfectly charming! I tell you, Bijou, that if I were not an old man, I should make love to you all the time!"

"You are not an old man!"

"Very many thanks! If, however, you do not look upon me as quite an old man—which, by the bye, [27]
is certainly debatable—I am at any rate a married man."

"Yes, that's true, and so much the better for you, for there is nothing more stupid and tiresome than men who are always making love."

"Well, then, you must know a terrible number of people who are stupid and tiresome."

"Why?"

"Because everyone makes love to you—more or less!"

"Not at all! Why, just think! I was brought up in the most isolated way, like a veritable savage. When papa and mamma were living, they were always ill, and I was shut up with them, and never saw anyone. It is scarcely four years since I came to live with grandmamma, where I do see people."

"Oh, yes; plenty of them, and no mistake!"

"You speak as though that annoyed you?"

She glanced sideways at Rueille, her eyes shining beneath her drooping eyelids, whilst he replied, with a touch of irritation in his voice in spite of himself:

"Annoyed me, but why should it? Are your affairs any business of mine; have I any voice in the matter of anything that concerns you?" [28]

"Which means that if you had a voice in the matter—?"

"Ah, there would certainly be many changes, and many reforms that I should make."

"For instance?"

"Well, I should not allow you, if I were in your grandmamma's place, to be quite as affable and as ready to welcome everyone; I should want to keep you rather more for myself, and prevent your letting strangers have so much of you."

"Yes," she said, with a pensive expression, "perhaps you are right."

"And all the more so because we shall have you to ourselves for so short a time now."

The large candid eyes, with their sweet expression, were fixed on Paul de Rueille as he continued:

"You will be marrying soon? You will be leaving us?"

Bijou laughed. "How you arrange things. There is no question, as far as I know, of my marriage."

"There is nothing definite—no; at least, I do not think so. But, practically, it is the one subject in question, and grandmamma thinks of nothing else."

"Oh, well, I am not like her then, for I scarcely ever give it a thought." And then she added, [29] turning grave all at once: "Besides, my marriage is very problematical."

"Problematical?"

"Why, yes,—in the first place, I should want the man who marries me to love me."

"Oh, well, you can be easy on that score; you will have no difficulty about that."

Her fresh young voice took an almost solemn tone as she continued:

"And then I should want to love him, too."

"Oh, so you will. One always does love one's husband—to begin with," said Rueille carelessly; and then he stopped short, thinking that the words "to begin with" were unnecessary.

Bijou had not understood, however, nor even heard, for she asked:

"What did you say?"

"I said that he will be very happy."

"Who will be happy?"

"The man you love!"

"I hope so. I shall do all I can for that!"

M. de Rueille seemed to be annoyed and irritated. He said, in a disagreeable way, as though he wanted to discourage Denyse in her dreams of the future: [30]

"Yes, but supposing you do not happen to meet with him?"

"Well, then, I shall die an old maid, that's all! But I do not see why I should not meet with him. I do not ask for anything impossible, after all!"

In a mocking tone, and a trifle aggressive, he, asked:

"Would it be very indiscreet to ask you what you expect?"

"Oh, not indiscreet in the slightest degree, for I can only answer just as I have already answered, I should simply want *to love him*! I do not care at all about money; I neither understand money nor worship it!" She turned towards her cousin, and said, in conclusion, as she looked up into his face: "Now, I'll tell you, I would agree to a marriage like Bertrade's."

"With another husband," he stammered out.

Very simply and naturally, and without the slightest embarrassment, she said, laughing:

"Oh, dear no! No, I think the husband is quite nice."

M. de Rueille did not answer. He could not help feeling some emotion, in spite of himself, at this idea that Bijou might have cared for him. It seemed to him that the evening air was delicious, and never had the setting sun, which was sinking slowly like a ball of flame into the Loire, appeared [31] more brilliant to him. The little gig was so narrow, that, with every oscillation, his elbow touched the young girl's arm, whilst her soft fair hair, escaping from her large straw hat, kept brushing against his cheek, which began to burn.

Bijou noticed his absent-mindedness.

"It seems to me," she said, laughing, "that you are not listening much to the description of my ideal."

"Oh, yes!"

"Oh, no!—by the bye, have we done all the errands?"

She took out of her pocket a long list, which she began to read:

"*Ice. Cakes. Fruit. Fish. The Dubuissons. Speak to the butcher. Pink gauze. Mère Rafut. Hat. Pierrot's books. Henry's cartridges (16).*"

"What's that?" asked M. de Rueille, who was looking at the list. "Henry has commissioned you to

get his cartridges instead of telling me to get them?"

"Yes; the time before last when he asked you, you forgot them; and last time you brought him number twelve cartridges, and his are number sixteen; therefore, he preferred—"

"Ah! I can understand that; but they do take advantage of you—and the children too have taken [32]
advantage. '*Balloon for Marcel, pencils for Robert*;' Fred is the only one who has not given you any commissions. You need not despair though, he is only three years old; he will begin next year."

"He did not give me any commissions, but I have brought him a picture book—'Puss in Boots.' He adores cats, so that will amuse him."

"How delicious you are!"

"Delicious! Is that saying enough? Could you not find something rather more eulogistic? Let us see—try now!"

She was still glancing down the list; and Paul de Rueille pointed with the handle of his whip to a line written in pencil:

"What's that?—'*Tell grandmamma about La Norinière!*'"

"Why, I met the Juzencourts, and they said I was to be sure to tell grandmamma that 'The Norinière' is to be inhabited."

"Ah, Clagny has sold it?"

"No; he is coming back to it. It appears that he is coming every summer."

"Ah, so much the better. Grandmamma will be very glad of that."

"Yes, she likes him very much. I do not know him, this M. de Clagny, but I have often heard about [33]
him."

"Don't you remember seeing him a long time ago?"

"Why, no!"

"Well, he was your godfather, anyhow!"

"You are dreaming! Uncle Alexis is my godfather."

"Your Uncle Jonzac is the godfather of Denyse, but it was M. de Clagny who was the godfather of Bijou. Yes, he said once, speaking of you when you were very little, *the Bijou*—and the name suited you so well that you have had it ever since."

"Don't you think it is rather ridiculous to call me Bijou now that I am old?"

"You look as though you were fourteen, and you always will look like that, I promise you."

"Isn't it rather risky to promise me that?"

She laughed as she glanced at him, and he, too, looked at her as though he could not take his eyes away from the pretty, fresh young face turned towards him. He was paying no attention to the road, which was in a very bad state, until suddenly the right wheel went into a rut, and the gig gave a jerk, which sent Denyse on to him. She clung to his arm with all her might, and they remained an instant like this until they were able to regain their balance. The wheel, then, in [34]
some way or another, got clear of the deep rut in which it had been caught, and the horse went on again at a quick pace as before.

"That's right!" said Bijou, laughing heartily. "I certainly thought we should be upset."

"It was as near a shave as possible," he answered gravely.

She loosened the grasp of her small fingers, which had been pressed tightly on her cousin's shoulder.

"Is it really over?" she asked. "You are not going to begin again, I hope?"

M. de Rueille did not answer. He was looking at her with an absent-minded, troubled expression in his eyes.

"Yes; but, instead of looking at me, do look before you," she went on. "We shall get into another rut directly, you'll see."

"Oh, no! oh, no!" he murmured, as though he were in some dream.

"I'm sure we shall be late for dinner," said Bijou; "and you know grandmamma does not altogether like that."

Rueille touched the pony's back with the whip, and the animal, springing forward, jerked the little carriage violently, and then started off at a mad pace. [35]

This time Bijou looked stupefied.

"What's that for?" she asked. "Whatever is the matter with you to-day? Just now you almost upset us, and now you touch Colonel with the whip, and you ought not to let him even guess that you have one; you have made him take fright," and then, seeing that the horse was calming down, she added, "or nearly so; you are not yourself at all."

"No," he answered mechanically, "I am not myself."

At the pony's first plunge Denyse had taken M. de Rueille's arm again. It was not that she was in the least afraid, but she was perched on a seat which was too high for her, so that she could not keep her balance, and, consequently, she tried to hold on to something firm. Without loosing the arm on to which she was hanging, she leant towards her cousin, and asked, with evident interest:

"Not yourself? What is the matter? Are you ill?"

"Ill? No! at least, not exactly."

"What do you mean by *not exactly*? Oh, but you must not be ill. We have to work at our play this evening, and if you do not set about it, all of you, and in earnest, why, it will never be finished for the race-ball." [36]

"I don't care a hang about the play, and—I—if I were you—"

He stopped abruptly, evidently embarrassed.

"Well?" asked Bijou, "what is it? You were going to say something."

"Yes," he stammered out, scarcely knowing how to put what he wanted to say. "I was going to remark that the design Jean has made for your—for Hebe's dress—"

"Well?"

"Well, it isn't the thing at all; there is too little of it."

"Too little of it? Nonsense!"

"It isn't nonsense. I say it is not the thing for a woman, and especially a young girl like you, to appear like that."

Bijou looked at Paul de Rueille with a bewildered expression on her face, and then burst out laughing.

"Oh, you are queer; you look exactly like a jealous husband."

"Jealous!" he stammered out, vexed and ill at ease. "It isn't for me to be jealous, but I—"

"No, certainly, but all the same, without being jealous, you men do not like a woman to look pretty, or to be nice, or amusing, for anyone else's benefit than just your own." [37]

"Well, admitting that that is so, it is quite natural."

"Ah! you think so? Oh, well, a woman, on the contrary, is always glad when the men she likes are admired; she is delighted when other people like them too."

"Nonsense! You do not know anything about it, my dear Bijou. You are most deliciously inexperienced in such things fortunately."

"Why *fortunately*?" she asked, opening her soft, innocent eyes wide in astonishment.

"Because—"

He stopped short, and Bijou insisted, pinching his arm.

"Well, go on—do go on."

"No, it would be too complicated," he answered, evidently ill at ease, and trying to shake off the grasp of the strong little hand.

"Too complicated!" repeated Bijou, turning red. "I detest being put off like that. Why will you not explain what you were thinking?"

"Explain what I was thinking," he said, in a sort of fright. "Oh, no!"

"No? Well, it is not nice of you."

They went on for a minute or two without speaking, Bijou calm and smiling, and her companion with a serious, uneasy look on his face. [38]

Just as the gig was entering the avenue, Bijou turned towards M. de Rueille, and touching him, this time very gently, with her little hand, she said in a penetrating voice, which, in his agitated state of mind, was the last straw:

"As it vexes you so much I won't wear that costume. We will get Jean to design another for me."

He seized the hand that was resting on his arm and pressed it to his lips with an almost brutal tenderness.

Bijou did not appear to like this passionate display of feeling. She drew her hand away quietly,

but there was a strange gleam in her eyes as she said:

"Take care of the gate, it is a sharp turn remember, and you are not in luck to-day."

She then began to collect her parcels calmly, and until they arrived at the door of the *château* she was silent and thoughtful. The first dinner-bell was just ringing, and Bijou ran upstairs to her room, and ten minutes later entered the drawing-room, arrayed in a dainty dress of rose-leaf coloured chiffon, with a large bunch of roses on the shoulder. [39]

"Why! you don't mean to say that you are here already!" exclaimed Madame de Rueille admiringly. "I will wager anything that that slow coach of a Paul is not ready."

"Did you do all the commissions?" asked the marchioness.

"Yes, grandmamma, and I have a special one for you. The Juzencourts wished me to tell you that M. de Clagny is coming back to live at The Norinière, and that he will come every year."

"Oh!" exclaimed Madame de Bracieux, looking very delighted, "I am glad to hear that. I never expected to see him come back here."

"Why?" asked Bijou.

"Well, because when he was here he had a great grief, just at an age when painful impressions can never be effaced."

"At what age is that?" asked Jean de Blaye, with a touch of sarcasm in his voice.

"Forty-eight. And when you are that age, you will not be as fond of ridiculing everything as you are now, my dear boy; and it won't be so long before you get there as you think either."

"So much the better," he answered, smiling; "that must be the ideal age—the age when one's heart is at rest."

"In some cases it is at rest before that age," said the marchioness slily, looking at her nephew. [40]

Jean shrugged his shoulders.

"Yes, but it wakes up again, or, at least, it might wake up; one is not quite easy about it; but at forty-eight ..."

"Ah! that's your opinion. Well, it is twelve years ago now since my old friend Clagny was forty-eight. He must therefore be sixty at present, and I would wager anything that his heart has never been at rest—never. You understand me?" And then in a lower tone, so that Bijou, who was just talking to Bertrade, should not hear, she added: "Neither his heart nor he himself."

Jean laughed.

"Oh, well! he's a curiosity this friend of yours. Why does he not go about in a show? He would get some money."

"He has no need of money."

"He is rich, then?"

"Atrociously rich!"

"Well, but what's he got?"

"Sixteen thousand a year. Don't you consider that a fair amount?"

"Yes," he answered, without any sign of enthusiasm, "yes, of course, that's very fair—for anyone who has not got it dishonestly." And then, after a pause, he asked: "What was this great trouble that he had?" [41]

"Oh, I'll tell you about it when Bijou is not here."

The young girl, however, could scarcely have heard what they were saying. She was joking with Pierrot, who had just come into the room. She wanted to part his hair again, and Pierrot, a tall youth of seventeen, strong-looking, but overgrown, with long feet and hands, and a forehead covered with extraordinary bumps, was trying to make himself short, so that the young girl might reach up to his bushy, colourless hair. He was bending his head, and looking straight before him, with a far-away expression in his eyes, evidently enjoying having his hair stroked by the skilful little hands.

Madame de Bracieux, seeing that Bijou was at a safe distance, ventured in a low voice to tell her nephew the details about the love-affair, which had in a way changed the whole life of her friend, M. de Clagny.

Suddenly Denyse came across to the marchioness.

"Grandmamma—I forgot—the Dubuissons cannot come to dinner on Thursday, but M. Dubuisson will bring Jeanne on Friday, and leave her with us for a week." [42]

"Well, then, we shall only be eighteen to dinner."

"No, we shall be twenty all the same; because I saw the Tourvilles, and I gave them an invitation

from you; I thought that—"

"You did quite right."

"Oh!" exclaimed Bertrade, "the Tourvilles and the Juzencourts at the same time! We shall be sure, then, of hearing their stories of William the Conqueror and Charles the Bold!"

"Oh, well!" exclaimed Bijou, laughing, "it will be much better like that, we shall have it altogether, once for all, at any rate."

Just as dinner was announced, M. de Rueille entered the room. He had an absent-minded look, and his eyes shone strangely. He took his seat silently at table, and did not talk during the meal.

III.

[43]

Bijou, assisted by Pierrot, was handing the coffee round, when suddenly she darted off in pursuit of Paul de Rueille, who had just come out of the drawing-room, and was descending the steps which led on to the terrace.

"Stop, stop! Where are you going?" she called out.

"Oh, only for a stroll," he answered, without looking round, "to get a breath of air, if that is possible with this heat."

Bijou had already caught him up.

"Oh, no, what about the play?—You must come and work."

"My head aches."

"Work will take it away! You really must come, we have only three days."

"But I am not indispensable; you can do without me," said Rueille irritably.

"Oh, but you always do the writing."

"From dictation; it is not necessary to be very clever for that." [44]

"Yes it is; and then, too, we are used to you."

She was on the step above him, and, bending forward, she put her arms round his neck, and said in a coaxing tone:

"Paul, dear, come now, just to please me, you would be so nice, so very nice!"

M. de Rueille, turning abruptly, unclasped the soft arms, which encircled his neck and rested against his face.

"All right, all right!" he said, in a hoarse voice, "I'll come!"

The young girl stepped back, and in the evening-light he could see her large astonished eyes shining as she gazed at him.

"How cross you are!" she said timidly. "What's the matter with you?" He did not answer, and she asked again: "Won't you tell me?"

"No, no," he said curtly, and then he re-mounted the steps and went into the drawing-room.

Bijou followed him, and whispered to Bertrade:

"I don't know what is the matter with your husband, but he is very bad-tempered."

Madame de Rueille glanced at Paul. He looked rather fagged and nervous, and was trying to appear at his ease, as he talked and laughed noisily with the tutor, who, on the contrary, was silent and reserved. [45]

"Yes, certainly something is the matter with him," said Bertrade, rather uneasy at seeing her husband so strange. "I do not know at all what it is, though," she added.

"Only imagine," Bijou proceeded to explain to the whole room, "Paul wanted to go for a stroll instead of coming to work. Yes, and it was not very easy to get him here, I can assure you."

With a resigned look, M. de Rueille took his seat at a side table with a marble top. He then took up the manuscript, and, turning to the page which was commenced, dipped a long, quill pen into the ink.

"When you are ready?"—he said calmly.

"Well, but first of all, where are we?" asked M. de Jonzac.

"Scene three of the second act."

"Still?" exclaimed Bijou, astonished.

"Alas, yes."

"My dear children, you will never have it finished," remarked the marchioness.

"Oh, yes, grandmamma, we shall," said Bijou merrily; "you will see how we are going to work now. Come now, we are at the third scene of the second act,—it is where the poet is defending himself after the accusations—rather spiteful ones, too—which Venus has brought against him." [46]

"Well, and what then?" asked M. de Rueille after a pause.

"Well," said Bijou, "in my opinion, we want a little couplet there; what do you think, Jean?"

Jean de Blaye, with an absorbed look on his face, was lounging in a deep arm-chair, his head thrown back on the cushions. He appeared to be in a reverie, and had not even heard the question.

"Are you asleep?" asked Bijou.

"Did you speak to me?" he asked, turning towards her.

"Why, yes, I did have the honour of speaking to you. I asked you whether a couplet would not be the right thing there—a couplet that would go to some well-known air?"

"Yes," he replied, in an absent sort of way, "that would do very well."

"All right, compose it then."

Jean gave a start; he was quite roused now.

"I am to compose it,—why should I be the one to do it?"

"Because you always do them."

"Well, that's a nice reason," protested Jean. "I should say that is precisely why it is someone else's turn. You have only to set the others to work—Henry, or Uncle Alexis, or M. Giraud, or even Pierrot." [47]

"Why do you say *even*?" asked Pierrot, annoyed. "I should do them quite as well as you."

"Well, do them then! for my part, I have had enough of it."

"Jean," said Bijou, in a pleading tone, "don't leave us in the lurch, please."

She was going across to him, her pretty head bent forward, and a most comically beseeching little pout on her lips, when M. de Rueille rose abruptly from his seat, and stopped her on the way:

"Oh, he will do your couplets right enough; he likes doing them; sit down, Bijou."

The young girl stood still in the middle of the room, surprised at this extraordinary proceeding.

"But why don't *you* sit down?" she exclaimed. "What have you come away from your table for?"

"Ah! I have no right to leave the table without your permission?"

"Jean!" began Bijou again, "come now, Jean!"

Once again M. de Rueille interposed.

"Why don't you kneel down to him at once?" he said, in a sharp tone.

"Goodness! I don't mind doing that even if he will only be persuaded." [48]

She was darting across to her cousin, but Rueille caught her arm, and said angrily:

"What nonsense! it is perfectly ridiculous!"

Bijou looked at him in amazement, and stammered out:

"It is you who are ridiculous!"

"Oh, yes, of course," he answered, speaking harshly, "it is I who ought to go and sit down, and I am the one who is ridiculous; in fact, I am everything I ought not to be, and I always do everything I ought not to do."

"Whatever is the matter, children?" asked Madame de Bracieux.

M. de Jonzac explained, as he emptied his pipe by tapping it gently against a piece of furniture.

"Heaven have mercy upon us! It is nothing less than Paul quarrelling with Bijou!"

"With Bijou?" exclaimed the old lady, in perfect amazement.

"Paul quarrelling with Bijou!" repeated Madame de Rueille, putting down the newspaper she had been reading, "impossible!"

"Yes, really!" affirmed the abbé, quite horrified. "M. de Rueille is vexed with Mademoiselle Denyse!"

"Come here, Bijou!" called out the marchioness, and the young girl tripped across the room to her grandmamma, and knelt down on the cushions at her feet. [49]

"You ought not to let Bijou go on in that way with you!" said M. de Rueille, going up to Jean, and speaking in a low voice.

"Go on in what way? are you dreaming?"

"I am not dreaming at all. Denyse is twenty years old, you know!"

"Twenty-one," corrected the young man.

"All the more reason—she really ought to behave more carefully!"

"Poor child, she behaves perfectly!" and then looking at his cousin, he added: "I really don't know what's up with you?"

"Oh, I'm in the wrong," murmured M. de Rueille, slightly embarrassed. "Of course, I'm quite in the wrong!"

"Absolutely so!" said Blaye drily, getting up from his arm-chair.

On seeing him move towards the door, Bijou left the marchioness, and rushed across to him:

"Oh, no! you are not going away! Grandmamma, tell him that he is not to leave us like this!"

"Come now, Jean," said the marchioness, half joking and half scolding, "don't plague them so!" [50]

The young man sat down again in despair.

"And this is the country!" he exclaimed, "this is rest and holiday! I have to work like a nigger, writing plays—plays with couplets—and then go to bed regularly at two in the morning, and this is what is called being in clover!"

Pierrot had listened to this outburst with apparent solemnity.

"Continue, old man," he said jeeringly, "you interest me!"

Bijou laughed, and Jean, looking annoyed, turned towards Pierrot, and said sarcastically, "You are very witty, my dear boy!"

"Children, you are perfectly insufferable!" exclaimed Madame de Bracieux, raising her voice. She was looking at them in surprise, wondering what wind had suddenly risen to bring about this storm. She could not account for all these disagreeable little speeches, and the hostile attitude they had taken up, and which was quite a new thing to the old lady. Once again she called Bijou to her. The young girl was standing looking round at everyone with a questioning expression in her soft eyes.

"Do you know what's the matter with them?" asked the marchioness. [51]

"I have no idea, grandmamma," she answered innocently, the wondering look still on her face.

"Don't you see how cross they are?" continued the marchioness.

"Yes, I can see that they are cross, but I do not know what it's all about; if it is on account of the play, why, we won't have it! I don't want to worry everyone with it, just because I like it; but I *do* like it immensely."

Just at this moment M. de Rueille called out:

"Well, are we going to work at this, yes or no? I have had enough of sitting waiting here like an imbecile."

"Where are we?" asked Jean, in a way which meant, "As there's no getting out of it, let us start at once."

"We've told you where we are—" answered Rueille, "we've told you twice."

Bijou interposed, explaining in a conciliatory tone:

"It is where the poet has to answer Venus."

"Ah, yes! exactly, I remember! She has accused him of all sorts of things, and you want him to defend himself—"

"In a couplet." [52]

"Yes, I understand—where are you going though?"

Bijou was just crossing the room.

"I am going across to sit by M. Giraud; he won't worry me like all of you."

The tutor blushed, and moved slightly to make room for her on the divan on which he was seated. Denyse glided on, and took her place at his side.

"We are listening," she said.

Jean was twisting a pencil and a piece of paper about in his fingers.

"What did Venus answer?" he asked.

M. de Rueille, with an absent-minded expression on his face, was watching a moth fluttering round the lamp near him.

"What did Venus answer?" called out several voices together, as loudly as possible.

M. de Rueille looked aghast, and, stopping his ears, read aloud from the manuscript:

"'*You know I do not believe a word of it.*'"

"Strike that out," said Jean, "and put: '*I do not believe it at all, you know.*' And now the poet answers:

> "'*L'âme d'un symboliste,*
> *Madame, est un coffret mélancolique d'améthyste*
> *A serrure de diamant.*
> *Il suffit de savoir l'ouvrir et la comprendre* [53]
> *Et le trésor éclos illumine la chambre*
> *Et sourit la tristesse aux lèvres des amants.*'"

"Is that at all amusing?" asked M. de Rueille.

"Well, hang it all!" exclaimed Jean irritably, "I do not say that it is precisely a *chef-d'œuvre*! Bijou asked for a couplet—I have given her a couplet to the best of my ability, but I don't wish to hinder you from giving us a better one."

"To what air will that go?" asked Bijou.

"Ah, yes, that's true, we want an air for it. What is there?"

"You might put '*Air. J'en guette un petit de mon âge,*'" suggested Rueille.

"Does that go to it?"

"What do you mean by 'does it go to it?'"

"Why, that air."

"I don't know. I don't even know what the air is."

"Then why do you suggest that we should take it?"

"Oh! because I often see things to that air: '*J'en guette un petit de mon âge.*' I just remembered seeing it, and there are lots of couplets that are put to it."

"But the poet's lines are longer than that," remarked Bijou, "especially the second one. No—one could never sing them to that air—nor to any other." [54]

"Ah, yes!—I did not think of that."

"Fortunately, Bijou thinks of everything," put in Pierrot, with pride.

"We'll find an air for it presently," said Jean. "Let's go on; do let's go on, or we never shall finish it. Who's on the stage at present?"

And then, as M. de Rueille was biting the end of his pen and watching Bijou, so that he did not appear to have heard, Blaye exclaimed:

"Paul, are you there? or have you gone out for a time?"

"I am there."

"Oh, very well! then will you have the kindness to tell me which of the characters are at present on the scene?"

"Wait a minute! I'll just look."

"What?" exclaimed Bijou, "do you mean to say you have to look before you can tell us?"

"Well, you do not imagine, I presume, that I know by heart all the insane things that each of you has been pleased to dictate to me."

"I know them all anyhow," and then, turning towards Jean de Blaye, she answered his question. "We have on the scene at present, Venus, the Poet, Thomas Vireloque, and the Opportunist, and we said yesterday that after the introduction of the Poet to Venus, we would let Madame de Staël come in." [55]

"Very well, we will let her enter at once."

"Have you found anyone for Madame de Staël?" asked Rueille; "up to the present no one has wanted to act her part."

"No," said Bijou; "just now I asked Madame de Juzencourt again, but she refuses energetically;

and if Bertrade refuses too—"

"Bertrade refuses absolutely," replied the young wife, very gently.

"It isn't nice of you."

"Is Madame de Staël indispensable?" asked Uncle Jonzac.

"Quite indispensable," answered Bijou, emphatically. "We must absolutely find some way of—" And then suddenly breaking off, as a new idea struck her, she exclaimed gaily: "Why, Henry can take it—Madame de Staël's *rôle*; he has scarcely any moustache."

"I?" cried Bracieux. "*I* act Madame de Staël?"

"She was rather masculine; it will do very well."

"But, good heavens!—I am not going to appear before people I know arrayed in a low-necked dress, a turban, and all padded up—why, it would be frightful!" [56]

"Not at all! Oh, come now—you don't want pressing, I hope?"

"And you are not going to spoil the whole thing by being disobliging over it," added Pierrot, with a virtuous air.

"Disobliging?" exclaimed Henry, turning towards him; "it is very evident that you are not in my place. By the bye, though, you might very well be in my place;" and then seeing that Pierrot looked horror-stricken, he continued: "Why shouldn't you take it instead of me—you have less moustache even than I have!"

"Yes, but I am too scraggy," declared Pierrot cunningly. "Madame de Staël was rather a stout-looking woman."

"Scraggy? you, the athlete!"

Jean de Blaye knocked the floor with a billiard-cue for silence.

"We will think about who is to act Madame de Staël when we have found out what she has to say —Well, then, she enters—Are you not going to write, Paul?"

"What do you want me to write?"

"Well, just write: '*Madame de Staël enters by*—' Yes, but that's the point—by which door does she enter?" [57]

"I have put '*from the back of stage.*' Whenever you don't tell me how they come in, I always put '*from the back of stage.*'"

"All right! Then we will leave '*from the back of the stage.*'"

> "*Madame de Staël (to Thomas Vireloque)*: 'I am Madame de Staël.'
>
> *Thomas Vireloque*: 'Beg pardon?'
>
> *Madame de Staël*: 'I am Madame de Staël.'
>
> *Venus*: 'What have you to tell us?'
>
> *The Opportunist*: 'It is very curious—I took you for a Turk.'
>
> *The Poet*: 'And I—'"

"Wait a minute!" said M. de Rueille, "I've made a mistake."

"How could you?"

"How could I? The same way we generally do make mistakes, of course—I wasn't thinking."

"That's about it," said Bijou. "I don't know what's the matter with you, but you certainly are absent-minded this evening."

Without answering, Rueille drew his quill-pen across the paper, bearing on heavily, so that the pen gave a plaintive screech. [58]

"What are you doing now?" asked Jean.

"I am crossing it out."

"What are you crossing out?"

"Well, I had written the same sentences over four times each."

Bijou and Blaye got up to examine M. de Rueille's work, and the young girl read out:

"*Madame de Staël*: 'I am Madame de Staël.'

Thomas Vireloque: 'Beg pardon?'

Madame de Staël; 'I am Madame de Staël.'

Thomas Vireloque: 'Beg pardon?'

Madame de Staël; 'I am Madame de Staël.'"

"Oh, yes," said Bijou, "you must cross that out!"

"No, leave it as it is, on the contrary," protested Jean, laughing; "they'll think that Mæterlinck collaborated with us—it will be capital."

"Supposing we were to retire," proposed M. de Jonzac. "Paul is half-asleep, that's why he wrote the same thing over three times without noticing it. Abbé Courteil is fast asleep, and, as for me, I am dying to follow his example."

"Oh," said Bijou, "it is scarcely one o'clock." [59]

"Well, but it seems to me that in the country—What do you say about the matter, Monsieur Giraud?"

"Oh, as for me, monsieur, I could sit up all night without feeling sleepy," replied the young tutor, without taking his eyes off Bijou.

"My dear children," said the marchioness, getting up, "your uncle is quite right, you must go to bed. Bijou, will you see that the books you had out of the library are put back?"

"Yes grandmamma, I will put them back myself."

When the others had gone upstairs, M. de Rueille asked:

"Shall I help you, Bijou? two will do it more quickly—"

"No, you don't know anything about the library; you would mix them all up. I must have someone who knows where the books go." And then turning towards the tutor, who was just going out of the room, she said to him, in the most charming way, as though to excuse the liberty she was taking: "Monsieur Giraud, would *you* help me to put the books up?"

The young man stopped short, too delighted even for words. As he remained standing there, she pointed to the open door leading into the hall and said gently: [60]

"Will you shut the door, please? And then, if you will take Molière, I will bring Aristophanes, and we will come back for the others—yes, that's it."

As she tripped along with the books, she chattered away, not as though she were addressing her companion, but rather as though she were going on with her thoughts aloud.

"What was Jean looking for in Aristophanes when he only wanted to make Thomas Vireloque and Madame de Staël talk?" And then breaking off abruptly, she asked:

"Do you think it will be interesting—our play?"

"Oh, yes, mademoiselle."

"Why do you never help us? you ought to work at it, too."

"Oh, I am not very well up in that sort of thing, mademoiselle; politics and society talk are like sealed books to me, and I do not exactly see either—"

"And then, probably, you would rather be just a spectator?"

"Unfortunately, mademoiselle, to my great regret, I shall not even be that."

"What?" she exclaimed, in amazement, "you will not see our play?"

"No, mademoiselle." [61]

"But, why?"

"Oh!" he replied, dreadfully embarrassed, "for a very ridiculous reason."

"But what is it?"

"Mademoiselle—I—"

"Do please tell me why?" she said, and as she leaned forward towards him, looking so graceful and charming, the perfume from her hair plunged the young man into a sort of enervating torpor.

"Why will you not tell me?" she said at length, almost sadly; "don't you look upon me a little as your friend?"

"Oh, mademoiselle," he stammered out, "I—I cannot appear at this soiree because—you will see how prosaic my reason is—the fact is, I have not a dress-coat."

"But you have plenty of time to send for your dress-coat; besides, you will want it for Thursday, there is a dinner on Thursday."

Giraud blushed crimson.

"But, mademoiselle, I cannot send for it either for Thursday or for later on, because I—I haven't one."

"Not at all?"

"Not at all!"

"Oh, you are joking?"

"No, I am not joking, mademoiselle! I do not possess a dress-coat." And then he added with a smile which was quite pathetic: "And there are plenty of poor wretches like I am who are in the same predicament!" [62]

"Oh!" said Bijou, taking the tutor's hand with an abrupt movement, "do forgive me—how horrid and thoughtless I am! You will detest me, shall you not?"

She pressed his hand slowly in a way which sent a thrill through him.

"Detest you?" he stammered out, almost beside himself with joy. "I adore you!—I simply adore you!"

Bijou gazed at him in a startled way, but there was a tender expression in her eyes, which were dimmed with tears. Her voice was quite changed when she spoke again:

"Go away now!" she said, "and do not say that again; you must never, never say it again!"

When he reached the door he turned round, and saw that Bijou had thrown herself down on the divan, and was sobbing, with her face buried in the cushions. He wanted to go back to her, but he did not dare, and, without saying another word, he left the room.

IV. [63]

Bijou, who, as a rule, was to be seen every morning trotting about, either in the house or the park, did not appear until after the first luncheon-bell.

Pierrot, who had been quite uneasy, rushed across to meet her, and assailed her with questions before she had had time to say good-morning to the marchioness and to her Uncle Alexis.

He wanted to know why he had not seen her as usual in the dairy, where she always went every morning to inspect the cheeses. Why had she not been there, as she had not been out riding?

"How do you know that I have not been out riding?" asked Bijou.

"Because Patatras was in the stable," replied Pierrot. "I went to see."

"Oh, then you keep a watch on me?" she said, laughing.

"That is not keeping a watch on you," answered Pierrot, turning red; "and then, too, it isn't only me! we were both of us—M. Giraud—" [64]

"What grammar—good heavens—what grammar!" exclaimed M. de Jonzac, in despair.

"What's it matter? If there was anyone here, I'd take care to put the style on; but when there's only us!" And then turning to Bijou, he continued: "It's quite true, you know! M. Giraud was just as much surprised as I. He kept on saying all the time: 'We always see mademoiselle every day hurrying about everywhere, she must be ill!' And then I'd say, 'Oh, no! it can't be that! the Bijou is never ill!' You see, Monsieur Giraud, I was quite right—"

"No, you were wrong! I was not exactly ill, but tired, out of sorts. I am only just up."

She walked across to the tutor, who was leaning so heavily against the window-frame that it seemed as though he wanted to hollow out a niche for himself with his back.

"I want to thank you, Monsieur Giraud," said Bijou, holding out her hand to him, "for being so kind as to think about me."

Very pale, and visibly embarrassed, the young man scarcely dared touch the soft little hand lying so confidingly in his; he looked very delighted, though, at being treated with such cordiality, as it was more than he had ever expected again.

"Mademoiselle," he stammered out, seized with a vague desire either to run away or else to give way to his emotion, "please do not believe that I should have taken the liberty of making all those remarks." [65]

"Oh, well, it would not have mattered; there is plenty of liberty allowed with *the Bijou*, as Pierrot would say." And then suddenly looking very thoughtful and absorbed, she asked: "Have they been working at the play this morning?"

"Working?" exclaimed Pierrot, with an air of surprise; "working without you there? Oh, by jingo, no: it's quite enough to peg away at it when you are with us, without going at it while you are away. Oh, no! it would be too bad—that would! We had a dose of it last night—the precious play—and I, more particularly, because I am obliged to work at other things."

Bijou laughed heartily. "Are you not afraid of tiring yourself with working so hard as all that?"

"If he continues at the rate he is going," said M. de Jonzac, "he will never take his degree, will he, Monsieur Giraud?"

"I am afraid not, monsieur, I am very much afraid not," replied the tutor gently. "Pierrot is very intelligent, but so thoughtless, and so absent-minded always, especially since our arrival here!"

"Oh! not any more than you are, at any rate, Monsieur Giraud," retorted Pierrot. "It's quite true! I [66]
don't know what's the matter with you, but your thoughts are always wool-gathering, and you don't go in for books as you did before. Why, even *maths* you don't seem so mad on—you don't do anything now except look after me, and go off writing poetry."

"You write poetry, Monsieur Giraud?" asked Madame de Rueille, entering the room, followed by Jean and Henry.

"Oh, madame," stuttered the poor fellow, not knowing where to put himself nor what to say, "I write some sort, but it is—not exactly poetry."

"You write charming poetry!" said Jean, and then, as the young tutor looked at him in astonishment, he continued: "Yes, you write very good poetry—and then you lose it; little Marcel has just picked up these verses and brought them to me."

He smiled as he held out to Giraud a folded paper, the writing on which was invisible.

"Let me see them!" said Bijou, holding out her hand.

"Oh, mademoiselle!" cried the tutor, stepping forward, terrified, "please do not insist!" And then
in order to explain his own agitation, he added: "They are wretched verses; please let me put [67]
them out of sight. I will show you some others which are more worth looking at."

Bijou's hand was still held out, and she stood there waiting, looking very frank and innocent.

"Oh, please, Jean, let me see these all the same; that need not prevent M. Giraud writing some more that we can see, too."

"I cannot show you a letter," replied Jean, handing the paper to the distracted tutor, "and this is a kind of letter, and belongs to the person who wrote it."

"Thank you," stammered out Giraud, thoroughly abashed, "I am much obliged, monsieur." And he at once put the troublesome scrap of paper into his pocket out of sight.

"Pierrot!" called out the marchioness, "give me 'La Bruyère'—you know where it is?"

"What's that?" asked the youth, winking.

"'La Bruyère'?"

"You see," remarked M. de Jonzac, looking at his son with an expression of despair on his face, "he does not even know who 'La Bruyère' is!"

Pierrot protested energetically. "Yes, I do know who he is, and the proof is, I can tell you—it's a blue-back."

"A what?" asked the marchioness.

"A blue-back, aunt." [68]

"Explain to your aunt," interposed M. Giraud, "that you have a most objectionable mania for speaking of books by the colour of the binding rather than by their title."

"By George!" exclaimed M. de Jonzac, annoyed, "he never by any chance opens one. He is an absolute ignoramus; just to think that he will soon be seventeen!"

"Poor Pierrot," said Bijou compassionately, "he is not as ignorant as all that!" And then, as her uncle did not answer, she added: "And then, too, he is ever so nice, and he is so strong and well."

"Oh, as to that," said M. de Jonzac, "his health is perfect, and that just makes him all the more insufferable, but not any more intelligent though. Everyone complains about the overtaxing of the intellectual faculties; they say that it is the ruin of children; and so, by way of improvement, they go in now for overtaxing them physically, which is a more certain ruin still."

"Ah, uncle is waging war now," put in Bertrade; "but I am of his opinion, too, for I do not like to think that some day my children will add to the number of the young ruffians we see around us."

"But," objected Henry de Bracieux, "many of them—and some quite young, too—are very [69]

intellectual; I know some."

"I, too, know some," said Jean de Blaye; "but, to my way of thinking, they are not precisely intellectual, they are—"

Just at this moment a bell was rung in the hall.

"We must go to luncheon, children," said the marchioness, rising, "Jean will finish his little definition for us at table."

"Oh, I am not particularly keen about it, aunt," said Jean, laughing.

"I am, though; I am no longer 'in the know' of things, as you say, and I don't object to be instructed about certain matters on which I am absolutely ignorant."

On taking her seat at table, the marchioness, addressing Jean, continued:

"You were saying that the young men who were not precisely the intellectual ones were—"

"Oh, I am not good at explanations," he replied.

"That does not matter; go on, anyhow."

"Well, those who are not really intellectual are of the sickly kind; they act that sort of thing to begin with, and then they end by getting like it in reality; they are intolerably affected, effeminate, crazy, and everything else beside. They set up for being original, and not like anyone else." [70]

"Well, and what do you call them?"

"I don't exactly know; they are of the complex kind. There's young La Balue, for instance, he's a perfect example for you of this class; you might study him."

"That's an idea that has never entered my head; but, in the young generation of to-day, there are others beside these complex ones."

"Yes, they are the athletes."

"Specimen, Pierrot!"—remarked Henry de Bracieux.

The marchioness turned towards her grandson.

"Don't be personal," she said. "Continue your little speech, Jean."

"I would rather eat my egg in peace, aunt!"

"We had got as far as the athletes—"

"Well, then, if the complex young men of to-day are a trifle sickening, the athletes are the greatest nuisances under the sun. Boxing, football, bicycles, matches, and records—all that, they consider of the most tremendous and vital importance, not only in their conversation, but, what is more regrettable still, in their lives. In their opinion, a man of worth is the one who can give the hardest blows, or who is endowed with the greatest strength or vigour; all their admiration is bestowed on one single being in the world—*the Champion*, with a capital C." [71]

"And what is there between the complex young man and the athletes?"

"Nothing; or, at least, some exceptions so rare that they are there simply to confirm the rule. Of course, I am only talking now of the young generation, of the latest—Pierrot's, in fact."

"Do leave poor Pierrot in peace!" said Bijou; "you all find fault with him."

"Because it is not too late yet for him to put his young self to rights, and if he were to be let alone, he would soon degenerate in the most deplorable manner."

"Jean is right," agreed M. de Jonzac; "he can very well afford to give advice to Pierrot, and even to the others, for he is himself highly intellectual and very good at sports."

Madame de Bracieux looked at her nephew with a benevolent expression in her eyes:

"Your uncle is right, my dear boy, you are the greatest success of the family," she said, and then seeing that Bijou appeared to be examining her cousin curiously, she added: "I am only speaking of the men, of course."

Pierrot leaned over towards Denyse, who was seated next him, and said, in an undertone with deep gratitude, "It's awfully good of you to stick up for me always, and I can't tell you how fond I am of you—more than any of the others." [72]

She answered with a smile; and in an almost maternal way, said:

"That's very wrong! You ought to be much fonder of uncle, and of grandmamma, too, than you are of me."

"Oh, well, to begin with, there's no rule for that, and then, too, I didn't mean that at all. I meant that I am fonder of you than all the others are; and, you know, there's some of them very fond of you; there's Paul, for instance, Paul de Rueille—I'm sure he likes you better than he does

Bertrade, or his children, better than anyone—even God!"

"Do be quiet!" said Bijou, alarmed, and looking round to see if anyone had heard.

"Don't be in a fright! They are all busy worrying each other; they are not troubling about us. It's quite true what I said, you know; and then Jean, too, and Henry, and Monsieur Giraud! There's scarcely anyone, except Abbé Courteil, who does not follow you about to every corner you go; and then—" [73]

"You are talking rubbish! how can you imagine—"

"I don't imagine it—I see it!—and I see it, because it annoys me!"

Just at this moment M. de Jonzac's voice was heard.

"Oh, no!" he was saying, "I am convinced that he has no idea that Renan ever existed. He does not know a thing—not a single thing."

"Oh, yes," put in the tutor, in his usual gentle and conciliatory way, "as regards Renan, I am sure that he knows. Only three or four days ago I had occasion to quote him as the author of the 'Origin of Language.'"

"Well, I would wager that he does not even remember his name—Pierrot!" called out M. de Jonzac.

The poor lad, entirely absorbed in his conversation with Bijou, had no idea that he was being discussed. On hearing his name called, he turned his head towards his father, vaguely uneasy.

"Pierrot," asked M. de Jonzac, "who was Renan?"

"Ah! that's it, is it," said Pierrot to Bijou, "now they're beginning the examination again. Renan—who in the world was he now?" [74]

"You do not know who Renan was, do you?" asked M. de Jonzac blandly.

"No, father, I don't," replied the boy.

"What?" exclaimed Giraud, surprised; "why, only the other day we were talking about him."

"About him?" repeated Pierrot, quite astounded, "do you mean to say that I was talking about the man?"

"Why, yes—come now; try to remember—I mentioned one of his works."

Bijou, who had just before only been listening with one ear to what Pierrot had been telling her, so that with the other she could keep up with the general conversation, remembered the title that had been quoted. She was looking at her plate, apparently taken up with the strawberries, which she was rolling about in the sugar. "The 'Origin of Language,'" she whispered very quietly.

"Come now, have a good try," repeated the tutor. "I mentioned one of M. Renan's books to you—which one?"

"'The Language of Flowers,'" answered Pierrot resolutely.

"That's right!" exclaimed Bertrade, delighted: "we can always reckon on something lively from Pierrot." [75]

M. de Jonzac, in spite of his inclination to laugh, put on a rigid expression. "I do not see anything amusing in it."

"*You* don't laugh, at any rate," said Pierrot, turning to Bijou and blushing furiously. "It is awfully good of you," he added.

After dinner, he drew her out on to the stone steps, and said, in a beseeching tone:

"Let me come out with you to take the green stuff to Patatras."

"But I must go and pour out the coffee first."

"Oh, just for once; Bertrade can pour it out right enough. Come, now, I don't want to go into the drawing-room; they'd begin asking me something else."

Denyse started off with him, taking from a shed the basket in which was prepared for her every day the bunch of clover she always took to her horse. She then went on in the direction of the stable, followed by Pierrot.

"You are awfully nice, Bijou, and so pretty, if you only knew it," he kept repeating, making his rough voice almost gentle.

As they crossed the path which led to the stable, they saw M. de Rueille and Jean de Blaye advancing towards them, deep in conversation.

"Look!" said Pierrot, "as you weren't in the drawing-room our two cousins made themselves scarce there." [76]

Denyse was going forward to meet them, but he stopped her abruptly.

"No, please don't, they'd stick to us all the time, and I shouldn't have you to myself at all. It's such a piece of luck for me to be with you for a minute without Monsieur Giraud; he's always at my heels, especially when I'm anywhere near you."

Bijou was looking attentively at the two men, who were coming towards her, but who were so deeply absorbed that they had not seen her, and between her somewhat heavy eyelids appeared that little gleam which gave at times a singular intensity of expression to her usually soft-looking eyes.

"Very well," she answered, entering the stable, "let us take Patatras his clover without them."

M. de Rueille was walking along with his eyes fixed on the gravel of the garden-path. He looked up on hearing the door open. Jean de Blaye pointed to the stable.

"Look here," he said, "*that's* the cause of all the trouble and worry that I can detect in every single word you say; and it's the cause, too, of the sort of petty spite that you have against me."

"Indeed!" replied Rueille, putting on a joking air; "and what is *that* pray?" [77]

"Why, Bijou, of course. Oh, you need not try to deny it. Do you think I have not followed up, hour by hour, all that has been passing in your mind?"

"It must have been interesting."

"Don't humbug; you are scarcely inclined for that sort of thing just now. I saw very well just when you began to admire Bijou, quite unconsciously, more than one does admire, as a rule, a little cousin one is fond of. It was the evening of the *Grand Prix* at Uncle Alexis' when she sang—why don't you speak?"

"I am listening to you—go on."

"When we were all here together at Bracieux, never absent from each other, and you had spent every minute of the long day in Bijou's society, your—let us call it—your admiration increased, of course, and ever since yesterday, ever since your expedition to Pont-sur-Loire, it has been at the acute stage. Am I right?"

"Well, yes: you are right."

"I am not surprised; but will you explain one thing—one thing which *does* surprise me?"

"What is it?"

"Why do you appear to have a special grudge against me? Why against me rather than against [78] your brother-in-law, or young La Balue, or Pierrot's tutor, or even Pierrot himself?"

"Well, Henry is nearly Bijou's own age; he was brought up with her, and she looks upon him as a brother exactly. Young La Balue is a regular caricature; the tutor, a poor wretch who does not count; and Pierrot, a lad; whilst you—"

"Whilst I?"

"Well, as to you, why, you are the sort that women like, and you know that very well; and I can see and feel, and, in short, I know, it is you whom Bijou will care for."

"Me? nonsense! she does not deign to pay the very slightest attention to me. I am nothing in her eyes except the man who is breaking in a horse for her, who takes her out boating, or who composes couplets for her play."

"In short, you exist more than the others do, anyhow."

"But why? It's your fancy to look upon young La Balue as a caricature; but everyone is not of your opinion. As to Giraud—well, he is a very good sort."

"Yes, but he is Giraud."

"Well, what of that? what difference does that make?"

"A good deal; that is, it would be nothing with certain women, but it is everything with others,— [79] and Bijou is one of these others."

"Oh—what do you know about it?"

"I have studied her for some time without appearing to."

"You are studying her, but you do not know her."

"Perhaps not!"

"If I were in her place I know which one I should choose amongst so many lovers."

"Ah! they sing that in *Les Noces de Jeannette*."

"Oh! you won't stop me like that! Amongst so many lovers, if I had to choose, it would certainly be Giraud that I should prefer."

"An older woman might admire Giraud, because he is handsome—but not a young girl! You see a

young girl's one idea is marriage——"

"Then, you have no grudge against Giraud, because, according to you, he is not marriageable, consequently, not to be feared."

"Precisely!"

"Very well, then, and what about me, my dear fellow? Do you think I am marriageable, then? Can you imagine me with my wretched fifteen hundred a year endeavouring to make Bijou happy? Yes, can you just imagine it now?—a house at a hundred a year or so—petroleum lamps, coke [80] fires, etc.—that *would* be delicious."

"And yet you are in love with her?"

"Excuse me, I did not say that I was in love with Bijou. I don't really know; all I can say is, that she has taken my fancy tremendously, and that, as I simply cannot marry her, I am wretchedly unhappy."

"And you don't think she cares for you?"

"Not the least bit in the world! She has never tried even to deceive me on that point. 'Good-morning! Good-night! What a fine day it is.'—that's the sort of palpitating dialogue which goes on every day between us. You see, therefore, that you have no reason to have a spite against me?"

"I beg your pardon, Jean, my dear fellow, but I firmly believed that you were the great favourite."

M. de Rueille broke off suddenly, and appeared to be straining his ears.

"Ah!" he said, "there she is!"

Bijou was just coming out of the stable, followed, of course, by Pierrot.

She tripped daintily across towards the two men, examining them in her calm, smiling way.

"Whatever's the matter with you both?" she asked; "you look—I don't know how!"

V. [81]

Bijou was in the dining-room, arranging the flowers on the table for dinner, whilst in the butler's pantry the servants were polishing up the large silver dishes until they shone brilliantly.

"Get into your coat!" said the butler to the footman; "there's a carriage coming slowly up the avenue. Oh, you've got plenty of time, it isn't here yet."

"Whose carriage is it?" said the footman, looking through the window.

"I don't know it; it's a fine-looking turn-out, anyhow. It might very well be the owner of The Norinière."

"My goodness! it's a clinking turn-out."

"Oh, he can afford it."

"He's got some money, then?"

"Why, yes, an awful lot; he's got about sixteen thousand a year."

"Do you know him, then?"

"My wife was kitchen-maid at his place before I married her—a good master he is, always pleasant, and not at all near—you'd better start now if you want to get to the steps before he's [82] there."

A minute before, Bijou, finding that she was short of flowers, had run out into the garden, and, springing across the path, had pushed her way into the middle of a rose-bed, and was now cutting away mercilessly. She was so absorbed that she did not hear the carriage, which was coming up the drive, and which went round the lawn, and pulled up in front of the stone steps. When at last she did happen to look up, she saw, a few steps away from her, a tall gentleman standing gazing at her with a most rapturous expression.

The fact was that Bijou, in her cotton dress, with wide pink stripes, and her little apron trimmed with Valenciennes, was really very pretty to look at, foraging about amongst the flowers.

When she discovered that she was being gazed at in this way, her tea-rose complexion took a deeper tint, and she looked confused and embarrassed, as she stood there facing the gentleman, who was still contemplating her without saying a word.

He was a man of between fifty-five and sixty, tall, slender, distinguished-looking, and elegant, and with a very young-looking figure for his years. His face, which was intelligent and refined, had [83] also an almost youthful expression about it, just tinged with a shade of melancholy. As Bijou remained where she was, and appeared to be hesitating and not quite at her ease, the visitor

approached, and, raising his hat, said in a very gentle voice:

"Excuse me, mademoiselle, but are you not Denyse de Courtaix?"

Bijou, with her frank, honest expression, looked straight into the eyes fixed so curiously upon her, and answered, smiling:

"Yes, and you?—you are Monsieur de Clagny, are you not?"

"How did you know?"

Denyse sprang out of the rose-bed on to the garden-path, and then, without answering the question in a direct way, she said, with the most trusting, happy look in her eyes:

"Oh! how glad grandmamma will be to see you, and Uncle Alexis, too; ever since they heard that you were coming back to live here, they have talked of nothing else. Let's go at once to find grandmamma."

She started off, leading the way, looking most graceful and supple, as she passed through the large rooms with that gliding movement which was one of her greatest charms. [84]

The marchioness was not in the room where she was usually to be found. Bijou rang the bell, and requested the servant to find Madame de Bracieux. She then took a seat opposite M. de Clagny, and examined him attentively.

"Paul de Rueille was quite right after all," she said, "when he told me that I had seen you long ago—I recognise you." She gazed with her bright eyes more fixedly into the count's, and repeated pensively: "I certainly do recognise you."

"Well, I confess, in all sincerity," said M. de Clagny, "that if I had met you anywhere else than at Bracieux, I should not have recognised *you*—you are so much bigger, you know, and then, so much more beautiful that, with the exception of the lovely violet eyes, which have not changed, there is nothing remaining of the little baby-girl of years ago."

"The name which you gave me still remains."

"The name? what name?" he asked, in surprise.

"Bijou! don't you remember? it seems that it was you who used to call me that."

"Yes, that's true! you seemed to me such a fragile little thing, so adorable and so rare—a bijou in fact, an exquisite little bijou. And so they have continued to call you by that name—it suits you, too, wonderfully well." [85]

"I don't think so! I am afraid it is rather ridiculous to be still *Bijou* at the age of twenty-one, for, you know, I am twenty-one now."

"Is it possible?"

"Very possible! in four years from now I shall be quite an old maid!"

The count looked at Bijou with an admiration which he did not attempt to dissimulate, as he answered emphatically:

"*You* an old maid? oh, never in the world, never!"

Madame de Bracieux was just entering the room.

"How glad I am to see you!" she said, looking delighted, and holding out her hands to her visitor.

As Denyse was moving towards the door, the marchioness called her back.

"I see Bijou has introduced herself," she said to Clagny, who had not yet got over his admiration, "What do you think of my grand-daughter?" And then, without giving him time to answer, she went on quickly: "It's just the same *Bijou* you used to admire years ago, just the same! the genuine *Bijou*, there's no *sham* about it, as my grandsons would say."

"Mademoiselle Denyse is charming."

"Denyse (and, by the way, you will oblige me by not calling her mademoiselle) is a dear, good girl, [86] obedient and devoted. Her gaiety has brightened up my old house, which was gloomy enough before her arrival."

"How is it that I have never seen Mademoiselle Denyse——"

"Mademoiselle again!"

"That I have never seen Bijou in Paris? I come so regularly on your day."

"Yes, but you always come very early, at an hour when she is never there, and then for the last sixteen years you have never dined with us."

"I never dine out anywhere, you know; but you have never spoken of Bijou, never told me anything about her."

"Because you have never asked me about her."

"I had forgotten about her, to tell the truth, the tiny, baby-child that I saw so little of, and yet just now, when I saw a delicious girl emerging from a rose-bed, I hadn't the slightest hesitation, had I, mademoiselle?" and then correcting himself, he added, laughing: "had I, Bijou?"

"Yes, that's true! M. de Clagny asked me at once if I were not Denyse de Courtaix——and I, too, knew at once who he was; I had heard so much about him that I seemed to know him in my [87] imagination, and, it's very odd—" She broke off suddenly, and then after gazing thoughtfully at the count, she added: "I knew him in my imagination just as he is in reality."

"A very old man," said Clagny, with a kind of sad playfulness.

"No!" replied Bijou, evidently sincere, "a very handsome man!" And then abruptly breaking off, she said: "And Uncle Alexis has not appeared yet; they have rung the bell with all their might in vain, for he doesn't come; I'll go and find him!"

She was hurrying away when the marchioness called her back:

"Stop a minute!—have another place laid at table. You will dine with us, Clagny?"

"Yes, if you have no one here."

"Oh, but I have; I am just expecting some friends of yours."

"And I am a regular bear, for I do not even dine with my friends; and then, too, in this get-up—"

"Your get-up is all right, and, besides, there is time to send to The Norinière for your coat if you particularly care to have it."

"I do care to, if I stay."

Bijou approached, and said, in a coaxing way: [88]

"You will stay—and do you know what would be very, very nice of you? well, it would be to stay just as you are, without your dress-coat."

"Why do you insist, Bijou, if it annoys him to stay without dressing?" asked the marchioness.

"Because, grandmamma, if M. de Clagny were to dine without his dress-coat, M. Giraud could, too; and otherwise he will have to dine all by himself in his room."

"What are you talking about, child?"

"Why, it's very simple. M. Giraud has no dress-coat; he hasn't one at all. I got to know it by chance; he told Baptiste just now that he was not very well, and that he should not leave his room this evening, and so, if M. de Clagny would stay just as he is, don't you see, he could, too—M. Giraud, I mean."

"What a good little Bijou you are!" said the marchioness, quite touched; "you think of everyone; you do nothing but find ways of giving pleasure to all."

Denyse was not listening to this. She was waiting for the count to give his consent.

"Would it be a great, great pleasure to you," he asked at length, "if this Monsieur Giraud could dine at table?"

"Yes." [89]

"Then it shall be as you wish. Tell me, though, now, who is this gentleman with whom I am not acquainted, and for whose sake I am consenting to appear as a most ill-bred man?"

"He is Pierrot's coach."

"Ah! and what's this Pierrot?"

"The son of Alexis," said Madame de Bracieux laughing.

"Then the god to whom I am to be sacrificed is M. Giraud, tutor to Pierrot de Jonzac, and he is honoured by the patronage of Mademoiselle Denyse. Thank you, I like to know how things are."

"But," protested Denyse, turning very red, "I do not patronise M. Giraud at all. I——"

"Oh, do not attempt to defend yourself. I know what kind of a role a poor tutor without a dress-coat must play in the life of a beautiful young lady like you; it is just a role of no account; he represents as exactly as possible *a gentleman of no importance* in a play."

"You have no idea," said the marchioness, when Denyse had gone away, "how good that child is. This young man in whom she is interested, and who, by the bye, is really charming, is always treated by her exactly on the same footing as the most influential and the most distinguished men [90] she meets. Oh, she is a pearl, is Bijou; you will see!"

"I shall see it perhaps too clearly."

"How do you mean—too clearly?"

"I am very susceptible, you know. I have a foolish old heart, which sounds an alarm at the slightest danger, and which afterwards I cannot silence again."

"But Bijou is my grand-daughter, my poor old friend."

"Well, what difference does that make?"

"Why, just this—that she might be yours."

"I know all that well enough. Good heavens!—that is what you might call reasoning; and hearts that remain young either reason very little or very badly."

"And so?"

"Oh," said M. de Clagny, making an effort to laugh, "I was joking, of course."

Bijou had crossed the court-yard. The heat was very great, and the peacocks, perched on the trunk of a tree that had been felled, looked stupid and ridiculous, whilst the dogs, lying on their sides, with their legs stretched out, were panting under the sun's rays, but were too lazy to look for any shade. [91]

No one was out of doors at that torrid hour, except Pierrot, who, arrayed in a white linen suit, with a wide straw hat on his head, was strolling about under the chestnut trees, which formed a V shaped avenue.

Denyse ran up the steps, and entered the schoolroom like a gust of wind. On the threshold, however, she stopped short, and seemed confused. M. Giraud, who had been seated at the table, had risen hastily on seeing her appear.

"Oh! I beg your pardon," she stammered out, "I wanted to speak to Pierrot. I thought he was here, and that you had gone for your walk."

Very much embarrassed, the young tutor could scarcely find any words with which to reply.

"No, mademoiselle, no! I am here you see. It is just the contrary, for Pierrot has gone out, but, if you like, if I could tell him what—for—you have something to say to him probably?"

He lost his head completely as he looked at her standing there. She was so pretty with her complexion, still pink and white, in spite of the terrible heat, and her large eyes, with their changing expression, were fixed on him with such a gentle look.

"Yes, certainly," she said, slightly embarrassed too, "I wanted to speak to Pierrot; although it is about something that concerns you—it would be better——" [92]

"Something which concerns me?" interrupted Giraud, looking uneasy; "but I do not know really—I wonder what——"

The thought flashed across him that she was perhaps going to say that, after what had taken place the night before last, he could not remain any longer at Bracieux. He was in despair, for not only would he have to leave Bijou, but he would probably get no employment for the next two months, just as he had thought to have a little peace and comfort.

The young girl was looking at him, and smiling kindly.

"You see, it is very difficult to say it to—to the person concerned," she answered at length.

"Well, but—Pierrot."

"Oh! Pierrot is not a very clever diplomatist, I grant, but he would have known better than I do how to go about things in order to announce to you——"

"To announce to me?"

"The fact that you are going to dine with us this evening. A headache, you know, is a very good excuse for women, but only for women."

"But, mademoiselle, without taking into account the annoyance it would be to me (and it would annoy me very much) not to be dressed as the others are, it would not be polite towards your guests." [93]

"Yes, you are perhaps right; it would not be the thing, perhaps, if you were the only one who was not in evening dress; but there will be M. de Clagny just as he is now, to pay a call; so you understand."

"Mademoiselle, I caught sight of M. de Clagny just now when he arrived. He is an old gentleman, and as such can take liberties about certain matters which I, particularly in my position, could not."

"As to you, you are just going to obey grandmamma like a good little boy, for it was grandmamma who sent me, you know."

"Ah!" murmured the young man, disappointed, "it was your grandmamma? I was hoping it was you, who—but you are still vexed with me, of course?"

"Vexed with you?" she asked, surprised; "what for?"

"Well—because—oh, you know—the other evening—when, in spite of myself, I——"

Bijou's merry face clouded over as she said very seriously:

"I thought that would never be brought up again. I wish you to forget what you said to me." She [94]
stood still a moment, with a pensive look on her beautiful face, and then she added, in a muffled voice: "And, above all, I wish to forget it myself."

Her eyelids were lowered, and her eyelashes were beating quickly against her pink cheeks throwing a strange shadow over her brilliant complexion.

Giraud went up to her, anxious and excited, and in a stammering voice he asked:

"Is it true what you have just said? Do you still remember that moment of madness? Can you think of it without anger?"

"Yes," she answered, gazing full at him with her beautiful blue eyes, "I think of it without anger," and then, in such a low voice that he could scarcely hear it, she murmured, "and I *do* think of it all the time!" Then, with a sudden change of expression, she began again hurriedly: "It is you who must forget now; you must forget at once—what I ought never to have said to you! Please forget it! Do as I ask you, for my sake!"

"Forget? How do you think that I can forget? You know well enough that it is absolutely impossible!"

"You must, though!" she persisted. "Yes, you must say to yourself that you—that we have had a [95]
dream—a very bright, happy dream,—one of those sort from which one wakes up happy, and, at the same time, troubled; a dream in which one has a vision of beautiful things, which disappear, and which we cannot possibly define. Have you never had such dreams? One cannot, no matter how much one tries, remember all about them; and yet—one likes them."

Her voice, with its caressing intonation, completely unnerved the young man. He had taken his seat again mechanically at the table, and, without replying, he looked up at Bijou, his eyes full of tears.

She came nearer, and said in a beseeching tone:

"Ah! please don't, if you only knew how wretched it makes me—" and then she added abruptly: "and if it is any consolation to you—you can say to yourself that you are not the only one to suffer—for I do, too."

"Is it really, really true?" he asked, bewildered with his happiness.

Denyse did not answer. She had just noticed on the table a letter, which Giraud had been finishing when she entered the room.

"I was writing to my brother," he said, following the direction of her eyes, "and instead of telling [96]
him about my pupil, and my occupations, and, in short, about such things as, in my position of life, I ought to confine myself to, I have only told him about you."

"I was looking at your name," she answered, pointing with her rosy finger to the signature; "Fred—it is a name I am fond of; I gave it to my little godchild, the youngest of Bertrade's children." She seemed to be looking far away through the open window as she repeated very gently: "Fred!" And then passing her little hand over her forehead, and walking towards the door, she said abruptly: "And this dinner—and my flowers for the table,—why, the *menus* are not written yet, and it is five o'clock!" And then, as the poor fellow looked stupefied and did not attempt to move, she went on: "It's settled about this evening, is it not? I shall have your place laid?"

He answered, in a vague, bewildered way, coming gradually to himself again:

"Amongst all the others in dress-coats, I shall cut the most ridiculous figure."

"Oh, no,—nothing of the kind! Besides, they will not all be in dress-coats. First of all, there is M. de Clagny in a frock-coat; and then M. de Bernès, who is afraid of meeting his General, and so is always arrayed in his uniform: then the abbé in his cassock," and with a laugh she concluded: [97]
"That makes three of them who will not be in dress-coats!"

As she was leaving the schoolroom, she ran against Henry de Bracieux, who was coming towards her in the corridor.

"Well, I never!" he exclaimed, in surprise. "What are you doing here?"

"And you?"

"I? Why, I was going back to my room."

"And I was coming away from Pierrot's."

"Pierrot is in the garden."

"I did not know, and I had something to say to him."

"To him?" asked the young man suspiciously, and almost aggressively, "or to M. Giraud?"

Without appearing to notice her cousin's singular attitude towards her, she answered, in a docile way:

"To him, so that he might repeat it to M. Giraud, but as he was not there——"

"It is to Giraud that you have——"

"Given grandmamma's message. Yes," and then, with an innocent expression in her eyes, she asked: "Why does it interest you so much to know whether I gave this message to the one rather than to the other?" [98]

He replied, in a joking tone, but with some embarrassment:

"Because I am inquisitive, probably; and the proof that I am inquisitive is that I should like to know what this message was."

"Grandmamma commissioned me to tell M. Giraud, who has no dress-coat——"

"No dress-coat—Giraud?"

"No."

"Not a dress-coat at all?"

"There, you say just what I did. No, not a dress-coat of any description! He had sent word that he would not dine with us; and then, as M. de Clagny is staying to dinner, and he is in a frock-coat, I was going to tell Pierrot, so that he could let M. Giraud know. Do you understand now?"

"Yes," replied Henry, "quite well—but Jean is very *chic* and never goes about without a change of dress-coats; he has, at least, three here; he would certainly lend him one—they are exactly the same figure."

"That would be nice!"

"Oh, he would be glad to do it! Giraud is a very nice fellow; we should all like him, if——"

He stopped short, and Bijou asked:

"If what?"

"Oh, nothing! I'll go and see about this business—at old Clagny's time of life it doesn't matter whether one is got up all right or not; but for Giraud, it's another thing. I am sure he would feel it very much if he thought he looked ridiculous, especially——" [99]

"Especially?"

"Especially before you!"

Bijou shrugged her shoulders, and ran away down the long corridor.

VI. [100]

Although Bijou had superintended the laying of the cloth, and had herself attended to the flowers, the service, and the *menus*, she was ready for dinner before anyone else.

Carrying in her arms an enormous bunch of roses, she entered the drawing-room just as the marchioness had gone upstairs to dress.

She was so much taken up with arranging her flowers on a side-table that she did not see M. de Clagny, who was watching her attentively as she came and went, with the pretty, graceful movements of a bird as it flies backwards and forwards before finally perching itself.

At length, however, he spoke, and the sound of his voice made Denyse start.

"It's very certain that it came direct from Paris—that pretty dress," he said.

"Oh!" exclaimed Bijou, scared, "you nearly frightened me." And then, going up to the count, and daintily patting her light, gauzy dress, she continued: "That pretty dress did not come from Paris; it was made at Bracieux, near Pont-sur-Loire." [101]

Thoroughly astonished, the count asked:

"Oh, no! by whom, then?"

"By Denyse, here present, and by an old sewing-woman, who is a dresser at the theatre."

He had risen, and was now walking round the young girl in almost timid admiration. She was so pretty, emerging from the pinky-looking cloud, which seemed to scarcely touch her dainty little figure, and out of which peeped her shoulders, tinted, too, with that singular pinky gleam which made her delicate skin look so velvety and soft.

M. de Clagny could not help thinking that Bijou was not only beautiful to look at, but fascinating in the extreme, with her tempting mouth, and her innocent, frank eyes. The charm of her person was rendered all the more complex by this same child-like expression.

Whilst he was examining her curiously, Bijou was saying to herself that "this old friend of grandmamma's" was much younger-looking than she had imagined him to be. He certainly did make a good appearance, tall and slender, with his hair quite white on his temples, whilst his fair [102] moustache had scarcely a touch of grey. His brown eyes had a gentle expression, and his mouth, sometimes mocking, and at times even almost cruel, showed, when he smiled, the sharp, white teeth, which lighted up his whole face in a singular way.

The silence was getting embarrassing, until Bijou at last broke it:

"Grandmamma has not come down then yet? I expected to find her here."

"She went away to dress just as you came in."

"She will never be ready."

M. de Clagny looked at his watch.

"But dinner is to be at eight—she has plenty of time; it is not half-past seven."

"Oh!" exclaimed Bijou regretfully. "If only I had known, I should not have hurried so much. I was so afraid of being late."

"I'm the one to be glad that you hurried so much. I shall have you to talk to for a minute"—

"For a good half-hour at least," she said, laughing; "no one is ever in advance here—oh, never, not even the guests any more than the people of the house."

"Ah, about the guests, tell me with whom I am going to dine. Your grandmamma said, 'You will dine with some friends of yours.' Now, as to friends, I cannot have many here now, considering [103] that for the last twelve years I have not been in this part of the world. There have probably been many changes since then."

"Not so many as all that; let's see, now! you will dine with the Tourvilles."

"The Tourvilles? they are not dead yet?"

"Those with whom you are going to dine are living. They had some parents who are dead."

"Ah! that's it, is it! then young Tourville is married?"

"Yes, two years ago!"

"He was a disagreeable fellow! Has he made a good marriage?"

"That depends! he married a young lady on the Stock Exchange."

"What do you mean? a young lady on the Stock Exchange?"

"Yes, her father is something there, I believe; he is very, very rich."

"Is it Chaillot, the banker?"

"Perhaps so, I never asked about them—they have restored Tourville, it is superb now; and they are always entertaining."

"Is Madame de Tourville pretty?"

"You will see her; she is very pleasant, and they say she is very intelligent; for my part, I have not [104] discovered that." And then, as M. de Clagny smiled, she added quickly: "Because I only know her very slightly."

"Well, and after the Tourvilles, who next?"

"M. de Bernès."

"Young Hubert, the dragoon?"

"He himself."

"He is the son of good friends of mine; a downright nice fellow, don't you think so?"

"Don't I think what?"

"That Hubert de Bernès is nice?"

"Oh! I know him so slightly; he has always seemed to me—how shall I express it?—insipid, yes, insipid."

"Because you intimidate him, probably? I can quite understand that, too!"

"I intimidate *you*, perhaps?" she said, laughing.

"Very much so!" he answered, very seriously.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, in astonishment, "how is that possible?"

"It is very possible, and it is true! There's nothing astonishing about it then, that if you intimidate an old man like me, you should intimidate poor little Hubert."

"Little Hubert? he is six feet!"

"Yes, and he is twenty-six years old, but to me he is always little Hubert. Well, anyhow, admit at least that he is handsome?" [105]

"I don't know!"

"Are you going to tell me that you have not looked at him?"

"I have looked at him; but as regards M. de Bernès I am a very bad judge."

"Why so?"

"Because I detest young men!"

"At the age of twenty-six they are not so young as all that!"

"That may be so! but, all the same, at that age they do not exist as far as I am concerned."

"Well, well! and at what age do they begin to exist as far as you are concerned?"

She laughed.

"Very late in life!" she said, and then suddenly changing her tone, she continued: "I am glad you know M. de Bernès, because, at any rate, you will not be bored to death now this evening."

"Ah! it appears, then, that I am not to count on the other guests for entertainment?"

"Oh, no! the others—well, first of all there are the La Balues."

"Good heavens, they are alarming! Why, their children must be beginning to grow up?" [106]

"They have even finished growing up! Louis is twenty-three, and Gisèle twenty-two."

"What are they like?"

"The one sets up for being *blasé*—-he is never either hungry, thirsty, or sleepy; he does not care for anything; everything bores him. And it is not true, you know! he never misses a dance, and his sister says that he gets up in the night to eat on the sly. Then, too, he writes ridiculous poetry, paints pictures as absurd as his poetry, and goes in for music—such music!"

"And the daughter?"

"She is as masculine as her brother is effeminate; she goes shooting and hunting, and her dream is to go in for deer-stalking, and to marry an officer."

"She is probably thinking of Hubert?"

"What Hubert?"

"Young Bernès!"

"Ah! But I don't fancy so! At all events, he is not thinking about her—"

"Because he is too much taken up with you, like all the others; is not that so?"

"Not at all!"

M. de Clagny shrugged his shoulders.

"Oh, nonsense!" he said, "I can see it all quite plainly." [107]

"There are only three guests left now for me to introduce to you," continued Bijou, evidently wishing to change the subject of the conversation. "There are the Juzencourts—people who are very much up-to-date, and who have bought 'The Pines'—and one of their friends who is staying for a month with them, a delightful young widow, the Viscountess de Nézel."

"What!" exclaimed the count, with an abrupt movement; "Madame de Nézel—Jean de Blaye is here then?"

Denyse opened her beautiful, bright eyes wide, as she replied in astonishment:

"Yes, Jean is here; but what has that to do with——?"

"Oh, nothing at all! nothing at all!" said M. de Clagny hastily, and then after a moment's silence, he asked: "Is Madame de Nézel as pretty as ever?"

"She is very pretty."

"As pretty as you?"

Bijou smiled. "Why do you make fun of me? I know very well that I am not pretty," she said.

"It's my turn now, my dear little Bijou, to ask why you make fun of an old friend who admires you

as much as it is possible to admire anyone, and who, alas! is not the only one." [108]

"Why do you say alas?"

"Well, because when one admires or loves, one would like to be the only one to admire or love; one's affection makes one selfish and jealous."

"And after—let me see—how long—three hours—yes, after three hours' acquaintance, you already have some affection for me?" asked Bijou, looking quite joyful.

"Yes, a great deal!" answered M. de Clagny very seriously.

"So much the better, because, you see, I too, I like you very much!" And, as though she were just talking to herself, she added: "I had imagined you very different, I expected to see you not at all like you are."

"Younger?" he asked sadly.

"Oh, no, just the opposite; they had always spoken of you as a friend of grandpapa's, and grandmamma always said, 'my old friend Clagny,' so that you can understand when I saw you, I was quite surprised."

"But why?"

"Because you looked to me to be—I don't know exactly—about forty-five perhaps?—well, say like Paul de Rueille; and then, you are very handsome, and, for my part, I like people who are handsome." [109]

"Your cousin De Blaye is handsome!"

"Jean?" she said, as though she were turning it over in her mind, "is he as handsome as all that? He does not strike me in that way, you see. When people are always together they end by not noticing each other!"

"I am quite sure that he notices you!"

"Oh, no! people don't notice me as much as you think! They care for me because I was left alone in the world at the age of seventeen; and then, when grandmamma took possession of me, like some poor little stray dog, and carried me off to her home, why, they all felt interested in me, and made me very welcome, and I was their Bijou whom they all tried to bring up and to spoil, whose faults are always looked over, and who always has her own way."

"And Bijou is quite right; that's the only good thing there is in life—having one's own way, when one can."

"One always can," she said, speaking as though she were not aware that she was saying anything, and then suddenly advancing towards the bay-window, she exclaimed: "Ah! there, now! the Tourvilles! and grandmamma is not down stairs again yet!"

Bijou went forward to greet the new-comers—a lady dressed very handsomely, followed by a common-looking sort of man, with very stiff manners, who, on the whole, was decidedly snobbish. [110]

Bijou introduced them, "Count de Clagny, Count de Tourville," and then, as the marchioness entered the room, looking very handsome still in her cloudy lace draperies, the young girl turned to M. de Clagny again.

"Well," she said, "and what do you think of the Tourvilles?"

"I don't admire them. But how much Henry de Bracieux has improved in appearance; he is not as good-looking as his cousin yet; but that may come, perhaps."

"As good-looking as which cousin?"

"As Blaye."

"Again. Oh, well! you will insist on this beauty of Jean's."

"Well, beauty is perhaps not just the word; but he is charming; if you will allow me to say that?"

"I will allow it."

"By the bye, do tell me who that very nice-looking young man is whom I met just now at the end of the avenue?"

"I do not know, unless it were Pierrot's tutor; but he is not so very nice-looking——" [111]

"Look, there he is," said M. de Clagny, indicating M. Giraud.

"Ah!" exclaimed Bijou, in astonishment; "yes, that is he!"

She was amazed both at the count's admiration, and at the transformation which Jean's dress-coat had made.

Arrayed in this garment of a perfect cut, and which fitted him wonderfully well, the young tutor looked quite at his ease.

"Well," said Henry, coming up to Denyse, "wasn't my idea a bright one? Do you see the difference?"—and then, as she did not answer quickly enough for his liking, he added: "I'll bet anything you don't see it; women never can see those things when it's a question of men."

The guests were all arriving. First the La Balues, imperturbable, absurd in the extreme, but so blissfully happy, so full of admiration, and so perfectly satisfied with themselves that one would have been sorry to have undeceived them. Then came Hubert de Bernès, arrayed, as Bijou had prophesied, in his uniform, and looking all round the drawing-room carefully afraid of meeting [112] what he was in the habit of calling '*any big pots*.' The Juzencourts arrived last of all, bringing with them Madame de Nézel, a very pretty and exquisitely-dressed woman. She was extremely refined-looking and supple, with that suppleness peculiar to Creoles; she had a jessamine-like complexion, and heavy, silky hair of jet black.

Bijou, who was looking at her with an expression of curiosity, as though she had never seen her before, remarked to M. de Clagny:

"Madame de Nézel is really very pretty—isn't she?"

He replied, in an absent sort of way, devouring Bijou all the time with his eyes:

"There is no mistaking that she comes of good family, and then, too, she's very womanly, and would respond——"

The young girl knitted her eyebrows as though she were making an effort to understand.

"And would what?"

"Oh, nothing," answered the count, annoyed with himself. "I don't know what I was going to say."

"Bijou!" called out the marchioness suddenly, "Madame de Juzencourt wants to see the children; go and fetch them. You will allow them to come down, Bertrade? and you, too, monsieur?" she [113] added, turning to the abbé.

M. de Clagny looked vexed at being separated from Denyse. It seemed to him already as though he could not do without her.

She soon came back, followed by Marcel and Robert, leading by the hand a superb baby-child of four years old, who was smiling amiably and confidingly as he trotted along.

"This is my godson," she said, introducing him with evident pride. "Isn't he a pet, and so beautiful and good. He's a love!"

"Bijou is so good to that child," said Madame de Rueille, "she is always looking after him and is teaching him now to read."

"So early!" exclaimed M. de Clagny, in a reproachful tone, "is he being taught to read already?"

"Bijou teaches him plenty of other things, too, don't you, Bijou?" asked the marchioness; "you are teaching him Bible history, are you not? Two days ago he told me about Moses, and he knew it all very well."

"Oh!" exclaimed the count jeeringly, "I should like to hear that. Poor unfortunate little mite!"

In a graceful, winsome way, Bijou knelt down by the child. On hearing "his story" mentioned, the [114] poor little fellow looked at her beseechingly.

"Now, Fred, tell it," she said.

Docile, but with a discontented expression on his face, the little fellow looked up at his god-mother.

"Tell about Moses, you know it very well."

"Well then," began Fred resolutely, "they put him in a 'ittle basket, 'ittle Moses, and they put the basket on the Nile——"

He stopped abruptly, his face bathed in perspiration.

"And then, what happened?" asked Bijou.

"Don't know," replied the little fellow briefly; "don't know any more—don't know, I tell you. Say it yourself—what happened."

"Nonsense! come now, have you made up your mind not to answer?"

The child replied coaxingly:

"P'ease don't make me say it!"

Denyse insisted, however.

"Oh, yes! now something happened when Moses was going down the Nile. What was it—what happened?"

He thought for a minute, his face puckered up, his eyes shut, and then, just when everyone had given up hoping for anything more, he cried out, delighted at having remembered: [115]

"Puss in boots came! and called out: 'Help! help! it's the Marquis of Carabas—he's drowning.'"

"There, you see," said Bertrade, laughing, "this is what comes of teaching him so many fine things at the same time."

M. de Rueille added:

"Yes, a day or two ago Denyse gave him a stunning 'Puss in Boots' that we brought with us from Pont-sur-Loire, and this has evidently done Moses a great deal of harm."

Bijou turned towards her cousin, and exclaimed in astonishment:

"Denyse! how long have you taken to calling me Denyse?"

"Oh, I don't know," answered Rueille, "sometimes I do."

"Why, you never do! I thought you were vexed," and then, bending towards her godchild, and taking him up in her arms, she said, laughing: "My poor little Fred, we have not had much success this time, have we?"

Giraud, who was standing just behind her, gazed at her admiringly. She clasped the child, who was smiling at her, closer still, and murmured in a caressing tone:

"Fred! my dear Fred! I do so love you, if you only knew." [116]

On hearing his own name pronounced so tenderly, the young tutor had started involuntarily, and he had had the greatest difficulty in keeping himself from advancing towards Denyse. He had turned so pale, too, and such a strange, drawn look had come over his face, that Pierrot, who, as a rule, was not endowed with much power of observation except in matters relating to Bijou, noticed it, and asked:

"What's the matter with you, Monsieur Giraud? you look so queer! are you ill?"

Denyse turned round abruptly, and asked with interest:

"You are not well, Monsieur Giraud?"

"I? oh, yes! perfectly well, thank you, mademoiselle. I don't know what made Pierrot fancy that."

"Oh, well!" said the youth, with conviction, "look at yourself; you look awfully queer! Besides, for the last three or four days you have not been yourself; you must have something the matter that you don't know of."

"I assure you," stuttered the poor fellow, in a perfect torture, "I assure you that there is nothing the matter with me."

M. de Clagny had approached them. He was looking enviously at little Fred nestling against Bijou's pretty shoulder. [117]

"Your godson is perfectly superb!" he said.

"Yes, isn't he? and he adores me!"

Dinner was announced just at this moment, and Bijou gave the child, who was getting sleepy, to the English nurse who had come for him.

With a disagreeable expression on his face, young La Balue, who was standing just by Denyse, offered her the sharp angle of his arm. With some difficulty she managed to slip her hand through, and, with a resigned look on her face, went in with him to dinner.

At table M. Giraud was at the other side of her, and half wild with delight at finding himself placed next her, he felt that he was more shy and awkward than ever. His timidity, which had hitherto been extreme, seemed to increase. He dared not say a word, and he was in despair, because he felt that he was making himself ridiculous.

He was not only in love with Denyse for her beauty, her grace, and her wonderful charm, but he venerated her for her goodness, which seemed to him to be infinite.

When he had been an usher in a certain college, he had one day murmured some foolish words of affection to the daughter of the headmaster, and he remembered still with awe the contemptuous anger with which the young lady had reproached him for having, in his position, dared to lift his eyes to her. [118]

He had now frankly and bluntly told this beautiful, wealthy, and nobly-born girl that he adored her, and, in reply, she had spoken to him sweetly and affectionately, discouraging him, but taking care not to wound him.

He began now to pity himself and his own fate, firmly believing that his life, having been crossed by this hopeless love, would be wretched for ever-more.

How could he expect that, having once known and loved a woman like Mademoiselle de Courtaix, he would ever be able to love any woman whom he would be in a position to marry.

And the poor young man, who, only three short weeks before, used to dream at times of a little home presided over by a young wife, who should be sweet and modest, though, perhaps, not

remarkable in any way, saw himself now condemned for life to a bachelor's dreary rooms, where, in the end, he would die, surrounded by photographs of Bijou, which he would get with great difficulty from Pierrot.

At the beginning of dinner Denyse did not talk much. She looked round in an absent sort of way at the whole table, noticing all those little nothings which are so amusing to persons capable of seeing them. [119]

Madame de Bracieux had M. de la Balue to her right, but she was neglecting him for the sake of her old friend, Clagny, who was on her other side, and to whom she never ceased talking.

M. de Jonzac, who was opposite his sister, between Madame de la Balue and Madame de Tourville, only appeared to be enjoying himself in a moderate degree. Madame de Nézel also looked rather sad, and talked in a half-hearted way to her neighbours, Henry de Bracieux and M. de Rueille. She glanced often in the direction of Jean de Blaye, who was seated at the other end of the table, between Madame de Juzencourt and Mademoiselle de la Balue. Jean did not seem to be taking any notice of Madame de Nézel, and several times Bijou saw that his eyes were fixed on her. She found this embarrassing; so turning towards young Balue, started an animated conversation with him, and thereupon Jean, with a somewhat troubled expression in his eyes, watched her all the time.

VII. [120]

After dinner the heat in the drawing-room was over-powering, and Madame de Bracieux said to her guests:

"Those of you who are not afraid of the evening air could go out on to the terrace or into the garden."

Gisèle de la Balue, a big, tall girl, built on the model of the statues round the Place de la Concorde, and who liked to affect free and easy tom-boyish manners, started off out-doors, running along heavily and calling out:

"Whoever cares for me will follow me!"

Hubert de Bernès followed her out of politeness.

Rueille, Henry de Bracieux, Pierrot, and M. Giraud turned with one accord toward Denyse.

"Are you coming, Bijou?" asked Pierrot.

She saw Jean de Blaye talking to Madame de Nézel, who was just going out with him, and she answered:

"I will come to you directly. I am going to see if the children are in bed just now." [121]

"Mademoiselle," proposed the abbé, "I can spare you the trouble."

"Oh, no; thank you very much, monsieur, but you know I never feel quite happy if I have not kissed Fred."

She went out by the door opposite the terrace.

"Your grand-daughter is decidedly the most charming girl I have ever come across," remarked M. de Clagny to the marchioness, and then he added sadly; "It is when an old man meets women like that, that he regrets his age."

"I must say," answered Madame de Bracieux, laughing, "that even if you were young, you would not be just the husband I dream of for Bijou."

"And why not, if you please?"

"Well, because you are, or at least you were, rather—how shall I put it?—rather large-hearted."

"Large-hearted! good heavens, yes, I was! but that was the fault of those who did not know how to keep my affection. I assure you, though, that with a wife like Bijou, I should never have been what you call *large-hearted*."

"Oh, as to that," said Madame de Bracieux incredulously, "one never knows."

On leaving the drawing-room, Bijou crossed the hall, and instead of going up the wide staircase which led to the children's rooms, she lifted the old green tapestry curtain which covered the door of the butler's pantry. Just as she was going to open this door she turned back into the hall to get a long, dark cloak, which was hanging there. It was a Berck fisherwoman's cloak, which she always put on when it rained. She wrapped herself up in it hastily, and then went into the pantry, where it was now quite dark. From the kitchen she could hear the loud voices of the servants, who were at dinner. Denyse went across to the open window, got up on to a chair, and then gathering her skirts closely round her, stepped out on to the window-sill, and jumped lightly down into the garden. [122]

Once there, she hesitated an instant. The terrace seemed to stand out distinctly, lighted up by the drawing-room windows. In the chestnut avenue she could distinguish in the shade the red gleam of cigars.

Suddenly she pulled the hood of her cloak up over her head, and evidently making up her mind, started off quickly along the dark pathway which led to the other avenue.

During this time her faithful admirers were waiting on the terrace for her to come and join them as she had promised, and the ponderous Gisèle was endeavouring vainly to organise a game at [123] hide-and-seek. The men seemed to have no energy; Madame de Tourville was afraid of spoiling her dress; and Madame de Juzencourt was strolling about with Jean de Blaye and Madame de Nézel. Presently, however, she went back to the others alone, and Mademoiselle de la Balue wanted to persuade her to have a game, but she refused emphatically. She certainly was not going to run about, she said, considering that she was too warm already with only walking; she had just had to leave Thérèse de Nézel and Jean de Blaye, for she could not walk another step.

Left to themselves, Jean and Madame de Nézel continued strolling along, she in a natural, unaffected way, going on with the conversation they had commenced, and he absent-minded and ill-at-ease.

"Why do you not reproach me?" he said at last, abruptly, not able to contain himself any longer; "why do you not say all the bad things you think about me?"

"Because I have nothing to reproach you for," she answered, very gently; "and I do not think any bad things about you."

"Well, then, you do not care about me any longer."

"I do not care about you any longer?" she said, and there was an accent of such intense grief in [124] her voice that he was quite overcome by it.

He knew so well how deeply she loved him, that he dreaded the thought of the awful suffering she would have to endure if he were to be quite straightforward with her now, and so, out of affection for her, he endeavoured to conceal from her the real truth.

"Yes," he began, improvising with difficulty an excuse of which he had not thought until that moment, "you must have fancied that I was not thinking of you, for you have been here at The Pines a fortnight, and I have not sent you a line. The fact is, it is very difficult to arrange to meet here at Pont-sur-Loire; everyone knows me here, and, you see, for your sake, I scarcely liked to ask you to meet me in the town."

She did not make any reply, and he could not understand her silence.

"Why do you not answer me?" he asked at length.

"Why? well, because you are telling me now exactly the opposite to what you said when you asked me to accept the Juzencourts' invitation."

"What did I say?" he asked, slightly embarrassed.

"You said that at Pont-sur-Loire it would be so easy to meet. You said that between the hours of [125] luncheon and dinner there were two trains up and two down from The Pines to Pont-sur-Loire, and that I could get away so easily, as the Juzencourts never went out except to pay calls at the various country-houses in the neighbourhood, or to follow the paper chases. On my arrival here I found that all these details were perfectly exact."

"Yes, but it really is not so easy as I had imagined."

"Ah, Jean! instead of trying to deceive me in this way, it would be much better to tell me the truth."

"And the truth, according to you, is that I no longer care for you?"

"Yes, that is a part of the truth."

"And," he asked, somewhat uneasily, "the rest?"—

"Is, that you are in love with Mademoiselle de Courtaix. Ah, do not deny it! it is so evident!" And then, after a moment's silence, she added: "And so natural!"

"Do you forgive me?"

"I have nothing to forgive. I have never demanded anything from you, and you have never, never promised me anything. When I first began to care for you, I was not a widow; you must therefore have judged me severely, as a man nearly always does judge the woman who is weak enough to [126] care for him when she ought not to."

"I swear to you—"

"No, do not swear anything; you had all the more reason to judge me in that way, because I did not think it my duty to tell you what my life had been like until then. You doubtless believed that my husband was kind and affectionate, and that I endured no remorse, when I allowed myself to love you—"

"I did not think about it at all, I simply adored you," he said. And then hesitating, and with evident anxiety, he continued: "And now you will never care for me any more?"

"What!" she exclaimed, perfectly amazed at the unconscious selfishness of the man, "you wish me to go on caring for you?"

"You ask if I wish it? why, what would become of me without you? you who are my very life!" And then, as she moved back a step or two in sheer bewilderment, he went on: "Well, but whatever have you been imagining?—that I am going to marry Bijou, perhaps?"

"Why, yes."

He was about to explain to her why he could not marry his cousin, but it occurred to him that the very prosaic reason for the impossibility of such a match, would make his return to Madame de [127]
Nézel, of whom he was really very fond, appear as a slight to her.

"It has only been a passing fancy that I have had for Bijou," he said. "How could I help it? it is simply impossible to be always with her and to escape being intoxicated by her beauty, and by her unconscious and innocent coquetry. For the last fortnight I have been a fool—I am still, in fact; but on seeing you again I knew at once that it is you only whom I love, and belong to—heart and soul."

As he said this, he drew Madame de Nézel's pale face against his shoulder, and, bending down, pressed his lips to hers, and then, as the young widow nestled closer still in his arms, he said, with passionate tenderness:

"How do you think that I could ever care for that child—with whom I am always so reserved—in the way I care for you?" He could feel her slender form trembling in his embrace, and, drawing her closer still, he murmured: "Forgive me, darling, you are always so good, and if I have sinned, it has only been in thought."

"You know I love you," she answered. "But we must go back to the house at once; they will think our walk is lasting a long time." [128]

Madame de Juzencourt, who was seated on the terrace, called out as soon as she caught sight of them:

"Well, have you been walking all this time?"

And at the same moment M. de Rueille called out to Bijou, who had just appeared at one of the windows:

"So that's the way you come out to us! It's very kind of you."

"I could not come before," she answered, stepping out, and then approaching her cousin, she added, in a low voice: "I had to see to the tea and the ices, etc., etc.; you must not be vexed with me."

"Vexed with you!" exclaimed Pierrot warmly. "Could anyone be vexed with *you*, now?"

Bijou did not answer. She was watching Hubert de Bernès in an absent-minded way, as he stood talking to Bertrade, and she was wondering how it was that he was so cool in his manner towards herself. He was polite, certainly, and even pleasant, but *only* polite and pleasant, and she was not accustomed to such moderation. M. de Clagny appeared presently at one of the windows and called out:

"Mademoiselle Bijou, your grandmamma wants you." [129]

Denyse ran into the house, her silk skirts rustling as she went. She did not even stay to answer young La Balue, who, pointing to Henry de Bracieux as he stood with the light showing up his profile, had just remarked:

"What a handsome man Henry is."

"Bijou," said the marchioness, "I want you to sing something for us."

"Oh! grandmamma, please"—she began, in a beseeching tone, and looking annoyed.

"M. de Clagny wants to hear you," said Madame de Bracieux, insisting.

"Oh, very well, then, I will, certainly," replied Bijou pleasantly, without taking into account that her way of consenting was not very flattering for the rest of her grandmother's guests.

She went to the piano, and, taking up a guitar, put the pink ribbon which was attached to it round her neck, and then came back and took up her position in the midst of the semi-circle formed by the arm-chairs.

"I am going to accompany myself with the guitar," she said; "it is simpler." And then turning to M. de Clagny, she asked: "What do you want me to sing? Do you like the old-fashioned songs?" and without waiting for a reply, she began the ballad of the "Petit Soldat": [130]

"Je me suis engagé
l'amour d'une blonde."

She had a good ear and a pretty voice, which she used skilfully, and it was with plaintive sweetness that she sang the touching story of the young soldier who "veut qu'on mette son cœur dans une serviette blanche."

The drawing-room soon filled when Bijou began to sing, and the various expressions on the different faces were most amusing to see.

Jean was listening in a nervous, excited way, pulling his fair moustache irritably through his fingers.

M. de Rueille, affected in spite of himself by the doleful air, and annoyed that all these people should be admiring Bijou, was pacing up and down at the other end of the drawing-room, pretending not to be listening to the music.

Pierrot, with his mouth open, was all attention. Young La Balue, with his elbow resting on a side-table in an awkward and ridiculous pose, kept his colourless eyes fixed on the young girl in a gaze which he tried to make magnetic, and with such bold persistency that Henry de Bracieux felt the most extraordinary desire to walk up to him and box his ears. Even Abbé Courteil was carried away by the plaintive ballad; he was deeply moved, and sat there with his eyes stretched [131]
wide open, breathing heavily. Hubert de Bernès only was listening with polite attention, but comparative indifference. As to the ladies, all, except, perhaps, Gisèle de la Balue, admired Bijou sincerely.

Madame de Nézel was listening with a mournful expression in her eyes, and a kind-hearted smile, whilst as for M. de Clagny, it was as though all the sensitiveness and affection of his nature had gone out towards this pretty, fragile-looking, young creature. His eyes, beaming with tenderness, seemed to take in at the same time, the beautiful face, the little rosy fingers as they touched the strings of the guitar, and the slender, supple figure.

When Bijou had come to the end of her song, she went up to him, without paying any attention to the compliments that were being showered on her, and, in a pretty, coaxing way, she asked:

"It did not bore you too much, I hope?"

M. de Clagny could not answer for a moment. He felt choked with emotion.

"I shall often ask you for that song again," he said at last. "Yes, I shall come often, and you will sing me the 'Petit Soldat,' won't you?"

He had a great desire to hear Bijou sing for him—for him alone; he did not want to share her [132]
voice and her charm with all these people whom he now detested.

"You shall come as often as you please," she answered, looking delighted, "and I will sing you everything you like," and then gliding away she went across to Jean de Blaye, who was standing alone at the other end of the drawing-room. "It annoys you when I sing, doesn't it?" she asked him.

"Why, no!" he answered, surprised at the question, and surprised that Bijou should trouble about him. "Why should you think so?"

"Because I saw you just now—you were pulling your moustache in the most furious way, and you looked bored to death. Yes, you certainly did look bored!"

"It was just your own imagination."

"Oh, no! it was not just my imagination. When I care about anyone I am always very clear-sighted! so, you see, it is quite the contrary. Why are you frowning now?"

"I am not frowning."

"Oh, yes, you were, and it looks as though what I said just now had vexed you, too."

"What did you just say?"

"That I am very clear-sighted. And you are vexed, because you are afraid that I shall see that [133]
something is the matter."

"Something the matter?" he asked uneasily. "What is it?"

"What is it? Ah! I don't know! But most certainly something is the matter with you—you are not at all like yourself ever since—why, ever since we have been at Bracieux."

"Really?" he said, putting on a joking tone. "I am different, am I—and the most extraordinary thing is, that I did not know myself about this difference."

Bijou shrugged her pretty shoulders.

"Don't try to take me in like that, Jean, my dear; I know you too well, you see. You are different, I tell you! You have gradually got very abrupt, restless, and absent-minded. Listen, now,—would you like me to tell you what it is?"

Seated at some distance away from them, Madame de Nézel was watching them, with an expression of melancholy resignation.

Bijou glanced across at her, and the young girl's violet eyes gleamed between her long, thick lashes, as she said:

"You are in love with someone who does not return your love." [134]

Jean de Blaye coloured up furiously.

"You don't know what you are talking about," he answered.

"Well, then, why have you gone so red? Oh, how proud you are. You are vexed because I have found this out." And then, after a short silence, she began again: "Have you told her?"

"Have I told what? and whom? My dear Bijou, how foolish you are."

"Have you told Mad—" She stopped abruptly, and then, with her face turned towards Madame de Nézel, she continued: "The person with whom you are in love, have you told her that you love her?"

"No!" he murmured, in a stifled sort of voice.

"You are afraid to? but why? I constantly hear grandmamma, Bertrade, Paul, and Uncle Alexis, saying over and over again that you are the kind of man women like; *she* would be sure to like you, too, and she would marry you, I am certain." She leaned towards him, nearly touching his ear as she whispered to him, and not caring what effect her familiarity might have. "Listen, now, if you like I will tell her for you, and I am quite sure what her answer will be."

Jean rose abruptly, and seizing Bijou's hand, he asked excitedly: [135]

"What are you saying?"

"I am just saying that she *will* love you, if she does not already."

"But of whom are you speaking—of whom?" he stammered out, aghast.

She answered him in a hesitating way, with a frank look on her pretty face, but she spoke in such a low voice that he could scarcely catch her first words.

"I am speaking of——"

"Bijou!" called out Pierrot, separating them unceremoniously, "grandmamma says you are forgetting about the tea." And then, looking at their faces, he went on: "Well, I never! you are both as red as cherries; there's no mistake about it, it's baking hot in here."

Denyse hurried away, and Pierrot continued:

"We thought over there that you were quarrelling."

"Ah! you thought that, did you?" answered Jean, by way of saying something.

"Yes, especially grandmamma; that's why she sent me to tell Bijou about the tea. I say, Bijou isn't worried about anything, is she?"

"Well, now, what kind of worry do you fancy she could have, my dear fellow?" And then, with a smile, he added: "Who do you imagine would undertake to cause her any worry? It seems to me [136] that anyone who did venture to would have a bad time of it in this house."

"She's so sweet, and so nice always," answered the boy, with great warmth. "As for me, why, I just adore her; and Paul does, too, and so does Henry, and M. Giraud, and Bertrade's kids, and the abbé, and everyone, in fact; even little La Balue is gone on her, and he's never gone on anyone. Yes, he was telling her I don't know what up in a corner of the room after dinner, and then, when she was singing—did you ever see such eyes as he was making at her?—oh, no! if you had only just seen him——"

"Do shut up!" exclaimed Jean irritably, "you wear everyone out, if you only knew it, my dear Pierrot."

When Bijou came back to the drawing-room, Henry de Bracieux waylaid her.

"I say," he began, in a cross-grained tone, "what was La Balue telling you just now that appeared to be so interesting?"

"Where?"

"Here, after dinner."

"Here?" repeated Bijou, apparently trying to recall something to her memory, "after dinner? Ah, I remember; why, he was talking about you!' [137]

"About me?"

"Yes, about you! He thinks you are very handsome, but he also thinks that you do not know how to make the most of your good looks."

"Have you finished making game of me?"

"I assure you that I am not making game of you—not the least bit in the world. He even advised

me to tell you that instead of your frightful stand-up collars—these are his words, you know, and not mine—you ought to wear—what did he call them now?—oh, Van Dyck collars, which would not cover your neck up, for it appears that your throat is superb, and your head so well set on your shoulders; and then you have lovely teeth! I only wish you could hear him sing the praises of your personal appearance."

"Of my personal appearance! Mine?"

"Why, yes; you thought, perhaps, that he was talking to me of mine? Not at all! He informed me, too, that he was going to tell you all that in poetry; not the Van Dyck collars, but the rest."

"That young man is an idiot!"

"Oh, dear me, he is very harmless."

"You are so good-hearted always, you never dig into anyone. Ah, attention! they are packing up, the La Balue crew!" And Henry, in a low voice, and apparently delighted, finished up with a "Hip! hip! hurrah!" [138]

M. de la Balue, who was just coming out of the hall with a heap of cloaks, looked at him in astonishment, while at the doorway a little family quarrel took place. The good man wanted to make his wife and daughter wrap their heads up in some very ordinary-looking knitted shawls, so that they should not get a chill. He was obliged, however, to give in at last.

Bijou, on saying good-bye to Madame de Nézel, held out her little hand, and looked straight into her eyes with such an expression of innocent curiosity that the young widow turned away, quite confused by the persistency of the young girl's gaze. It seemed to her as though this child had discovered the secret of her life, and the bare idea of this caused her intense misery.

Bijou's charm, however, was so great, and her power of attraction so strong, that Madame de Nézel, at the bottom of her heart, felt nothing but affection for the lovely little creature who had so unconsciously stolen her happiness from her.

"Oh, dear!" exclaimed Denyse gaily, when she went back into the drawing-room, where only M. de Clagny and the family now remained, "it is half-past twelve, you know; they all seemed like fixtures, and I thought they were never going to leave us!" [139]

"The La Balue family are not very handsome," remarked the abbé.

"Oh, they are not so bad," protested the young girl; "it is only a question of getting used to them, that's all!"

"Young Balue is horrible!" said Madame de Bracieux. "And then, too, there is something snaky about him. When you shake hands with him, it is like touching an eel."

"And the daughter, too!" put in Pierrot. "Ugh, she has such little pig's eyes! and Louis, too, has little eyes!"

"They are very nice, though, all the same," said Bijou, in a conciliatory tone.

"And they come of very good family," added Madame de Bracieux; "they are descended from La Balue, from the Cardinal, the real—"

"Oh, well," put in Bijou gently, "it would, perhaps, be better for Gisèle not to have descended from the iron cage, but to have larger eyes; however, as it cannot be helped—"

M. de Clagny laughed, as he turned round to look about for his hat, which he had put down somewhere in the room. [140]

"One needs to have a certain amount of assurance," he said, "in making one's exit from here, for one feels how one will be pulled to pieces."

"You need not be afraid," said Bijou, "we shall not pull you to pieces, although you could stand it very well. I promise you, though, that you shall not be pulled to pieces. Will you take my word for it?"

"Yes, I will take your word," answered the count, as he took the little hands, which were held out to him, and pressed them affectionately in his.

VIII. [141]

"Are you going for a ride, Bijou?" called out Pierrot, leaning out of the window.

Denyse, who was just crossing the courtyard, pointed to her riding-habit.

"Well, you can be sure that in this heat I should not entertain myself by walking about in a cloth dress if I were not going to ride."

"Where are you going?"

"Why?"

"So that we can come and meet you—we two—M. Giraud and I,—at eleven o'clock!"

Just behind Pierrot the tutor's head was to be seen.

"I am going to The Borderettes to take a message to Lavenue," answered Bijou; and then, seeing Giraud, she said pleasantly: "Good morning. I shall see you again, then, soon?"

Patatras was waiting in the shade. The old coachman, who always accompanied Bijou, helped her into her saddle, and then, mounting in his turn, prepared to follow her. When Pierrot saw this, he called out again: [142]

"How is it that none of the cousins are riding with you?"

"I did not tell them that I was going out."

"Ah!" he exclaimed regretfully, "if I were only free, wouldn't I come with you!"

She turned round in her saddle, with an easy movement which showed that she was not laced in at all, and answered Pierrot, with a merry laugh:

"I should not have told you though, either!"

As soon as Bijou had passed through the gateway, she put Patatras to a gallop, for the flies were teasing him dreadfully.

She went along through the hot air, meeting the sun, the burning rays of which fell full on her pretty face without making it red. She did not slacken her pace until she arrived at the narrow lane leading to The Borderettes. It was almost perpendicular, and covered with loose stones, and at the bottom of the little valley, which was very green, in spite of the dry season, the farm, with its white walls and red roof, looked like a perfectly new toy-house. When she was at the bottom of the hill, Bijou pulled out of her pocket a little looking-glass, and then arranged her veil and the loose curly locks of hair, which had blown over her ears and the back of her neck. She then gathered from the hedge a spray of mulberry blossom, which she fastened in the bodice of her [143] habit, arranged the little handkerchief, trimmed with Valenciennes, daintily in her side-pocket, and then, after another short gallop, pulled up at the entrance to the farm.

A rough voice called out: "Are you there, master?" and then a young farm labourer came out of the house, saying: "Master ain't heard me call; I'll go and find him."

A minute or two later, a tall young man, of some thirty-five years of age, appeared. He was a true type of the Norman peasant, somewhat meagre-looking, with fair hair, and a slight stoop. He looked very warm and was out of breath. His face was so red that it seemed to be turning purple.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, trying to get his breath again, "it's you, Mad'moiselle Denyse, it's you, is it?"

"Yes, Monsieur Lavenue," she answered, smiling, "it is."

"Won't you get down?" he asked, holding out his hand to help her.

"No, thanks! I have only come to bring you a message from grandmamma. It is about the Confirmation dinner next Monday; but you know all about that, as you are the mayor?"

"Yes, I know about it!" [144]

"Well, grandmamma would like to have some very nice peaches for Monday, and some very nice pears; in fact, all kinds of nice things, such as grow in your orchard."

"They shall bring you them, Mad'moiselle Denyse! You can be quite easy about that. I'll see they are well chosen." And then, as the young girl turned her horse round, he said, as he watched her, almost dazed with admiration: "Are you going to start back already, mad'moiselle? Won't you stop and have some refreshment—a bowl of milk now? I know you like a drop o' good milk!" And then, in a persuasive tone, he added, as he took hold of Patatras' bridle, "That 'ud give the horse a rest, too; he's very warm after the run."

Farmer Lavenue's way of talking always amused Bijou. It had been more than ten years now since the sturdy Norman had emigrated to Touraine, and yet he had not lost his strong Norman accent in the slightest degree.

It was Madame de Bracieux, who, thoroughly dissatisfied with the Touraine farmers, had taken up this man. Charlemagne Lavenue had never fraternised with the regular inhabitants of the place. He was looked up to and admired by the simple-minded and unskilful villagers, who saw [145] him making money in the very place where others had been ruined. He had, by "sending for people from his part of the world," gradually transformed The Borderettes into a small Normandy, and he had so much influence now in the place that he, an interloper, had been elected mayor of Bracieux, to the exclusion of the former notables of the place.

As Denyse did not reply, he lifted her down from her horse, saying as he did so: "You will, mad'moiselle, won't you?" And then, after giving the reins to the old groom, he led the way to the door of the farm, and stood aside for Bijou to enter.

"How nice it is here, Monsieur Lavenue," she exclaimed, in a pleasant way. "Have I ever seen this room before? No, I don't think I have!"

"Yes, you've seen it, mad'moiselle, only, you know, it's been fresh white-washed, and, you see, that makes it different-like."

"When you are married, now," she said, smiling, "it will be very nice, indeed."

Farmer Lavenue, who was looking at Bijou with hungry eyes, held his head up erect, and then, shaking it slowly, he answered, with some hesitation:

"I can't decide to give the farm a mistress, because I don't come across one as suits me." And [146] after a moment's silence, he added: "That is to say, amongst them as I could have."

"Why, how's that? any of the girls from Bracieux, or Combes, or from the villages round The Borderettes, would marry you, Monsieur Lavenue, and there are some very pretty girls among them."

"I can't see as they are," he answered, blushing, and twisting about in his fingers the huge, broad-brimmed hat which he always wore the whole year round.

"You are difficult to please, then; do you mean that you don't think Catherine Lebour pretty?"

"No, Mad'moiselle Denyse."

"Nor Josephine Lacaille?"

"No, Mad'moiselle Denyse."

"And Louise Pature?"

"No, mad'moiselle."

Bijou laughed merrily. "Oh, well, do you mean to say that you don't admire any woman?"

"Yes, I do—there's *one*—"

"Who is it?" she asked, looking full at the peasant, with her frank, innocent expression.

Lavenue turned redder still, and stooped down with an awkward movement to pick up his hat, which had fallen to the ground.

"I can't say," he stuttered out; "she isn't for such as me." [147]

Bijou did not hear his reply. With her pretty figure slightly bent, and her head thrown back, she was slowly drinking a second cup of milk, whilst the farmer, who had recovered himself, stood still, with his eyes wide open, gazing at this fragile-looking young creature in timid, half-fearful admiration.

When Bijou had finished her milk, she looked at him critically, with a smile on her lips.

"My goodness! how warm it is to-day," he said, wiping with the back of his hand the great drops of perspiration, which stood out on his forehead.

"Thank you, so much, Monsieur Lavenue," said Denyse, getting up; "your milk is delicious."

"Oh! but you aren't surely going to start off again already?" he said, with a downcast look.

"Already! why, I have been here at least a quarter of an hour."

"Oh, well! it's been precious quick to me that quarter of an hour!" he stammered; and then, in a lower voice, he added: "Thank you, very much, Mad'moiselle Denyse, for the honour as you've done me. I sha'n't forget it, that's certain!"

On getting up, Bijou had let the flowers, which she was wearing in her bodice, fall to the ground.

As she turned towards the door, to see whether the horses were there, the peasant, with a [148] stealthy movement, stretched his long, sinewy body out along the floor, and, snatching up the flowers, hid them away under his blouse.

The groom was about to descend from his horse in order to help Denyse to mount; but she made a sign to stop him.

"Monsieur Lavenue will help me on to my horse," she said; "he is very strong."

She put her foot out in order to place it in the farmer's hand; but, without any warning, he put his hands round her waist, and then, steadying her a second against himself, he lifted her straight into the saddle.

"Oh, well!" she exclaimed, in amazement, "I said you were strong, but however could you hold me at arm's length like that, and put me on to my horse, which is so tall?" and then, as he did not speak, but just stood there, looking down and breathing heavily, she added: "There, you see, I was too heavy! You are quite out of breath."

She started off before he had time to answer, calling out to him as she rode away:

"Good morning, and thank you again, very much!"

Just as she was turning out of the farmyard, she looked round again at the farmer, who was standing motionless, as though rooted to the spot, with his arms hanging down at his sides. [149]

"Don't forget grandmamma's peaches and pears, Monsieur Lavenue!" she called out.

She then looked at her watch, and found that it was five minutes past eleven. She had plenty of time to return home without hurrying, and then, too, M. Giraud and Pierrot were to meet her, and they were never free until eleven o'clock.

As she passed through a village, she gathered a spray of clematis from the cemetery wall to replace the flowers which she had dropped, and then, when she found herself quite alone, she took out her little looking-glass again, and fluffed her hair up, as it was not curly enough now that the heat had made it limp. At half-past eleven, as she saw no signs of those whom she was expecting, she began to get impatient, and put her horse to a gallop, for Patatras was getting tired, and would keep stopping, and doing his utmost to browse the leaves along the hedges.

Suddenly a serious, almost melancholy, expression came over the girl's pretty, happy-looking face. She was just crossing a meadow, which was skirted by a wood.

"Hallo, Bijou! that's how you cut us, is it?" exclaimed a voice. [150]

She stopped short, looking surprised, and turned back a few steps.

Pierrot and M. Giraud, who had been lying down in the shade, rose from the ground, leaving the long grass marked with their impress.

"Why, you are here already!" she said; "I did not expect to meet you so far away from home; at what time did you start, then?"

"A little before the hour," answered Pierrot; and then he added slily, winking at his tutor: "M'sieu' Giraud was a brick; he let me off a bit earlier—without me begging much, either—and now, if we want to be at Bracieux at twelve o'clock, we shall have to put our best feet first!"

They were walking along by the side of Bijou.

"Have you recovered from yesterday evening?" she asked, addressing M. Giraud.

"Recovered?" said the young tutor. "How *recovered*?"

"Because you could not have enjoyed yourself very much! M. de Tourville and M. de Juzencourt blocked you up, one after the other, in a corner, to explain to you: the one that Charles de Tourville embarked with William the Conqueror in 1066; and the other, that a Juzencourt fought against Charles the Bold in 1477 under the walls of Nancy. Am I not right?" [151]

"Quite right! and M. de Juzencourt added that there was only blue blood in his family. I did not quite understand why he should tell me that."

"In order to prove to you that, traced clearly only since 1477, but without the slightest *mésalliance*, the Juzencourts are more respectable than the Tourvilles."

"Oh, indeed!"

"Yes, M. de Tourville married a young lady who was all very well, but her name was Chaillot, and her father is on the Stock Exchange; you see, therefore, that, as regards the Tourvilles, the family is older than the Juzencourt family, but it is not so pure. You managed to put such a good face on as you listened to all that. Oh, dear! I could have laughed if you had not looked so wretched."

"It wasn't just the nuisance of having to listen to the Tourville and Juzencourt yarns that made him look like that," observed Pierrot. "For some time past he is always like that, even with me, and I can promise you that I don't overpower him with yarns, either about Charles the Bold or William the Conqueror."

"I am quite convinced on that score!" said Bijou, laughing.

"Dear me! it isn't that there'd be any difficulty about it," protested Pierrot. "I *could* very well if I wanted to, but—confound it!" [152]

"Confound it! again?" said the young tutor, annoyed, and looking reproachfully at his pupil. "You know that M. de Jonzac objects to your speaking in that way. He particularly wishes you to be more careful, and more correct, in your choice of words."

"Oh, well! if he were to talk to my friends, he'd hear a few things, and he'd soon get used to it, too. It's always like that; just a matter of getting used to things."

"I cannot imagine that very well, though," said Bijou; "Uncle Alexis letting himself get used to the style of conversation of your friends."

She drew up whilst she was speaking, and pointed to something in the wood.

"Oh! look at that beautiful mountain ash, isn't it red? How pretty those bunches are!"

"Do you want some of those berries?" proposed Pierrot.

"Yes, I should like some, they are so beautiful."

The youth entered the coppice, and they heard the branches snapping as he broke them in order to make himself a passage, and presently the top of the red tree shook and swayed, now bending [153] down, and now springing up again, as Pierrot shook it roughly.

Bijou, with her head bent, and a far-away look in her eyes, seemed to be in a dream, quite oblivious of what was going on around her. She started on hearing Pierrot's voice as he called out to her to know whether he was to gather a large bunch.

"There is nothing worrying you, is there, mademoiselle?" asked Monsieur Giraud timidly, as he stroked Patatras gently.

"Oh, no! Why?"

"Because you do not seem quite like yourself; you look rather sad."

"Sad?" she said, forcing a smile. "I look sad?"

"Yes. Just now, when you passed by without seeing us, you looked sad, very sad, and now again —"

"Just now—that's quite possible. Yes, I did not feel quite gay; but, now, why, I have no reason to be otherwise—quite the contrary. I feel so happy here, in this velvety-looking field, and with this beautiful sunshine that I love so much!" And then she added, as though in a dream, and not taking any notice of the young man: "Yes, I am so happy, I should like to stay like this for ever and ever." [154]

She pressed her rosy lips to the spray of clematis with which she had been playing the last minute or two, and then put it back into her bodice, not seeing the hand which Giraud was holding out beseechingly towards the poor flowers, which were already withering.

Pierrot came out of the thicket at this moment, carrying an immense bunch of mountain ash berries. Bijou was smiling again by this time.

"You are ever so kind, Pierrot dear," she said, after thanking him, "and all the more so as you will have the bother of carrying that for another mile yet."

"Oh! if it would give you any pleasure, you know, I'd do things that were a lot more bother than that!"

"You are good, Pierrot."

"It isn't because I'm good;" he said, and then coming nearer, so that he touched the horse, he added very softly: "It's because I'm so fond of you."

Bijou did not answer, and in another minute Pierrot began again:

"How well you sang last night. Didn't she, M'sieu' Giraud?"

"Wonderfully well," said the tutor. "And what a lovely voice! so fresh, and so pure. I can [155] understand something now which I did not understand yesterday."

"What may that be?"

"The infinite power of the voice! Yes, before hearing you I did not know what I know at present. You will sing again, will you not, mademoiselle? Fancy, I have been here three weeks, and I had never had the happiness of—"

"I will give you *that happiness* as much as ever you like."

She was joking again now, for the little dreamy creature of a minute before was Bijou once more.

As they approached the château, she put her hand up to shade her eyes.

"Why, what's going on?" she said; "the hall-door steps look black with people."

"Hang it!" exclaimed Pierrot crossly. "They are all out there watching for you! There's Paul, and there's Henry, and the abbé, and Uncle Alexis, and Bertrade. Look, though! Who's that? You are right—there are some other folks too. Ah! it's old Dubuisson, and Jeanne, and then there's a fellow I don't know; a fellow all in black. Oh, well! he must be a shivery sort to come to the country dressed in black, in such heat as this." [156]

"Perhaps it's M. Spiegel, Jeanne's *fiancé*. They were to bring him."

"Yes, that must be it! I say, he doesn't look a very lively sort, your Jeanne's *fiancé*. She isn't though either—"

Bijou was looking round to see what had become of Giraud, who had suddenly become so silent. He was following the young girl, worshipping her as he walked along as though she were some idol.

Just at this moment, whilst Pierrot was very much taken up with looking in the direction of the château, the little bunch of clematis dropped from Bijou's dress, and fell at the tutor's feet. He picked it up quickly, and slipped it into his pocket-book, after kissing it, with a kind of passionate

devotion, whilst behind him, the old groom, silent and correct as usual, laughed to himself.

IX.

[157]

M. Dubuisson, whom the students called "Old Dubuisson," was the principal of the college.

He had brought his daughter to Bracieux, where she was to spend a week with Bijou, and Jeanne's *fiancé*, a young professor, newly appointed at the Pont-sur-Loire College, had accompanied them.

"How warm you must be, my dear Bijou," called out the marchioness, appearing at one of the windows.

"Oh, no, grandmamma," answered Denyse, taking M. de Rueille's hand in order to descend from her horse. "M. Giraud and Pierrot must be warm—I am all right."

She kissed Jeanne heartily, spoke to M. Dubuisson, and then looked in a hesitating way towards the young professor, who was contemplating her in surprise.

"Bijou, this is Monsieur Spiegel," said Mademoiselle Dubuisson.

With a graceful, pretty movement, which was very taking, Bijou held out her little hand to the young man.

[158]

"We are friends at once," she said; and then, as she moved away with Jeanne, she whispered: "He is charming, you know, quite charming!"

M. Spiegel perhaps overheard this kindly criticism, or else it was just by accident that he happened to turn very red at that moment.

"Go and change your dress quickly, Bijou!" commanded the marchioness.

"But, grandmamma, I am not warm, really and truly."

"Come here! Let me see!"

In a docile way, Bijou went up to Madame de Bracieux.

"Well, grandmamma?" she said, when the marchioness had satisfied herself by putting her finger between the young girl's neck and her collar, "wasn't I right?"

"Yes, it's quite true," said Madame de Bracieux unwillingly, "she is not warm at all; it is incomprehensible! Well, stay as you are then, if you like." She made her grand-daughter turn round just in front of her, and then remarked, in a satisfied tone, "You look very well like that. Those little white, piqué jackets are very becoming."

"They suit Bijou," said Bertrade, "because, with her complexion, everything suits her; but these little English jackets are very unbecoming to most women."

[159]

Abbé Courteil looked at the black skirt, the white jacket, and then at Bijou herself.

"At all events, the black and white together is perfectly charming. Mademoiselle Denyse looks like a big swallow."

"Well, well!" exclaimed the marchioness, with a benevolent expression in her eyes, "that's very pretty, now, that comparison!"

Though she herself was the topic of conversation, Bijou was paying no attention to what was being said, but was talking in a pleasant way to M. Spiegel, a little apart from the others.

He was a serious, placid, young man, with a somewhat rigid expression. His eyes, however, had a merry twinkle, which relieved the severity of his mouth, and the austerity of his deportment.

He was rather tall, and slightly made, and was dressed in dark clothes of a good cut. Altogether M. Spiegel might have passed for a young clergyman. Fascinated and almost bewildered by Bijou's charm and wonderful beauty, he was gazing at her with a look of surprise and admiration in his eyes, whilst the young girl, for her part, kept stealing a glance at him, for she was quite astonished to find that Jeanne's *fiancé* was so satisfactory-looking.

[160]

Luncheon seemed to be very long. The marchioness's guests were all engaged in studying each other, some of them absent-minded and silent, and the others talkative, but singularly preoccupied also.

Madame de Bracieux was witnessing, without understanding in the least what it all meant, the change of attitude, or, in fact, the transformation which had commenced a few days ago. She could scarcely recognise her little troop with whom she had hitherto been able to do just as she liked.

M. Spiegel and Bijou, who were placed next to each other at the table, were the only ones who talked with the animation of those who have something to say, and who are not talking for the

mere sake of talking.

Several times Jeanne Dubuisson, seated on the right of M. Spiegel, turned towards him with a little flash in her usually soft blue eyes. She was thinking, sorrowfully, that her *fiancé* certainly seemed to prefer looking at Bijou to looking at her, and a feeling of sadness came over her at the idea that she had never seen his eyes resting on her with as much expression in them as there was now when he gazed at Bijou. [161]

Jeanne, who was nineteen, looked much older than Denyse, although she was a little like her. Her hair, which was fair like Bijou's, was less glossy, and not so auburn, although it was thicker; her eyes were of a less uncommon blue; her teeth were as white, but not so regular; her complexion was less brilliant, and her head not so well set on her shoulders.

Bijou, who was very short, wore very high heels in order to look taller, whilst Jeanne, who was tall enough, always wore flat-heeled boots.

The one fairly dazzled everyone by her wonderful beauty, whilst the other would pass by almost unnoticed, her chief claim to prettiness being a certain charm of expression, which betokened an unselfish disposition and a kind heart.

After luncheon, Bijou carried Jeanne off with her to the park which surrounded the château. She had scarcely seen her friend since her engagement.

"Why," asked Bijou, "did you tell me so calmly that M. Spiegel was rather good-looking?"

"Well, because I think he is," answered Mademoiselle Dubuisson. "Do you mean to say that you—"

"Oh, come now, don't act; you know perfectly well that he is more than *rather* good-looking."

"But—" [162]

"Yes, don't you see, from the description you gave me, I expected to see a nice young man with a goody sort of look about him—rather a bore, in fact—and then, instead, you bring us a most delightful man. You ought to have prepared us; you ought not to give people such shocks—" And then, not giving Jeanne time to reply, she continued: "Where did you meet him?"

"This spring, at Easter, when we went to Bordeaux to stay with my aunt."

"And it was settled at once."

"No, but I liked him from the first."

"Yes, you are one of the affectionate kind."

"And I soon saw that he, too, liked very much to be with me."

"And then?"

"Well, then, we came away, and I felt wretched, of course. I thought I was mistaken, and that he did not care about me at all."

"You did not tell me anything about all that."

"No; in the first place I imagined that it was all over, and then I should not have liked to talk about it to anyone, not even to you; it seems to me that, about such matters—well, when one is in love, one should only talk about it to one's own self; that is the only way to be quite understood." [163]

"Oh, then, you fancy that I do not understand anything about love?"

"About love such as I understand it? no! you are too pretty, you see, and then you are too much fêted and adored by everyone to be able, as I have done, to satisfy and content yourself with an immense affection for one person only."

Bijou sighed, as she said regretfully:

"It must be so happy, though, to love anyone like that."

"Well, it would be easy enough for you; your cousin M. de Blaye adores you. Oh, it is no use denying it—it is so perfectly evident; I saw it instantly."

"You are dreaming—" said Bijou, looking astounded.

"Oh, dear, no! he is in love with you, madly in love with you, and he seems to me to be a man worthy of your love."

"Instead of talking nonsense, finish telling me the story of your engagement. We had got as far as where you left Bordeaux, thinking that all was over. What next?"

"Well, next, a fortnight ago, the professorship of philosophy was vacant, and papa was surprised to hear that M. Spiegel had been appointed to it. 'It is a come-down,' he said to me, 'for Pont-sur-Loire is not as good as Bordeaux'; but not at all—it was no come-down." [164]

"It was he himself, then, who had asked for the change?"

"Exactly! and last Monday, he and his mother arrived at our house to ask papa's consent."

"What's his mother like?"

"Very nice, and good-looking still; but she seems rather severe, a little bit hard."

"Don't take any notice of that; Protestants always appear like that."

"How do you know that she is a Protestant?"

"Because I suppose that she is of the same religion as her son."

"But who told you that M. Spiegel is a Protestant?"

"No one. I discovered that all alone; it did not take me long either—"

"But how can you know—"

"I do not know anything, and yet you see I do know all the same; it's a very good thing to be able to marry a Protestant; they are less frivolous, more serious, and more constant."

"Yes, perhaps so; but his mother, as I told you looks very severe, very; and she is going to live with us."

"Oh, well, so much the better. It is a safe-guard, don't you know, to have a mother with you who is somewhat austere. In the first place, she will inspire everyone with respect for you." [165]

"I don't think I need anyone to inspire people with respect for me, and, anyhow, it seems to me that if I did, why, my husband would be—"

"Not at all! oh, no! parents are quite different, and I was brought up to worship my parents, and to believe that their presence brings not only respect but happiness into the home."

"Oh, yes, I think that, too, as regards papa; but Madame Spiegel is a stranger to me, as it were, and I do feel that I owe her a little grudge for coming to intrude on the privacy of our home-life, which would have seemed so much happier alone."

"You must say to yourself that she is the mother of your husband, that he loves her, and that you ought to love her for his sake."

"You are quite right. How I wish I were like you, Bijou dear! you are so much better than I am."

"I am an angel, am I not? that's settled."

"You are joking; but it is quite, quite true."

"Tell me, won't it make you miserable to be away from your *fiancé* all this week, which you are going to spend with me?"

"No; besides he will come with papa to see me if your grandmamma will allow him to, and then he is going to Paris for a few days." [166]

"And here I am walking you about, like the thoughtless creature that I am, forgetting that the unhappy young man is sure to be wretched without you. Let us go in; shall we?"

"Yes, I am quite willing."

A bright gleam suddenly came into Bijou's eyes, shaded as they were by their long lashes, and then, putting on an indifferent air, she said to her friend:

"Tell me what little incident could possibly have given you the extraordinary idea that Jean de Blaye cares for me?"

"The way he looked at you all through luncheon, and then, too, his annoyance when we were all out on the steps this morning watching for you, and he saw you coming with young Jonzac and his tutor."

"You have too much imagination."

"No; I am sure that he is in love with you—and very much so!—and what about you?"

"What about me?"

"You—you don't care for him?"

"No, not in the way you mean, at least. He is my cousin; I like him just as one does like a nice cousin, whom one knows too well to care for in any other way." [167]

"It's a pity."

"Why?"

"Because it seems to me that you would be happy with him."

Bijou shook her head.

"I don't think so; I must have a husband more steady than Jean."

"More steady? but he must be thirty-four or thirty-five—M. de Blaye."

"What does that matter? he is not steady, you know—not by any means."

"Ah! I did not know."

"Then, too, I should want my husband to only care for me."

"Well, pretty and fascinating as you are, you can make your mind easy about that."

Bijou stopped suddenly in the middle of the garden-walk.

"Is not that a carriage coming up the drive?" she asked, pointing to the avenue.

"Yes, certainly it is."

"What sort of a carriage? I cannot see anything, I am so short-sighted."

"A phaeton with two horses, and a gentleman I don't know is driving."

"Ah, yes, that's it!" And then, as Jeanne looked at her inquiringly, she added: "It is M. de Clagny— [168]
a friend of grandmamma's—the owner of The Norinière."

"Ah! the man who is so rich!"

"So rich? Do you think he is so rich? I have not heard a word about that!"

"Oh, yes; he is immensely wealthy—and all his fortune is in land."

Bijou was not listening to this. She had just gathered a daisy, which was growing amongst the grass, bending its little timid head over the garden pathway, and she was now pulling it to pieces in an absent-minded way.

"Well?" asked Jeanne, smiling; "how does he love you?"

Bijou lifted her pretty head in surprise.

"Whom do you mean?"

"The one about whom you were questioning that daisy?"

"I don't know! I was not questioning it about anyone in particular."

"And what did it answer you?"

"Passionately."

"Oh, well, it was answering about everybody." And Jeanne added, as she mounted the little flight of stone steps just behind her friend: "It's quite true; everybody loves you; and you deserve to be loved—there!" [169]

When the two girls entered the room where everyone was assembled, their arrival seemed to have the effect of bringing some animation into the faces of all the people.

"At last, and not before it was time!" murmured Henry de Bracieux, in a way which caused his grandmother to glance at him, whilst M. de Clagny stepped quickly forward to meet Bijou.

"That's right," she said pleasantly; "how good of you to come again so soon to see us!"

"Too good! You'll have too much of me before long!"

"Never!" she answered, smiling merrily; and then taking Jeanne's hand, she introduced her. "Jeanne Dubuisson—my best friend—whom I shall lose now, because she is going to be married!"

"But why do you say that, Bijou?" exclaimed the young girl reproachfully. "You know very well that, married or not married, I shall always be your friend."

"Yes—everyone says that; but it isn't the same thing! When one is married one does not belong to one's parents or friends any more, one belongs to one's husband—and to him alone."

"How delightful such delusions are!" murmured M. de Clagny. [170]

Bijou turned towards him abruptly.

"What did you say?" she asked.

"Oh, it was just nonsense!"

"No; I quite understand that you were laughing at me. Yes, I understand perfectly well; it's no good shaking your head, I know all the same that you were making fun of me, because I said that when one is married one belongs only to one's husband! Well, that may be very ridiculous, but it is my idea, and I believe it is M. Spiegel's, too?"

The young man smiled and nodded without answering.

"Has anyone introduced M. Spiegel?" continued Bijou, still addressing the count. "No? well, then, I will repair such negligence. Monsieur Spiegel, Jeanne's *fiancé*, who does not dare to support me, and declare that I am right, because he is not in the majority here; there is no one here who is married but himself—that is to say, nearly married."

"Oh, indeed, and what about Paul?" asked the marchioness, laughing.

"Paul! Oh, yes, that's true; I was not thinking of him! Anyhow, the unmarried persons are in the majority—Henry, Pierrot, Monsieur Courteil, M. Giraud, Jean—well, what's the matter with Jean? he does look queer!" [171]

Jean de Blaye was seated in an arm-chair, with his eyes half-closed and his head resting on his hand, looking very drowsy.

"I have a headache!" he answered; and then, as Bijou persisted, and wanted to know what had given him a headache, he exclaimed gruffly: "Well, what do you want me to say? It's a headache; how can I tell what's given it me? It comes itself how it likes—that's all I know!"

Bijou had gone behind the arm-chair in which her cousin was lounging.

"You must have a very, very bad headache to look as you do," she said, not at all discouraged by his abrupt manner, and noticing his pale face, his drawn features, and his eyes, with dark circles round them, "and for you to own, too, that there is anything the matter with you; because you always set up for being so strong and well. Poor Jean, I do wish you could get rid of it."

She bent forward, and pressing her lips gently on the young man's weary eyelids, remained like that a few seconds.

Jean de Blaye turned pale, and then very red, and rose hastily from his chair.

"You startled me," he said, in an embarrassed way, not knowing where to look, "how stupid I am; [172] but I did not see you were so near, so you quite surprised me."

M. de Clagny had risen, too, in an excited way on seeing Bijou kiss her cousin. It occurred to him though, at once, how very ridiculous his jealousy would appear, and he sat down again, saying in a jesting tone:

"Well, if that remedy does not take effect, de Blaye's case is incurable."

M. de Rueille looked enviously at Jean, who was just going out of the drawing-room, and then, turning to Bijou, he remarked, in a hoarse voice:

"When I have a headache, and, unfortunately, that is very often, you are not so compassionate."

M. Giraud remained petrified in the little low chair in which he had taken his seat. His eyes were fixed on the ground, and his lips pressed closely together; he looked as though he had seen nothing.

As for Pierrot, he exclaimed candidly:

"What a lucky beggar that Jean is!"

"Undoubtedly, undoubtedly," replied Abbé Courteil, with conviction; "but, all the same, he certainly has a very bad headache—Monsieur de Blaye. I know what it is to have a headache."

The marchioness bent forward to whisper to Bertrade, whilst looking all the time at Bijou. [173]

"Isn't she sweet, that child, and so good-hearted, and, above all, so natural. Did you see how innocently she kissed that simpleton of a Jean, and how it startled him?"

"Oh! as to startling him! he was rather upset by it, poor fellow, and he wanted to explain away the fact that he was upset by it; that is about all."

"Do you think so? with him, one never knows."

"You did not notice that he went off at once, without even saying good-bye to M. Dubuisson and M. Spiegel, who are just going away."

The marchioness turned towards the two men in question, who were just coming across to take leave.

"As we are keeping your Jeanne," she said, "I hope you will often come to see her."

"Are you quite sure that you don't mind staying at Bracieux?" Bijou asked her friend; "I shall not be angry with you, you know, for preferring your *fiancé* to me."

"Spiegel is obliged to go to Paris for a few days," said M. Dubuisson; "on his return I shall come with him to fetch Jeanne back."

On leaving the drawing-room, a few minutes before, Jean de Blaye had felt thoroughly wretched. [174] Bijou's innocent kiss, given so openly before everyone, had, as a matter of fact, thoroughly upset him rousing again the love which he felt for the young girl, and which he had hoped would remain dormant, since Madame de Nézel was ready to console him with her affection.

Only the evening before he had said to the young widow: "How can I love that child as I love you?" and when he had uttered these words, he had, for the time being, felt his old love for Madame de Nézel returning, and it had seemed to him that Bijou could never inspire the same

passion as he had felt for this woman. And now, after hoping that he had conquered his love for the young girl, her kiss had completely undone him, and left him helpless to struggle against himself any longer.

He felt now that from henceforth he ought not to continue to claim Madame de Nézel's affection, since he could no longer return it; and as he thought of all that this affection had been to him in the past, he suffered intensely. For the last four years this woman had loved him with a devotion that had known no bounds, and, whilst Madame de Bracieux, M. de Jonzac, the Rueilles, and, indeed, all his family, had imagined that he was living a very gay life, he had been spending his time peacefully and happily in the society of Madame de Nézel. [175]

They had understood each other perfectly, and no one had suspected anything of the sympathy which had thus drawn them together, so that Jean had always been criticised for those actions of his which were known to the world, and he had been perfectly satisfied that things should be thus. Now, however, all would be changed. He would have to give up this peaceful happiness which had been so much to him.

And why should he, after all? Did he intend to tell Bijou of his love for her? And even supposing that she did not reject his love, was he in a position to marry this fragile and exquisite girl, who had certainly been created for the most luxurious surroundings?

He had already thought it all over many times and had said to himself, over and over again, that it would be absurdly foolish. Then, too, Bijou would never love him well enough to accept him with his extremely moderate income. As he had promised Madame de Nézel to meet her the following day at Pont-sur-Loire, he wrote her a few lines in order to excuse himself.

"She will not believe the pretext I have given her," he said to himself, as he sealed the letter "but she will quite understand, and, now, it is all over between us." [176]

And then all at once a feeling of utter loneliness came over him, and a vision of the life that would from henceforth be his rose before him with strange distinctness. He shuddered in spite of himself, and then he fell to going over again in his mind all his sorrows.

In the meantime, Bijou had shown Jeanne Dubuisson to the room she was to occupy during her visit to the château.

"It is your imagination, I tell you; nothing but your imagination," she said to her friend. "He does like me, certainly, but just in the way one cares for a cousin, or even a sister."

"No! It was quite enough to look at his face when he went out of the drawing-room. He was quite upset, and I am sure he has not got over it yet."

"Wouldn't you like me to go and ask him? But, there, it is seven o'clock. We have only just time to dress. I will come back for you when the first dinner-bell rings."

When Bijou came out of her bedroom, simply but charmingly dressed, as usual, the long landing was dark and silent. The servants had drawn the blinds, but had not yet lighted the lamps. [177]

Jean, who was coming out of his room, could just distinguish, in the darkness, a few yards away from him, a figure in a light dress. He hurried up to it, and Bijou asked:

"Is that you, Jean?"

"Yes," he answered; "and I want a word with you."

"Something that won't take long? The first bell has gone."

"Something very short; but I should prefer no one else hearing."

"Shall we go into your room, then, or into mine?"

"Into yours, as we are so near it."

Bijou opened the door, and, when Blaye was inside, she said:

"Wait a minute. Don't move, or I shall knock against you. I will light—"

"Oh, it isn't worth getting a light," he said, catching hold of her arm to stop her. "I can say what I have to without that. Besides, it won't take long. I want to tell you, Bijou, my dear, that what you did, you know, just now—"

She appeared to be trying to remember.

"Just now? Whatever was it I did?"

"Well, in a very nice way—oh! in a very nice way, indeed, you know—you kissed me, but you are too grown-up to do that now when there are people there." [178]

"And when there isn't anyone there?" she asked, laughing, "may I then—tell me?"

Before he had time to reply, she had laid her hands on his shoulder, and lifted her face towards his. He bent his head at the same moment, and her lips touched his. Bijou gave a little half-timid murmur of affection, which moved him deeply.

He made up his mind now to tell her of his love, and tried to draw her to him; but the young girl

pushed back the hands which were endeavouring to hold her, and ran out of the room, and, by the rustle of her dress along the wall, Jean knew that she was hurrying away.

X. [179]

The following day Mère Rafut arrived. Bijou had expected to have her for a week, and was very much disappointed when the old woman told her that she could only give her five days, as the theatre opened again on the first of September, and she would have to be there at her post as dresser.

Jeanne, therefore, proposed to help with the work, and Bijou accepted her offer.

"That's a capital idea!" she said; "if we are both together we shall not be dull! we can talk to each other without troubling about Mère Rafut."

Accordingly, every day, whilst the marchioness and Madame de Rueille were doing what Jean de Blaye called "a visiting tour," the two young girls installed themselves in Bijou's boudoir, which was converted into a sewing-room, and were soon busy with their cutting out and sewing, whilst chattering together, too intent on their conversation to pay much attention to the old sewing-woman.

"Are you going to the race-ball?" Bijou asked her friend. [180]

"Yes," said Jeanne; "it seems that as I am now engaged it is not quite the thing; but I am going all the same, as Franz wants to see me arrayed in my ball-dress, and he wants to waltz with me, too; he waltzes very well, you know."

"Ah! and yet he looks so austere? Tell me, don't you mind in the least marrying a Protestant?"

"Not in the least! without being bigoted, I am a thorough Catholic, and he is a devoted Protestant, but not bigoted either. We shall each of us keep to our own religion, for we have no wish whatever to change; but neither of us has any idea of trying to convert the other."

Bijou did not speak, and Jeanne continued:

"I am not at all sorry that I am going to have a husband who is a Protestant, and I will confess that, for certain things, I feel more satisfied that it should be so. It's quite true, what you were saying yesterday—Protestants have certain ideas about the family, and about constancy; in fact, they have stricter principles about such things than Catholics."

"Yes; tell me, though, what dress are you going to wear for the race ball?"

"I don't know yet! I haven't one for it!"

"Why, how's that? what about the white one with the little bunches of flowers all over it?" [181]

"Papa does not think it is nice enough; the race ball is to be at the Tourvilles, you know, this year; and it will all be very grand!"

"Oh, yes!"

"We do not know them at all; it will be the first time of our going to Tourville, and if I were to be dressed anyhow, it would not be very nice for your grandmamma, who got us invited; and so papa told me to have a dress made, and he gave me two pounds."

"What are you going to have made?"

"I don't know at all; advise me, will you?"

For the last minute or two Bijou had seemed to be turning something over in her mind.

"If you like," she said at last, "we might be dressed in the same way, you and I; that would be awfully nice!"

"What is your dress?"

"My dress does not exist yet; it is a thing of the future! It will be pink, of course—pink crêpe—quite simple—straight skirts, cut like a ballet-dancer's skirts, so that there will be no hem to make them heavy, three skirts, one over the other, all of the same length, of course—three, that makes it cloudy-looking; more than that smothers you up; and it will fall in large, round *godets*. Then there will be a little gathered bodice, very simple; little puffed sleeves, with a lot of ribbon [182] bows and ends hanging, and then ribbon round the waist, with two long bows and long ends—ribbon as wide as your hand, not any wider.'

"It will be pretty."

"And it would suit you wonderfully well."

"But shouldn't you mind my being dressed like you?" asked Jeanne, rather timidly.

"On the contrary, I should love it! Would you like us to make the dress here? I would try it on,

and like that we should be sure that it was right."

"How sweet you are! Plenty of other girls in your place would only trouble about themselves."

"Listen, supposing you wrote for the crêpe to be sent to-morrow." And then she added laughing, "M. de Bernès asked me yesterday evening if I had not any commissions for Pont-sur-Loire. I might have given him that to do!"

"He would have been slightly embarrassed."

"Why? It is easy enough to buy pink crêpe with a pattern."

Mère Rafut, who had been busy sewing, without uttering a word, but just pulling her needle through the work with a quick regular movement, now lifted her face, all wrinkled like an old apple, and remarked drily: [183]

"And even without!"

"Without what?" asked Bijou.

"Without a pattern. Oh, no, it isn't he who'd be embarrassed! Why, he always helps to choose Mademoiselle Lisette Renaud's dresses."

"Lisette Renaud, the singer?" asked Jeanne eagerly, whilst Denyse, very much taken up with her work, did not appear to have heard.

"No, mademoiselle, the actress."

"Well, that's what I meant. Ah! and so M. de Bernès knows her?"

The old sewing-woman smiled.

"I should just think he does. He's known her more than a year and a half."

"Ah!" said Jeanne, evidently interested, "she is so pretty, Lisette Renaud! I saw her in *Mignon* and in the *Dragons de Villars* too."

"Oh, yes!" said Mère Rafut, "she is pretty, too, and as good as she is pretty! If you only knew!"

"Good?" repeated Jeanne, "but—"

"Ah, yes! For sure, she isn't a young lady like you, mademoiselle! But ever since she has known M. de Bernès, I can tell you, she won't look at anyone else. And he's the same, as far as that goes, and that's saying a good deal, for, nice-looking as he is, there's plenty of ladies after him, ladies in the best society, too, in officers' families; and they do say the Prefect's wife admires him! Oh, [184] my, he doesn't care a snap for them all, though! He's got no eyes for anyone but Lisette; but you should see him when he's looking at her—it's pretty sure that if he was an officer of high rank he'd marry her straight off, and he'd be quite right, too—"

"Jeanne!" interrupted Bijou, "that's the first bell for luncheon." And when they were out of the room she said, in a very gentle voice, with just a shade of reproach: "Why do you let Mère Rafut tell you things you ought not to listen to?"

"Oh, goodness!" cried Jeanne, blushing and looking confused, "her story wasn't so very dreadful; and then, even if it had been, how do you think I could help her telling it?"

"Oh! that's easy enough, the only thing to do is not to reply or pay any attention; you would see that she would soon stop."

"Yes, you are right," and throwing her arms round Bijou, Jeanne kissed her.

"You are always right," she said; "and I, although I look so serious, am much more thoughtless than you, and much weaker-minded, too; I never can resist listening if it is anything that interests me."

"And did that interest you?" [185]

"Very much, indeed."

"Good heavens! what could you find interesting in it all?"

"Well, I don't exactly know; I was curious to hear about it, in the first place, and then I always notice everything, and this little story explained exactly something I had observed."

"When?"

"Why, during the last four or five months, ever since I have begun going out a little."

"What had you observed?"

"I had observed that M. de Bernès never pays attention to any woman, that he never even looks at anyone, that he scarcely takes the trouble to be pleasant, even with the prettiest girls; and the proof of all this is, that he has not tried to flirt with you even."

"Oh, not at all," answered Bijou, laughing; "but just because he has not tried to flirt with me, you must not conclude that with others."

"No, Mère Rafut must be right, and, after all, I am not at all surprised about it—this story, I mean; you have no idea how charming she is, this Lisette Renaud. Something in your style; she is much taller than you, though, and not so fair; but she has the most wonderful eyes, and a lovely, graceful figure, almost as graceful as yours; in short, I can quite understand that, when anyone [186] does care for her, they would care for her in earnest; then, added to all that, she has a great deal of talent and a beautiful voice—a contralto. I am sure you would like her."

"I don't think so."

"Why?"

"I don't like women who act comedy—those who act well, at least; it denotes a kind of duplicity."

"Oh, I don't think so; it denotes a faculty of assimilation, a very sensitive nature, but not duplicity."

"I can't help it, my dear, but I do not see things in the same light as you; still, that does not prevent Mademoiselle—what is her name?"

"Lisette Renaud."

"Mademoiselle Lisette Renaud from being an exception, and she may be a very charming creature; for my part, I only hope that is so for the sake of M. de Bernès."

"You don't care much for him, do you?" asked Jeanne.

"What makes you think that?—he is quite indifferent to me, and I always look upon him as being just like everyone else."

"Oh, no; that is not true—I see him pretty often at Pont-sur-Loire; he is very intelligent, and very [187] nice, and then, too, very good-looking; don't you think so?"

"I assure you that I have never paid much attention to M. de Bernès and his appearance," and then Bijou added, laughing: "The very first time I see him, I will look at him with all my eyes, and I will endeavour to discover his perfections to please M. de Clagny."

"You like him very much, don't you—M. de Clagny?"

"Oh, yes, indeed I do."

"I noticed that at once; ever since my arrival you have only talked of him; and yesterday, when he came, you were delighted."

"Yes, he is so good, and so kind to me."

"But everyone is kind to you, everyone adores you."

"Everyone is much too good and too indulgent, as far as I am concerned; I know that very well; but M. de Clagny is better still than the others. I have only known him three days, and now I could not do without him. Whenever I see him, I feel gay and happy at once; and I wish he were always here. I'll tell you what—I should like to have a father or an uncle like him. Doesn't he make the same kind of impression on you?"

"Oh, as for me, you know, it would be impossible to imagine myself with any other father than [188] papa. Just as he is I adore him; perhaps to other people he may seem nothing out of the common but you see he is my father; all the same I like M. de Clagny, and he is very nice—he must have been charming."

"I think he still is charming."

The two girls had reached the hall by this time, and Jeanne went to the door.

"How very warm it is," she said, and then, shading her eyes with her hand, she looked out into the avenue. "Why, there's a mail-coach!" she exclaimed. "Whoever would be coming with a mail-coach?"

"M. de Clagny, of course," cried Bijou, rushing out on to the steps in her delight; "he told grandmamma that if he possibly could he should come and ask her to give him some luncheon."

"And he has managed to," remarked M. de Rueille drily, as he, too, approached the hall door; "we've seen a great deal of him these last three days; certainly, he is very devoted to us," he added sarcastically.

The sight of the horses, which were just being pulled up in front of the steps, somewhat appeased him, however. [189]

"By Jove! what horses!" he exclaimed, in admiration, "and he knows how to drive, too; there's no mistake about that, he's a born aristocrat."

After luncheon, Pierrot declared that his foot hurt him just at the end of each toe, and he did not know what it could be.

"I know, though," remarked Jean de Blaye; "his boots are too short."

"Too short!" exclaimed M. de Jonzac, "oh, no, that's impossible"—and then, after a moment's reflection, he added in terror: "unless his feet have got bigger still—"

"Which they probably have," said Jean, laughing; "anyhow, his toes are turned up at the ends and curl back over each other, I am sure; you have only to look at his feet, now, to tell. Look at the lumps in his boots; they look like bags of nuts."

"I must get him some more boots to-day," said M. de Jonzac.

"The best thing, uncle, would be to send him to Pont-sur-Loire to be measured; there's sure to be a decent bootmaker there."

"M. Courteil is going just now to take a letter to the bishop and get an answer to it," remarked Madame de Bracieux; "he might take Pierrot with him." [190]

"Well, then," said Bijou, "they might take our omnibus, so that Jeanne and I could go too; we have some errands to do."

"What are they?" asked the marchioness.

"Well, first, some crêpe—we want some crêpe for Jeanne; and then some pencils and paints that I am short of; in fact, there are a lot of things."

"Would you like me to take you all?" proposed M. de Clagny; "I have some business with a lawyer at Pont-sur-Loire at three o'clock. You could do all your errands, and then I would bring you back; it's on my way to The Norinière."

"Oh, what fun!" exclaimed Bijou, delighted. "I have never been on a mail-coach; you don't mind, grandmamma?"

Madame de Bracieux seemed rather undecided.

"Well, I don't know, Bijou dear; you see at Pont-sur-Loire you will be noticed very much perched up there, and for two young girls I don't know whether it is quite the thing—"

"Oh, grandmamma," protested Bijou, "not the thing! and with M. de Clagny there!"

"Yes, with me," put in the count, with emphasis, his face suddenly clouding over, "there is no danger; I am safe enough."

"Yes, certainly," replied Madame de Bracieux with evident sincerity; "but at Pont-sur-Loire everyone is so fond of gossip and scandal." [191]

"Oh, grandmamma," Bijou said, in a beseeching tone, "don't deprive us of a treat, which you don't see any harm in whatever yourself, just because of the Pont-sur-Loire people, about whom you do not care at all."

"Yes, you are right. Go, then, children, as you want to, for, as you say, there is no harm whatever in amusing yourselves in that way."

"Is there any room for me?" asked M. de Rueille.

"For you, and some more of you," answered M. de Clagny; "we are only six at present."

The marchioness turned towards Bertrade.

"What do you say about going with them to look after the girls?"

Madame de Rueille glanced at her husband, who appeared to be studying the floor attentively at that moment.

"Oh, Paul will look after them very well!"

"I must ask if you would mind not starting before three o'clock?" said Bijou, advancing towards the window, "because there is M. Sylvestre coming to give me my accompaniment lesson; he is just coming up the avenue."

"The poor fellow!" exclaimed the marchioness, glancing out of the window, "he is actually walking in spite of this terrible heat!" [192]

"He always walks, grandmamma."

"Five miles; that is not so tremendous," remarked Henry de Bracieux.

"No, not for you—driving!" said Bijou.

"Well, but when we are out shooting, we do a lot more than that!"

"But you are enjoying yourself when you are out shooting; that's quite different. I know very well that if I could, I should send M. Sylvestre back always in the carriage."

"If you like, we can drive him back to-day," said M. de Clagny.

"I should just think I should like to! You are very good to offer me that, because, you know, he is

not very, very handsome—my professor—and he will not be any ornament on your coach!"

"Do you think I care anything about that? I am not snobbish, Bijou; not the least bit snobbish."

"But he isn't bad-looking, this fellow," said Jean de Blaye. "He has very fine eyes; they are wonderfully limpid and soft."

"I never noticed that," answered Bijou, laughing; "but even if they are, they could not be seen very well on the top of a coach. And he is very queerly dressed; he wears clothes that are too [193] small, and which cling to him; and then long hair that is very lank; he looks rather like a drowned rat."

A domestic appeared at this instant to announce that M. Sylvestre had arrived.

"Have you told Josephine?" asked Madame Bracieux.

"Yes, Josephine is there, madame," replied the servant.

Jeanne Dubuisson rose, but Bijou stopped her.

"No, don't come with me," she said; "when I feel that there is anyone listening, that is, anyone beside Josephine, I don't do any good." And then, just as she was going out of the room, she turned round, and added: "At three o'clock I shall appear with my hat—and M. Sylvestre."

When Bijou entered her room, Josephine, the old housekeeper, who had seen two generations of the Bracieux family grow up, was sewing near the window, whilst, in the little room adjoining, the musician was arranging the music-stand, and taking his violin out of the case.

On seeing the young girl, his blue eyes lighted up, and seemed to turn pale against his red face. He was a young man of about twenty-eight years of age, very thin, very awkward, and dressed wretchedly enough; but there was something interesting about his face, an expression that was [194] congenial, and yet, at the same time, told of anxiety and of trouble.

"How warm you are, Monsieur Sylvestre!" said Bijou, as she held out her hand to him; "and they have not brought you anything to drink yet! Josephine!" she called out, as she moved towards the door between the two rooms, "will you tell them to bring—ah, yes, what are they to bring? What will you take, Monsieur Sylvestre?—beer, lemonade, wine, or what? I never remember!"

"Some lemonade, if you please; but you really are too good, mademoiselle, to trouble about me."

"I forgot to buy the music you told me to get when I was at Pont-sur-Loire," said Denyse, interrupting him. "You will scold me."

"Oh! mademoiselle!" he exclaimed, in a scared way, "*I* scold you?"

"Yes, you! If you do not scold me you ought to. Now, let me see! What are we going to play? Ah! I was forgetting! I am going to ask you if you will begin by accompanying me at the piano; it is just a silly little song I am learning."

"What song is it?"

"'Ay Chiquita'! it is quite grotesque, isn't it? But we have an old friend who adores it, and he [195] asked me to sing it for him."

"Oh! as to that!—'Ay Chiquita'—it isn't so grotesque; but it has been worn out, that's all. Ah!" he added, looking at the music, "you sing it in a higher key. I was wondering, too—"

"Yes, I sing it higher; that makes it more dreadful still. Oh, dear! how I do wish I had a deep voice; they are so lovely—deep voices, but there are none to be heard!"

"They are rare, certainly; but there are some, nevertheless."

"I have never heard one," said Bijou, shaking her head.

"Well, but you might hear one if you liked."

"Where?"

"Why, at the Pont-sur-Loire theatre. Yes, Mademoiselle Lisette Renaud, a young actress, with a great deal of talent, and she is very pretty, too, which is not a drawback, by any means."

"She has a beautiful voice?"

"Very beautiful! I hear her, on an average, three times a week, without reckoning the rehearsals with the orchestra, and, I can assure you, I have never had enough."

"Ah! Do you think she would sing at private houses?" [196]

"Why, certainly! She does sing sometimes at Pont-sur-Loire."

"I will ask grandmamma to have her here. Where does she live?"

"Rue Rabelais. I do not remember the number, but she is very well known."

After a short silence, the professor asked:

"Why should you not go to the theatre to hear her? That would interest you much more."

"Grandmamma would never let me."

"I know, of course, that society people do not go to the Pont-sur-Loire theatre—it is not considered the thing; but there are circumstances,—for instance—in a fortnight from now there is to be a performance for the benefit of disabled soldiers, organised by the *Dames de France*; everyone will go to that."

"And they will play things that will be all right?"

"Oh! some comic opera or another, and varieties from other things; but I am sure Lisette Renaud will be on the programme, and several times, too. These are the best sort of things that we have at the theatre."

"You are not drinking anything, Monsieur Sylvestre," said Bijou, approaching the tray which had [197] been brought in, and pouring out the lemonade for the young man.

The glass which she passed to him showed the effect of the contact of her hand.

"Are you not still too warm to drink?" she asked. "This lemonade is very cold."

He took the glass with a hand that trembled slightly, and stood there, with his arm stretched out, looking at Bijou with passionate admiration.

"Monsieur Sylvestre," she said, smiling, "a penny for your thoughts."

The young man's face, which was already red, flushed deeper still. He drank his lemonade at a draught, and hurried to the piano.

"Let us begin, mademoiselle! shall we?" he said, and he played the short symphony of the song in a hesitating way, as though his fingers refused to act. This was so noticeable, that Denyse asked him:

"What is the matter with you? you are not in form to-day, at all."

"Oh, it's nothing, mademoiselle; I—it is so warm."

Being rather short-sighted, and never using a lorgnette, Bijou was obliged to bend forward to read the words of the song, and sometimes, in doing so, she touched the professor's hair or shoulder. This served to increase his agitation, and at times he could scarcely see what he was [198] playing, whilst his fingers would slip off the notes.

"Really, you are not at all in form to-day," repeated Bijou, surprised.

"I beg your pardon, mademoiselle, I—I don't know what is the matter with me."

"Nor I either; I can't tell at all," she said, laughing.

He was getting up from the piano, but she begged him to sit down again.

"No! if you don't mind," she said, "I should like to work up two or three old songs."

She began at once to read at sight, bending over in order to see better, whilst the poor young man, who was now pale, did his best to follow her, in spite of the buzzing in his ears and the clamminess of his fingers.

When the lesson was over, Bijou went to fetch her hat, and then came back and put it on at the glass near the piano.

Instead of putting his violin into its case, M. Sylvestre stood watching her as she lifted her arms, and drew her pretty figure up with a graceful swaying movement.

"Be quick!" she said, "we are going to take you back to Pont-sur-Loire, or rather M. de Clagny, [199] one of our friends, is going to take you on his coach." Denyse saw that he did not understand, so she went on to explain: "It's a large carriage, and holds a good number of people."

"Are you going, too?" he asked excitedly.

"I am going, too—yes, Monsieur Sylvestre."

He was just taking from his violin-case a little bunch of forget-me-nots and wild roses, which were already drooping their poor little heads. He held them out timidly to Bijou.

"As I came along, mademoiselle, I—I took the liberty of gathering these flowers for you."

She took them, and after inhaling their perfume for a minute or two, put them into her waistband.

"Thank you so much for having thought of me," she said.

He followed Bijou downstairs, step by step, happy in the present, forgetting all about his poverty, and as he appeared, tripping along behind the young girl, his violin-case in his hand, M. de Clagny turned to Jean de Blaye, and remarked:

"You were right; he has a nice face."

The mail-coach had just appeared in front of the steps when the marchioness called out:

"Bijou! I have a commission for you. Go to Pellerin the bookseller, and ask him—stop—no—send Pierrot here." [200]

"Pierrot," said Denyse, returning to the hall, "grandmamma wants you."

"I'll bet it's some errand to do," remarked the youth, making a grimace, "and errands are not much in my line." And then, whilst Bijou and the others were clambering up on to the coach, he went back to Madame de Bracieux. "You wanted me, aunt?" he said.

"Yes. Will you go to Pellerin's? do you know which is Pellerin's?"

"The book shop."

"Yes. Ask him for a novel of Dumas' for me. It is called 'Le Bâtard de Mauléon.' What are you looking at me for in that bewildered way?"

"Because I have never seen you reading novels, and—"

"You will not see me reading this one either; it is for the curé, I have promised it him. He adores Dumas, and he does not know 'Le Bâtard de Mauléon.' You will remember the title?"

"Yes, aunt."

"You are sure? You would not like me to write it for you?"

"'Tisn't worth while."

"You will forget it!" [201]

"No danger."

He rushed off, looking down on the ground, and then, as he climbed on to the coach, he trod on the feet of various people, nearly smashed M. Sylvestre's violin-case, and excused himself by saying:

"Oh, by Jove! I've nearly done for the little coffin."

XI. [202]

ALWAYS up first in the morning, Bijou was in the habit of going downstairs towards seven o'clock, in order to attend to her housekeeping duties.

She always paid a visit to the pantry, and to the dairy, and, with the exception of Pierrot, who was sometimes wandering about the passages with very sleepy-looking eyes, she never met anybody at this early hour.

To her astonishment, therefore, on this particular morning she nearly ran up against M. de Rueille, who was coming out of the library with a book in his hand.

Of all the visitors at Bracieux he was the laziest, so that Bijou laughed as she commented on his early rising.

"How's this?" she asked; "have you finished your slumbers already?"

"Or, rather, I have not commenced them!"

"Oh, nonsense!"

"No, and as I had finished all the literature I had upstairs, I came down to get a book to finish my night with." [203]

Bijou pointed to the sun, which was streaming in by the open window.

"Your night!"

"Oh, as far as I am concerned, you know, unless I am going out shooting, or off by train somewhere, it is night up to ten o'clock, at least!"

"And you are now going to bed again?"

"This very instant."

"But it is ridiculous."

"On the contrary, it is very wise, and all the more so, as, when one is in a bad temper, the best thing to do is to keep one's self out of the way."

"You are in a bad temper?"

"Yes."

"And why?"

Paul de Rueille hesitated slightly before answering.

"I don't know why."

"It's quite true," said Bijou, laughing, "that you were not very amiable yesterday during our journey to Pont-sur-Loire."

"It was your fault!"

"My fault—mine?"

"Yours."

"And pray why?" [204]

"I will tell you if you like."

"Yes, I should like; but not now, because I am keeping some one waiting in the dairy."

"Who is waiting for you?" he asked anxiously.

"The dairy-maid," answered Bijou, without noticing his anxiety.

"Oh! go at once, then, if that is the case," said M. de Rueille sarcastically. "I should not like the dairy-maid to be kept waiting on my account."

"You should come and see the cheeses," proposed Denyse.

"That must certainly be very festive; no, really, are you not afraid that I should find that too exciting, Bijou, my dear?"

"You would find it as exciting, anyhow, as going to bed, and reading over again some old book that you must know by heart. Oh, you know it by heart, I am sure! There is nothing in the library but the classics, or a lot of old-fashioned things; ever since I have come no new books are put in the library, either in the Paris house or here at Bracieux. Grandmamma is so afraid that I should get hold of them; but she is quite mistaken, for I should never open a book that I had been told not to open—never!"

"Grandmamma is afraid of your doing what any other girl would do; you are such an astonishing exception, Bijou!" [205]

"Yes, I am an exception—an angel, anything you like; but either come with me, or let me go, if you please! I don't like to keep people waiting."

"Oh, well, I'll come with you if you like," said M. de Rueille, putting his book down on a side-table.

He followed Bijou without speaking, as she trotted along in front of him. She looked so sweet, going backwards and forwards amongst the great pails of milk; her straw hat, covered with lace, tossed carelessly on her fair hair; her morning dress, of pink batiste, fastened up rather high with a safety-pin.

She inspected everything, gave her orders, and settled all kinds of details, without troubling about her cousin any more than if he did not exist; and then, when she had quite finished, she turned towards him, smiling.

"Now, then," she said, "if you would like a stroll, I am at your service." She turned into one of the garden paths that led to the avenues, and then added, as she looked up at Paul, "I'm listening!"

"You are listening? What do you want me to say?" [206]

"I thought you were going to tell me why you were so bad-tempered yesterday; you said it was my fault."

"Well, it was; you were—" he began, in an embarrassed way; and then he continued, in desperation, "the way you went on, it was not at all like you generally are, nor like you ought to be!"

"Ah! what did I do then?"

"Well, in the first place, you insisted, in the most extraordinary way, that Bernès should come on to the coach when we met him. Why did you insist like that?"

"Well, it is natural enough when you meet anyone walking a mile away from where you are driving yourself, that you should offer to pick him up; it seems to me that it would be odd, on the contrary, not to offer to pick him up!"

"Yes, agreed; but then it was M. de Clagny who should have offered a seat in his own carriage."

"He never thought of it—"

"Or else he did not care to? And you obliged him to do it whether he would or not?"

"Rubbish! he adores M. de Bernès. The other day he spent half an hour singing his praises to me in every key."

"Ah! that is probably what made you so pleasant to him?" [207]

"Was I so pleasant?"

"Certainly! As a rule you don't pay the slightest attention to him, but yesterday you had no eyes for anyone but him."

"I did not notice that myself."

"Really? Well, you were the only one who did not, then! You went on to such a degree that I wondered if it were not simply for the sake of tormenting me that you were acting in that way!"

Bijou gazed straight at M. de Rueille with her beautiful, luminous eyes.

"To torment you? and how could it torment you if I chose to be agreeable to M. de Bernès?"

"How?" stuttered M. de Rueille, very much confused; "why, I have just told you I am not—we are not accustomed to seeing you make a fuss like that, especially of a young man! No, I assure you, I was amazed. I am still, in fact."

"And I am ever so sorry to have vexed you," she said sweetly. "Yes, I am really; you see, I had never noticed M. de Bernès particularly, and I wanted to see whether all the nice things M. de Clagny had told me about him were quite true, and so I was studying him. Will you forgive me?"

M. de Rueille did not reply to this, as he had another grievance on his mind.

"With Clagny, too, you have a way of carrying on, which is not at all the thing. He is an old man; [208] that's all well and good; but, you know, he is not so ancient yet for you to be able to take such liberties with him!"

"What do you call liberties?"

"Well, sometimes you appear to admire him, to be in ecstasies about him; and then sometimes you coax and wheedle him in the most absurd way, as you did yesterday."

"Yesterday! I coaxed and wheedled M. de Clagny? I?"

"You!"

"But about what?"

"When you would insist, in spite of everything, in driving through Rue Rabelais; and I'll be hanged if I can see why you wanted to; it's about as dirty a street as there is, without taking into account that you might have caused us all to break our necks. Yes, certainly, it was the most dangerous experiment—your fad! Young Bernès, who is one of the most out-and-out daring fellows himself, tried to persuade you out of wanting to go along that street!"

The strange little gleam, which sometimes lighted up Bijou's eyes, came into them now.

"Yes, that's true!" she said, smiling. "He was wild to prevent our going down the Rue Rabelais—M. de Bernès! It was as though he was afraid of something!" [209]

"He was afraid of coming to smash, by Jove, just as I was, and the abbé, and even Pierrot. I cannot understand how old Clagny could have let you have your fad out, for he was responsible for the little Dubuisson girl, and for Pierrot, and you, without reckoning all of us!"

"Have you finished blowing me up?"

"I am not blowing you up."

"Oh, well, that's cool. Let's make it up now, shall we?" and, standing on tip-toes, Bijou held her pretty face up, saying, "Kiss me?"

He stepped back abruptly.

"Oh!" exclaimed Bijou, in surprise, and looking hurt, "you won't kiss me?"

Paul de Rueille had been so taken aback, that he could scarcely find any words.

"It isn't that I won't, but—well, not here like that, it is so absurd! I cannot understand your not seeing how ridiculous it is."

Bijou shook her rough head, and the loose curls over her forehead danced about.

"No, I do not see that it is at all ridiculous," and then, instead of going any farther, she turned round, and they went back to the house without another word. [210]

On going up into his room, M. de Rueille found his wife reading a letter.

"I have just heard from Dr. Brice," she said, handing him the letter. "It seemed to me that Marcel had not been well just lately."

"Not well—Marcel? Why the child eats and drinks more than I do. He sleeps like a top, too, and grows like a mushroom. Oh, that's good, that is! And what disease has he discovered in the boy—our excellent Brice?"

"No disease at all!"

"Oh, well, that's lucky!

"But he orders him to have sea-air."

"Sea-air for a lad who is in such downright good health that it positively makes him unbearable, he is so riotous?"

"Read what he says."

"Let me see what he says," murmured M. de Rueille, putting on a look of resignation, as he began to read the long letter, in which the doctor advised sea-air as the best remedy for the child in his present nervous state.

"And so he is in a nervous state?" said M. de Rueille jeeringly; "and on account of this, which no one, by the bye, except you, has noticed, we are to leave Bracieux, where the lad is flourishing in this delightful fresh air—it is his native air, in fact—and we are to go and take up our abode at [211] some stupid seaside place? Oh, no! You really do get hold of some ridiculous ideas sometimes."

He was still irritated after his discussion with Bijou, and the idea of going away from her now caused him to speak in a harsh, dry way. He tried to laugh, too, but his laugh sounded forced and hollow.

Bertrade looked at him as she said gently:

"I did not want to tell you the truth straight out; I hoped that you would guess it. Do you not guess?"

"No, not at all," he answered, with a vague feeling of uneasiness.

"Well, then, you were right just now; not only Marcel, and his brothers too, for that matter, are better at Bracieux than anywhere else, but he has nothing the matter with him."

As M. de Rueille looked surprised, she continued, in a tranquil way:

"It is Marcel's father who is not quite himself, who needs a change of air, and who will, I am sure, decide on having a change."

"Well, really," he stammered out, "I do not know what you mean."

"I mean that you must leave Bracieux for a time," she answered, speaking very distinctly. [212]

"Do you particularly wish me to tell you why?"

"I do."

"You are unwise to insist. You know that in a general way I never interfere in anything that you choose to do, or leave undone."

"Yes, you have always been very sweet and very sensible about everything," said M. de Rueille, "and I thoroughly appreciate—"

"Oh, there is no need to say anything about all that. I have always left you quite free to act in every way as you preferred, and now, in this matter, I do not bear you any ill-feeling whatever, and I should never have spoken to you of it if I had not seen that you are going too far. I have confidence in you, so that I know you will be on your guard; but I know how fascinating Bijou is, and I can see perfectly well that, next to poor young Giraud, you are the one who is the most infatuated."

"Yes, you are quite right, I am infatuated; but, as you say yourself, there is no danger whatever, and whether I go away, or whether I stay here, it is all the same; that will make no difference whatever."

"Yes! if you stay you will certainly make yourself ridiculous, and probably wretched, too. I am [213] speaking to you now just as a friend might. Let us go away; believe me, it would be better."

"Well, but when we came back again—for we should come back, shouldn't we? in two months at the latest—things would, be exactly as they were before."

"No, it would be quite different," she answered carelessly. "In two months' time she will be married, or nearly so."

"Married!" exclaimed M. de Rueille, astounded. "Married! Jean is going to marry her, then?"

"Why, no! Jean is not going to marry her. He's another one who would do well to make himself scarce."

"Well, if it is not Jean, I do not see—it is not Henry, I presume?"

"No, not Henry either. He understands perfectly well that, with what he has, he cannot marry Bijou."

"Well, who is it, then? Who is it?"

"Why, no one at all—that is, no one in particular."

"You spoke, on the contrary, as though you were affirming something that was quite settled. You said: *In two months' time she will be married, or nearly so*. What did you mean by that? Why don't you want to tell me? You have been told not to? It is a secret?" [214]

"No, it is merely a supposition, I assure you, that is all."

"And this supposition you will not tell me?"

"No."

After a short silence Madame de Rueille began again:

"I showed grandmamma the doctor's letter; she is very sorry about our going away. She adores the children, and then, too, she likes to have the house full at Bracieux."

"And she let herself be gulled with this story about Marcel's nervous condition? I am surprised at that; she is so sharp!"

"If she was not *gulled*, as you call it, she allowed me to think that she was. I shall see you again presently: I must get ready for breakfast."

M. de Rueille went up to his wife, and asked, in a half-timid way:

"You are angry with me about it?"

"I? why should I be angry about what you cannot help? You are in the same situation as Jean, M. Giraud, Henry, the accompaniment professor, Pierrot, and others that we don't know of, not to speak of the abbé, who, at present, is always to be found somewhere round about where Bijou is." [215]

"Oh!"

"It's perfectly true; the only thing is that, as far as he is concerned, he is unconscious of it. Without understanding the why and wherefore, he, too, is captivated by Bijou's charms just the same as all the others who come near her. I am quite sure that he, too, will be unhappy about going away from here; but he will not be able to explain to himself even the cause of his unhappiness. Ah! there's the bell; I shall never be ready; you had better go on down."

"Pierrot," said the marchioness, after breakfast, when everyone had assembled in the morning-room, "you did not give me my book yesterday?"

Pierrot, who was talking to Bijou, turned round, somewhat taken aback.

"What book, aunt?"

"Dumas' novel for the curé."

"Ah, yes; I could not think what book you meant!"

"You forgot to do my errand?"

"Not at all! but Pellerin hadn't it."

"Oh, why—he always has everything one wants!"

"Well, he hadn't got that; and, what was better still, he didn't seem to know the book at all!" [216]

"Nonsense!"

"No, it's quite true! and he's an obstinate sort of beggar, too, he would have it that it wasn't by the father—what's his name? ah! I've forgotten already."

"Dumas!"

"Dumas! yes, that's it; and he kept on saying all the time, 'I know my Dumas well enough, and that book was never written by him.' Well, anyhow, he promised to try to get it, and to send it to you if it is to be had."

M. de Rueille was sorting out the letters, which had arrived during breakfast-time.

"Here's a letter from your bookseller, grandmamma," he said; "he evidently has not been able to get it."

"Open it, Paul, will you?"

Rueille tore open the envelope, and, taking out the letter, read as follows:

> "MADAM,—It is quite impossible to get the book which your nephew asked for. As we were anxious to execute your order, we sent to several of the principal booksellers, and even wired to Paris, but we were informed that there is not, and there never has been, a book entitled, 'Le Bâton de M. Molard.'"

"Le Bâton de M. Molard?" repeated the marchioness, not understanding in the least. "What is he talking about?" and then, all at once, the explanation of the mystery dawned upon her, and she [217]

exclaimed, in consternation: "Ah, I see! 'Le Bâton de M. Molard' is 'Le Bâtard de Mauléon,' translated by Pierrot into his own language. I was quite right in wanting to write the title for him, but he would not hear of it."

M. de Jonzac turned his eyes up towards the ceiling with a tragic gesture of despair.

"He is incorrigible—absolutely hopeless," he said, half laughing and half vexed.

"I can't help it, I am as I was made," said Pierrot, blushing furiously and very much annoyed. "And then, too, I didn't know what I was doing yesterday; we were almost upset going into Pont-sur-Loire."

"Almost upset?" exclaimed Madame de Bracieux, "upset! why, how?"

"Because Bijou had the insane idea of wanting to go down the Rue Rabelais with the coach; and so M. de Clagny went—the old fool."

"Stop! that's enough!" interrupted the marchioness; "will you kindly speak more respectfully when you have anything to say about my old friend Clagny?" [218]

"Well, all the same, your old friend hasn't got his head screwed on very well, considering his age. He might have killed us; and, besides that, I can tell you we did kick up a shindy in the Rue Rabelais. The coach scraped against the curb-stones; all the kids were running along nearly under the horses' heels; then the sound of the horn brought all the women to the windows, and didn't they exclaim when they saw what it was. That part wasn't so bad, either, for there were some jolly pretty ones, I can tell you; weren't there, Paul?"

As M. de Rueille appeared to be preoccupied, and did not answer, Pierrot turned to the abbé.

"Weren't there, M. Courteil?"

"I don't know," answered the abbé, with evident sincerity; "I was not noticing."

Pierrot did not intend to give in.

"Oh, well, Bijou noticed them anyhow, for I can tell you she *did* look at them, and with eyes as sharp as needles, too; they shone like anything."

"I?" she exclaimed, her pretty face turning suddenly red. "It was your fancy, Pierrot; I never saw anything. I was much too frightened."

"Frightened of what?" asked the marchioness. [219]

"Why, of being upset, grandmamma. Pierrot is right about that; we were nearly upset."

"He is right, too, in saying that it was an insane idea to want to go with a carriage and four horses down a wretched little street like that; however could you have had such an idea?"

Bijou glanced at Jeanne Dubuisson, who, with her eyes fixed on the carpet, had turned very red, too, and was listening to the discussion without taking any part in it.

"Oh, really, I don't know. I think it was M. de Clagny telling me that his horses were so well in hand that he could make them turn round on a plate. And so, as the Rue Rabelais is rather narrow and winding, I said: 'I am sure you could not go along Rue Rabelais.'"

"No!" protested Pierrot, "it was not quite like that. You said, 'Let us go down Rue Rabelais, I should like to see it.' And, then, as he hesitated—for we may as well give him credit for having hesitated—you stuck to it as hard as you could."

"But," put in M. de Jonzac, seeing that Denyse looked annoyed, "what interest could your cousin possibly have in wanting to go down that street?"

"That's what I wondered," said Pierrot, looking puzzled; and then, suddenly taken with another idea, he added: "I can tell you there was somebody who didn't like it, and that was M. de Bernès. [220] I don't know what took him, but he did pull a long face. Oh, my! I can tell you he did look blue."

Henry de Bracieux laughed.

"I know why he was pulling such a long face, poor old Bernès; he was afraid of being blown up—"

"Blown up?" asked Bijou, innocently opening her limpid eyes wide in surprise, whilst Jeanne's face, usually so impassive, turned almost purple. "Blown up? by whom?"

And then, as there was a dead silence, which became more and more embarrassing, Bijou turned to her friend.

"Let's go out for a stroll in the garden, Jeanne, shall we?" she said.

"I'll come with you," remarked Pierrot promptly; but Bijou pushed him gently back.

"No! we shall do very well by ourselves, thank you; you would worry us."

As the two girls were descending the hall-door steps, Bijou said to Jeanne, who was just behind her, and who had not quite recovered from her embarrassment:

"I know why you looked so conscious just now; you were thinking of the gossip about that actress

—I've forgotten her name—whom M. de Bernès knows. I had not thought of it at the time, and so it did not trouble me. You see I was right when I told you that it was a mistake to listen to Mère Rafut's tales." [221]

"Yes, you always are right!" answered Jeanne pensively; "I said then that you are always right!"

After Bijou's departure, the men one after another left the drawing-room.

"What's the matter, Bertrade?" asked the marchioness, as soon as she found herself alone with Madame de Rueille. "Paul looked very queer during breakfast!"

"Did you think so?" said the young wife, not wishing either to acknowledge it or to tell an untruth about the matter.

"I did think so, and you looked queer too; and as I watched you both, an idea dawned upon me."

"And what is this idea?"

"It is that my dear little Marcel is no more ill than I am, and that the letter you showed me this morning is nothing but a pretext for getting your husband away from here; is that so?"

Madame de Rueille was too straightforward to be able to deny the fact.

"It is so!" [222]

"And so you are jealous, and jealous of Bijou?"

"Not jealous, oh, dear no! not in the least; but anxious."

"About Bijou?"

Madame de Rueille looked serious as she shook her pretty head.

"No, about Paul."

"You are not afraid of your husband going too far, I suppose?"

"No!"

"Well, what then?"

"I am anxious about his peace of mind, and then, too, I do not care for him to make himself completely ridiculous."

"You must know, my dear Bertrade, that I have seen for some time past that Paul was gone on Bijou, just as all the others are—for there is no mistake about it, they all are; and the last few days I have noticed that your abbé even has begun to lose his indifference; don't you think so?"

"It is very possible!"

"Yes, and I am sure that he isn't going along quite so peacefully in his worship of God as formerly?"

"And that does not displease you either, grandmamma, does it? Come, now, own it!" [223]

"Oh, well; as long as it is just a little beneficial upset for him, I don't mind; but I should not like it to develop into anything serious—you understand where I draw the line?"

"No, because I always pity all those who are suffering from such little upsets—as you call them—even when they are mild, I think they are calculated to make people suffer greatly."

"You always see a darker side of things than I do; at all events, I think that the idea of carrying Paul off is a very excessive and unwise kind of remedy. He keeps a strict guard over himself, and no one suspects the true state of things except you—"

"And all the others!"

"Do you think so?"

"I am sure of it."

"Well, even if it be so, that is of no importance, provided that Bijou does not suspect it herself. Why do you not answer?"

"Because I am not of the same opinion as you, grandmamma, and you do not like that as a rule, particularly when it is a question of Bijou."

"What do you mean?"

"Just what I said, nothing else."

"Then, according to you, Bijou has noticed it from—" [224]

"From the very first day."

"And even if that should be so, she cannot help it! Besides, what danger does she run?"

"None at all."

"Paul is honourable."

"Undoubtedly, and even if he were not, Bijou would have nothing to fear for several reasons."

"What are they?"

"Well, in the first place—her own indifference. Paul makes about as much impression on her, I believe, as a table."

"Next?"

"Next? Why, that's all!"

"You said 'several reasons,'—you have given me one; let us hear what the others are."

"Oh, no!" said Madame de Rueille, "it was just my way of speaking."

"Nonsense! you are not clever at telling untruths, my dear Bertrade; I am pretty sure I know what you thought!"

"I don't think you do."

"Well, you'll see! You were thinking that one of the reasons why Bijou will never take any notice of Paul is—"

"Because he is married."

"Yes, of course; but you fancy, too, I am sure of it, that Bijou is thinking of someone else? Ah, you see! you don't answer now! Yes, you believe, as your husband does—he told me so two or three days ago—that she is madly in love with young Giraud!" [225]

"Oh, grandmamma, what an unlikely supposition! In the first place, Bijou is not, and never will be, madly in love with anyone."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that when she marries, it will be in a reasonable, calm sort of way, just as she does everything else."

"But when will it be?"

"When will it be? Well, I do not know exactly—soon, I think."

"Then you are saying that just at random? You are speaking of the future in just a vague sort of way?"

"The future always is vague, grandmamma," answered Madame de Rueille, smiling.

XII. [226]

For a whole week there was scarcely anything else thought about but the rehearsals of the little play, which was to be given the day after the races.

The La Balues, the Juzencourts, and Madame de Nézel, came to Bracieux nearly every day, and M. de Clagny also, for he was very much interested in the rehearsals. He acted as prompter when Giraud, who had undertaken this post, was occupied, and he appeared to be delighted whenever he saw Bijou acting.

"Old Dubuisson" and M. Spiegel had been to dinner several times, and Denyse, under the pretext of letting him be more with his *fiancée*, had persuaded the young professor to take a minor rôle, in which he was execrable. Perhaps Jeanne had noticed this, as the last few days she seemed to be low-spirited, and she was not as even-tempered as usual. Her father was astonished to see her frequently with tears in her eyes, and for no apparent motive, so that at last he declared that "she must be sickening for some illness or another." [227]

The Rueilles had not left Bracieux. Bertrade felt that everyone was against her, as it were, and had resigned herself to the inevitable; she had quite given up the plan she had proposed, and was now letting herself drift along, carried forward by the society whirl in which she was living.

Young Bernès arrived one evening to invite the marchioness and her guests to a paper-chase which was being organised by his regiment. He, himself, was to be hare, and all kinds of obstacles were being put up; there had never been so fine a paper-chase run in the forest.

Bijou at once persuaded her grandmother to allow her to follow on horseback, M. de Rueille and Jean de Blaye both answering for it that nothing should happen to her. She was, besides, very prudent, like most people who are accustomed to riding, and who ride well, and she always managed to avoid accidents, and not to run useless risks.

Madame de Bracieux kept Hubert to dinner, and in the evening, as she watched Denyse talking to him, she said to Bertrade:

"It's very odd. It seems to me that Bijou is not at all the same now with that young man. She used to just give him an indifferent sort of bow, and then leave him alone, and now it seems almost as though she were 'gone' on him, to use your elegant language. She has quite changed her attitude towards him," continued the marchioness, puzzled. [228]

"And he, too, has quite changed his attitude towards her," said Madame de Rueille.

"Yes, hasn't he? The first few times he came to Bracieux, I was struck with his coolness towards our sweet girl, whom everyone adores. He was just simply polite to her, and that was all."

"At present, he is not very far gone, but there is considerable progress; he is preparing to follow in the pathway which has been beaten out by others."

"Just lately, when you were talking to me about Bijou getting married, had you any idea in the background?" asked the marchioness, looking at Madame de Rueille.

Bertrade repeated the question without replying to it.

"An idea in the background?"

"Yes. Were you, for instance, thinking that Bijou was in love with this young Bernès?"

"I told you that same day, grandmamma, that it is my belief Bijou is not in love, never has been in love, and never will be in love with anyone." [229]

"If you had said that, as you say it now, I should most certainly have protested. It would be impossible, in my opinion, to be more absolutely and completely mistaken than you are. Never to love anyone?—Bijou!—when there never was anyone who needed to be loved and petted as she does."

"She needs to be loved and petted—yes, I grant that; but she always requires people to love and pet her, and she does not feel the need of loving and petting others in her turn."

"In other words, she is selfish and cold-hearted?" questioned the marchioness, her voice suddenly taking a harsh tone. "The fact is, Bertrade, you have a grudge against Bijou, because of the charm there is about her: you are angry with her, because no one can resist being fascinated by her, and instead of blaming Paul, who is the real culprit, you accuse the poor child in this cruel way."

"I do not accuse Bijou any more than I do Paul, grandmamma: and I should be all the less likely to accuse them, because I do not think that we are exactly free agents in such matters; yes, I know that you will be scandalised at my saying such a thing—I can see that very well. You think it is blasphemy, don't you? And yet, Heaven knows that the thoughts which come to me sometimes on this subject make me much more tolerant and indulgent towards others—" [230]

M. de Clagny approached the two ladies just at this moment.

"What are you two plotting in this little corner?"

"Nothing," said Madame de Bracieux; "we were watching Bijou, who seems to be taming your young friend Bernès."

"Taming him? Whatever do you mean by that?" asked the count, turning round with a disturbed look on his face.

"Well, I mean just what everyone means when they make that remark! A week ago, when the young man dined here with us, he was like an icicle; well, I fancy that the thaw has set in."

"Oh!" exclaimed M. de Clagny, suddenly looking serene again; "I forgot that he has a love affair, and is so far gone that he fully intends to marry this lady-love; and, as you can imagine, his father is not delighted about it, by any means." And then, in an absent-minded way, he added, "I feel perfectly easy, as far as he is concerned!"

"Easy!" exclaimed Madame de Bracieux in astonishment "Why, easy! you would not like Bijou to marry M. de Bernès, then? Why not?" [231]

"Well—she is so young," he stammered out, in a confused sort of way.

"How do you mean, so young? She is quite old enough to marry; she will be twenty-two in November, Bijou!"

"Well, then, Hubert is too young for her; he is only a lad!"

"I should certainly prefer seeing her married to a man rather more settled down; but, if she should care for him, he is of good family, and is wealthy, why should she not marry him as well as any other?"

"Do you really think that Bijou cares for him?" asked M. de Clagny anxiously.

"I don't know anything about it at all," answered the marchioness, laughing; "but anyhow, what can that matter to you? I can understand that Jean or Henry should be disturbed in their minds—

but you?" As he did not reply, she went on: "It's a case of the dog in the manger: he does not want the bone himself, but he does not want the others to have it either. That is just your case, my poor friend, for, I presume, you have no idea of marrying Bijou yourself?"

He answered in a joking way, but there was a troubled look on his face.

"Oh, as to me, it is an idea that I should like very much; but she would not; therefore it amounts to the same thing!" [232]

Bijou came up to them just at that moment, gliding along with her light step. She was followed by young Bernès, who looked vexed about something.

"I cannot, really, mademoiselle," he was saying, "I assure you that I cannot get away from my friends that day."

"Oh, yes, you can; mustn't he, grandmamma?" asked Denyse merrily, "mustn't M. de Bernès come to dinner here on the day of the paper-chase? He is to be the hare, and the start is to be from the 'Cinq-Tranchées'—it is only a mile from Bracieux at the farthest."

Madame de Bracieux was examining the young officer with interest, and there was a kindly look in her eyes.

"Why, certainly," she said, "he must come here to dinner; we shall all be so pleased."

"You are very kind, madame, to invite me, but I was explaining to Mademoiselle de Courtaix that on that day, after the paper-chase, which the regiment is getting up for the benefit of the residents, I have promised faithfully to dine with several of my friends." And glancing, in spite of himself, at Bijou, he added, "And I regret it now, more than I can tell you!" [233]

Turning round on her high heels, Denyse glided off again to the other end of the long room, where she was greeted by Pierrot with reproachful words.

"It was very mean of you to slope away from us like that, you know!" exclaimed the boy.

M. de Jonzac, who was playing billiards with the abbé, was also keeping one ear open to catch what was going on round him. He now protested against the way in which Pierrot expressed himself, even supposing that the reproach itself were just.

"Well, yes," answered his son, "it's quite true that I'm not over-particular about what words I use, but that doesn't prevent what I said being true; and the others said it too, just now; I wasn't the only one."

"Mademoiselle," said Giraud, who was standing near the large bay-window, looking out at the sky, "you said yesterday that you liked shooting stars—I have never seen so many as there are to-night."

"Really?" replied Denyse, going to the window, and leaning her arms on the ledge, side by side with the tutor, "are there as many as all that? What's that to the left?" she asked, bending forward. "I can see something white on the terrace." [234]

"It is Mademoiselle Dubuisson, who is strolling about with her father and M. Spiegel."

"Ah! supposing we went out to them—shall we?"

Giraud led the way at once, only too happy to go out for a stroll on this beautiful starry night. When they were near the terrace, she stopped suddenly.

"Perhaps we shall be *de trop*," she said; "they may be talking of private affairs. Let us go to the chestnut avenue, and they'll come to us if they want to."

She descended the marble steps, and they were soon in the dark avenue, under the thick chestnut trees. The young man had followed her, his heart beating with excitement, almost beside himself with joy. They walked along for some little time without speaking, and then at last Bijou looked up, trying to catch a glimpse of the sky between the branches of the trees.

"We shall not see much of the shooting stars here," she said.

"Oh, yes," answered Giraud, who did not want to leave this shady walk, where he had Bijou all to himself, "we can see them all the same. Look, there's one, did you see it?"

"Not distinctly, and not long enough to be able to wish anything." [235]

"To wish anything? but what?"

"Oh! anything. Why! do you mean to say you did not know that when you see a shooting star you ought to wish something?"

"No, I did not know. And does your wish get fulfilled?"

"They say so."

"Well, then, mademoiselle, have you a wish quite ready this time, so that you will not be taken unawares?"

"Yes, certainly, I have one; but it can never be realised."

"Ah! I dare not ask you what."

"I should like to be quite different from what I am," she replied, very gently. "Yes, I should like to be a very pretty girl, in quite humble circumstances, so that I need not be obliged to go into society, and so that I could marry just whom I liked. I should like to be, in fact, happy according to my own idea of things, without troubling anything about social prejudices and conventionalities."

"Why should you wish that?" he asked, in a voice that trembled slightly.

"So that I should have the right to love anyone who loved me. I mean, openly; without having to keep it to myself." And then she added, in a very low voice, "And without reproaching myself for it." [236]

She was walking quite close to him, so close, that their shoulders touched at every step.

Giraud was quite agitated with conflicting emotions.

"You say that—as if—as if—you did care for someone?" he stammered out.

He knew that she had turned her face towards him, but she did not speak.

Just at this moment a screech-owl, which was perched quite near them amongst the thick, dark looking foliage of the trees, gave a sudden, wailing, cry, which startled Bijou. She knocked against Giraud as she jumped aside in her fright, and he instinctively put his arms round her. Her soft, perfumed hair brushed against his lips, making him lose his head completely. He forgot everything, and, utterly oblivious of all that separated him from the young girl, he drew her closer to him in a passionate embrace, and murmured tenderly:

"Denyse!"

She let him do as he liked, without offering any resistance, but when, at last, he set her free, she said, in a tender, plaintive tone:

"Oh! how wrong it was of you to have done that, how wrong of you!" And then she hid her face in her hands, and he could hear that she was crying. [237]

He tried to console her, but she would not allow him to stay.

"No, go away, please," she said: "they will be wondering where you are. I shall come in directly, when I am myself again."

As he was starting off in the direction of the terrace, she called him back.

"Not that way," she said. "Go round by the pool. Don't let them think you have come from here."

"Let me stay another minute, just to ask you to forgive me. Let me kiss those little hands that I love—"

"Please go! Please go!" she said, in a tone that sounded as though she mistrusted herself.

Before turning into the walk that led round by the pool, Giraud stopped a minute to get another glimpse of Denyse, who, in her light dress, looked like a white spot against the dark background of the trees. He could hear that she was still crying.

"Is that you, Bijou?" asked Jean de Blaye, coming forward in the thick darkness.

"Who is it?" asked the young girl, drawing herself up. [238]

"It is I—Jean! Why, do you mean to say that you won't even do me the honour of recognising my voice. What are you doing out here in this pitch darkness?"

"I am taking a stroll."

"All alone?"

"I came out to join the Dubuissons, but I thought afterwards that it was better not to disturb them, and so I came here all alone."

"It must be quite a change for you to be alone, isn't it? And what in the world do you do when you are all by yourself?"

"I think."

"Oh! what a big word!"

"Well, I dream dreams, if you like that better?"

"Well I never! That's what I never should have thought you would do. They are surely not in the least like ordinary dreams—yours?"

"Because—?"

"Because dreams are usually incoherent, strange and quite improbable."

"Well?"

"Well, your dreams must be admirably sensible and reasonable; they must resemble you."

"Thank you."

"For what?" [239]

"Well, for the pleasant things you are saying."

"Oh! they are not exactly pleasant things; they are true, though. Besides, I have not come here just to say pleasant things to you, but to talk to you seriously."

"Seriously?"

"Yes! I have undertaken a mission for some one else. I have promised to speak to you to the best of my ability in the name of some one who did not care to speak for himself."

"Who is this some one else?"

"Henry! He begged me to ask you whether you would authorise him to ask grandmamma for your hand?"

"My hand! Henry?" she exclaimed, and her accent expressed her bewilderment.

"Is that so very astonishing?"

"Why, yes!—it is as though he were my brother—Henry!"

"Well, but he is not your brother, nevertheless; therefore do not let us trouble about him as a brother, but as a lover. What is your answer?"

"My answer! why does Henry apply to me first? Instead of asking my permission to speak to grandmamma, he ought to have asked grandmamma's permission to speak to me."

"There; didn't I say that you were a most excellent little person, always knowing the correct thing, and all the rest of it!" [240]

"Is it wrong of me to be like that?"

"Oh, no! it is not wrong—on the contrary! only it is a trifle embarrassing. Tell me, now that I have made this mistake in speaking to you first, will you give me an answer? or must I set to work to put matters right again, by applying now to grandmamma, who in her turn will apply to you, etc., etc."

"No, I will give you my answer."

"Well, then, let me finish my rigmarole. Count Henry de Bracieux was born on the 22nd of January, 1870. His entire fortune, until after the death of his grandmother, consists of twenty-four thousand pounds, which amount brings in—"

"Oh! you needn't trouble to tell me about money matters; in the first place, they don't interest me, and then, as I do not wish to marry Henry, it is useless to tell me all that!"

"Ah! you do not wish to marry him! Why?"

"For several reasons, the best of which is that I know him too well."

"It certainly is not very flattering, this reason of yours!"

"I mean what I said just now, that, living with Henry as I have done for the last four years, I consider him as a brother." [241]

"Then that applies to me, too; do you look upon me, too, as a brother?" asked Jean de Blaye, trying to speak in an indifferent tone.

"You, oh, no! not at all; you are thirty-five at least!"

"No, thirty-three."

"Only that?—ah, well, it's all the same! you don't seem to me like a brother!"

She was silent a moment, thinking, whilst he stood waiting, with a sort of vague hope.

"You seem to me more like an uncle," she said at last.

"Oh!" remarked Jean, with an accent that betrayed his vexation, "that is very nice."

"You are annoyed with me for saying that?" she asked, in her pretty, coaxing way.

"Oh, not at all! I am delighted, on the contrary; it is very satisfactory, for, with you, one knows exactly what to count on; and then, if one has any delusions, well, they don't have to hang fire."

"You had delusions—what were they?"

"No, I hadn't one of any kind."

"Oh, yes, I can tell by your voice; you speak in a sharp, bitter, irritated way. Tell me why you are so bad-tempered all in a minute?" she asked, in a coaxing tone, leaning against him, and looking up into his face. [242]

He stepped back from her as he answered:

"When one is not very good to start with, and one has trouble, it makes one go to the bad; it is inevitable!"

"And you have trouble?"

"Yes."

"Is it very bad?"

"Well, quite bad enough, thank you!"

"Poor Jean; things don't go as you want them to, then?"

"What do you mean? What are you talking about?"

"Why, about—oh, you know very well! I told you the other evening!"

"That again!" he said, getting more and more worked up; "how foolish you are!"

"What, do you mean that you do not care for Madame de Nézel?" exclaimed Bijou.

"Madame de Nézel is a charming woman," he stammered out, in an embarrassed way. "She is an excellent friend whom I like very much, very much indeed, but not in the way you imagine."

"Ah! so much the worse for you; she is a widow, and she is rich; she would just have suited you. Well, then, you like someone else?" [243]

"Yes."

"Someone you cannot marry?"

"Exactly."

"Why? isn't she rich enough?"

"Oh, no, it is not that; if she had not a farthing it would be all the same to me; it is the other way round, I am not rich enough for her, and then—she would not have me."

"You do not know; you ought to tell her that you love her."

"Do you think so?"

"Why, of course—try that, at any rate."

"Very well, then, Bijou, I love you with all my heart—but I know that there is no hope, and, unfortunate wretch that I am, I dare not even ask for any."

"You love *me*!" she exclaimed, in deep distress, and then, stopping short, she repeated: "*you*—Jean?"

"Yes, and what about you? you detest me, do you not?"

"Oh, Jean, how can you say such things? You know very well that I love you, though not in the way you want me to, or as I should like to be able to, but very much, all the same; indeed I do." [244]

She put her hand on his shoulder, obliging him to stand still, and then passed her hand over his eyes.

"Oh, Jean," she exclaimed, in great grief, "tears, and all because of me! Oh, please, don't—no, indeed you must not; do you hear me, Jean?"

He took the little hand, which was stroking his face, and kissed it passionately. Then putting Bijou, who was clinging to him, gently aside, he left her abruptly, and strode off alone.

XIII. [245]

"Then, you really mean that you are going?" asked Bijou sorrowfully, as Jeanne Dubuisson folded her dresses into the tray of a long basket trunk.

"Yes," answered the young girl, absorbed in what she was doing, and without even looking up. "I have been here a long time; it would be taking advantage to stay longer, you know."

"You know very well that it would be nothing of the kind; and it was almost settled that you were to stay until Monday, and then, all at once, you changed your mind. What is the matter?"

"Why, nothing at all. What do you imagine could be the matter?"

"If I knew, I should not ask you. Come, now! what can it be? you don't seem to find things too dull?"

"Oh, Bijou, however could I find things dull?"

"Oh, well, you might; and yet, you see your *fiancé* almost as much as when you were at Pont-sur-Loire." [246]

"Oh, no—"

"Oh, yes; let us reckon, shall we? M. Spiegel went to Paris for Saturday, Sunday, and Monday; Tuesday he came here to dinner with M. Dubuisson; Wednesday he came alone; Thursday he managed to swallow the confirmation luncheon, poor man; Friday he was here to dinner; and every day we have been rehearsing our play either before or after dinner, so that he has never been away from you."

"Yes, that's true," answered Jeanne reluctantly; "but if he has not been away from me, he has scarcely troubled about me at all."

"How do you mean?"

"How? Oh! it is simple enough! He has only troubled about you; he has talked to no one but you."

"To me?"

"Yes, to you—there! I may as well own it, Bijou; I am jealous—frightfully jealous."

"Jealous of whom? Of me?" asked Denyse, with a startled look.

Mademoiselle Dubuisson nodded, and then she proceeded to explain, whilst the tears rose to her eyes:

"You must forgive me for telling you this. I can see that I am causing you pain, but it is better, is it not, to tell the truth, than to let you suspect all kinds of wrong reasons? You are not angry with me?" [247]

"No; not at all!" And then Bijou added sorrowfully: "It is you who ought rather to be angry with me. But you are mistaken, I assure you! M. Spiegel, who is very polite, has taken notice of me simply because I am the grandchild of his hostess, and not for any other reason."

"He has taken notice of you for the same reason which makes everyone take notice of you—just because you are adorable, and you know that very well!"

"Oh, no! I—"

"It was quite certain that he would be fascinated by you, just as all the others are, and I was very silly not to have foreseen what would happen. I counted too much on his affection—I thought that he loved me just as I love him—I was mistaken, that's all!"

"Then I shall not see anything more of you? You will avoid all opportunities of meeting me?"

"No; we shall spend the whole of the day together at the paper-chase."

"As you will be driving, and I shall be riding, I shall not be much in your way." [248]

Bijou was silent for a minute, and then she began again in an anxious tone:

"You don't think, at any rate, that it is my fault—what has happened?"

"No," answered Jeanne; "I don't think anything, except that you are a charming girl, and I am merely common-place. Bijou, dear, don't make yourself wretched about it, please!"

"I should be so unhappy if I were not to see anything more of you!"

"But you will see me! The day after to-morrow I am coming back to Bracieux for your play. I must, you know, considering that we are both acting, M. Spiegel and I."

"Why do you say, 'M. Spiegel'? Why do you not say Franz like you always do? Are you angry with him?"

"On Saturday," continued Jeanne, without answering Bijou's question, "we shall see each other at the races, and then again at the Tourvilles' dance; you see we shall scarcely be separated at all."

"All the same it won't be as though you were staying here," answered Bijou, with a sorrowful look, "and, then, too, I know very well that you are going away feeling different towards me."

Just at this moment the maid entered the room. [249]

"Madame wishes to speak to mademoiselle in the drawing-room."

"In the drawing-room at this time of day!" exclaimed Bijou, in surprise.

"M. de Clagny is there."

"Oh! very well! Say that I am coming at once."

"Will you go down with me?" asked Bijou, turning to Mademoiselle Dubuisson.

"No, I want to finish packing my trunk, as it is to be sent to Pont-sur-Loire after luncheon."

A quarter of an hour later, Bijou returned in great glee.

"Ah! you don't know something. We are going to spend the evening together to-day!"

"Where?"

"Guess!"

"Oh! I don't know. At the theatre?"

"Right! How did you guess that?"

"Because you said over and over again before M. de Clagny how much you wanted to go to that performance organised by the *Dames de France*. I suppose he has offered you a box?"

"Two boxes! yes, just imagine it; two beautiful big boxes, each one for six persons! And so we have at once arranged with your father that you are to come—M. Spiegel as well, of course—I [250] forgot to tell you that they are there—your father and M. Spiegel. M. de Clagny brought them with him."

"But three of us will be too many for you," began Jeanne.

"When I have just told you that there are twelve places! Come, now—Grandmamma and I, that makes two, and you three, that makes five; there are seven places over, and no one wants to come."

"The Rueilles?"

"Paul, but not Bertrade; that makes six. Neither Jean nor Henry are coming, nor Uncle Alexis either, and Pierrot has got into a scrape. Then there is M. de Clagny, and I thought of offering a place to M. Giraud, so that makes us eight altogether."

Mademoiselle Dubuisson did not speak, and Bijou went on:

"You do not care about spending this evening with us, or, rather, with me, and so you are trying to find a pretext?"

"Oh, no, I am not trying to find anything: besides, since it is all arranged with papa—"

"Yes, it is quite settled. I had invited M. de Bernès, too; but he makes out that he cannot come, [251] because he is going with his friends."

"Where did you see M. de Bernès?"

"In the drawing-room just a minute ago. Ah, of course you did not know. He has come to bring the invitation for M. Giraud. Jean wrote to him for it, because M. Giraud wanted to go to the paper-chase, and as there are refreshments offered by the officers to their guests, grandmamma is so scrupulous that she would not take him without an invitation."

"Then M. de Bernès is staying to luncheon, too?"

"No, he has gone again; he is the hare, you know, and the meeting-place is at the cross-roads at three o'clock; it is quite near for us, but for those who come from Pont-sur-Loire, it's a good step."

"What time do we start?"

"At half-past two the carriages, and a quarter past two those who are riding—Do you know—I feel inclined to dress before luncheon, so that I should not have to think any more about it."

"You have half an hour."

"Well, you are ready. Come with me while I dress, will you?"

Jeanne followed Bijou in a docile way, as the latter hurried along the corridors, singing as she [252] went.

"You are always gay," remarked Jeanne, "but this morning it seems to me that you are particularly joyful. What is it that makes you so?"

"Why, nothing! I am delighted about the paper-chase, and the theatre; then, too, it is beautiful weather, the sky is so blue, the flowers so fresh and beautiful, it seems to me delicious to be alive —but that's all!"

"Oh, well, that's something at any rate."

"Sit down," said Bijou, pushing Mademoiselle Dubuisson into a cosy arm-chair.

Jeanne sat down, and looked round at the pretty room. The walls were hung with pale pink cretonne, with a design of large white poppies. The ceiling, too, was pink, and the Louis Seize furniture was lacquered pink. There were flowers everywhere, in strange-shaped glass vases, and the air was laden with a delicious, penetrating perfume, a mixture of chypre, iris, and a scent like

new-mown hay.

Jeanne inhaled this perfume with delight.

"What do you put in your room to make it smell like this?" she asked.

"Does it smell of something? I do not smell anything—anyhow, I don't use scent for it," answered Bijou, sniffing the air around her with all her might. [253]

"Oh! why, that's incredible!" exclaimed Jeanne astounded. "But do you mean truly that you do not put anything at all to scent your room?"

"Absolutely nothing."

Denyse was moving about, getting everything she required before changing her dress. She was not long in putting on her habit, and as she stood before the long glass, putting a few finishing touches to her toilette, Jeanne could not help admiring her.

"How well it fits you!" she said. "It looks as though it had been moulded on you—it really is perfection! And then, too, you have such a pretty figure!"

Denyse was just putting a pearl pin into her white cravat. The point broke with a little sharp click.

"Oh!" exclaimed Jeanne, "what a pity!"

"It doesn't matter," answered Bijou, "for it was not up to much. If I win my bet with M. de Bernès, I will let him give me a strong pin," and then, with a laugh, she added: "and not an expensive one, so that it will not seem like a present."

"You have made a bet with M. de Bernès?" [254]

"Yes."

"And you have to choose your present?"

"Yes. Is there any harm in it?"

"Harm? No! but it is odd."

"Well! you are like grandmamma. She was scandalised, grandmamma was."

"Well, it is odd, you know! And what have you been betting—you and M. de Bernès?"

"I, that there would be, at least, one accident at the paper-chase; and he, that there would not be one at all."

"Well, but that's very possible."

"Oh, no! it is not very possible! There always are accidents; it would be the first paper-chase without one. Take notice that it is merely a question of a fall—just a simple fall—the person falls down, and is picked up again. I do not predict that anyone will be killed, you understand?"

"Well, don't you go and have a fall, at any rate."

"Oh, as to me!" said Bijou, her eyes shining with merriment, "there is no danger. Patatras has never been stronger on his legs. Pass me the scissors, will you, please, they are just by the side of you?"

Jeanne watched her admiringly as she stood in front of the long glass. [255]

"There is not a single crease anywhere in your habit, and what a pretty figure you have, really, Bijou."

When, at a quarter past two, punctual, as usual, Bijou appeared on the stone steps in front of the half-door, she found Henry de Bracieux there, Jean de Blaye, and Pierrot. M. de Rueille had not yet come downstairs.

The horses, which had been waiting a few minutes, were somewhat restless, as the flies were worrying them. Patatras alone was perfectly calm, nibbling at the hazel tree, and looking peaceably at what was going on around him.

Presently Bertrade opened a window, and called out:

"Don't wait for Paul. He is only just beginning to dress. He will catch you up."

"Would you like to start, Bijou?" proposed Jean.

"I feel almost inclined to let you start without me," she answered, in an undecided way. "Your three horses are jumping about like mad things; they will excite Patatras, who is quite peaceful now. Start on, at any rate—I will join you out there. Nothing annoys me more than to ride a horse that is pulling so that you can hardly hold him in, and that is what I should have to put up with, for certain, if I start with you." [256]

"Then you are going to wait for Paul?" asked Henry, looking bad-tempered.

Bijou pointed to the carriages, which were just coming out of the stable-yard.

"No, I am going to escort grandmamma."

"Well, that is just what will rouse your horse up," said Jean de Blaye.

"Oh, no! Don't you think I know my horse? Anyhow, all I ask you is to start off, and not to trouble yourselves about me."

"You are charming, really," observed Pierrot, moving towards his pony, and then turning towards the others, he added majestically, although, in a vexed tone: "Let us leave her, then, as she does not want to go with us."

"I think that's the only choice left us in the matter," answered Jean, half vexed and half laughing, as he mounted his horse.

Just as they were all three disappearing round the bend of the drive, M. de Clagny came out of the hall. He was looking to see whether his mail-coach had been put in, and was astonished to find Bijou there.

"How nice you look in that red habit," he said, in his admiration. "Generally, red makes anyone look pale, but you—why, it makes you look rosier than ever, if that is possible." [257]

When he heard that she was going to accompany the carriages as far as the meeting-place he was perfectly happy.

The marchioness soon arrived, followed by all the others. She got into the landau with the Dubuissons and M. Spiegel, whilst M. de Clagny took on his coach Madame de Rueille, the children, Abbé Courteil, M. de Jonzac, and M. Giraud. The latter was hypnotised to such a degree by Bijou, who was waiting, ready mounted, for the others to start, that he almost fell off the coach instead of sitting down.

The sun was shining brilliantly when they at last set out on their journey. M. de Clagny was much more taken up with Bijou than with the four horses he was driving. He watched her trotting in front of him, near to the carriage in which the marchioness was driving.

It was the first time he had seen her on horseback, and she seemed to him incomparably pretty and elegant. Whilst he was thus watching her with singular attention, Madame de Bracieux called out to her from the landau:

"What a horribly hot day it is, Bijou dear. I don't like to see you in this blazing sunshine!" [258]

Denyse turned round with a very rosy face.

"Nor do I either, grandmamma, I don't like to see myself in it at all!" She was silent a moment and then she continued: "When we come across Jean, Henry, and Pierrot, I shall desert you."

"Do you think we shall come across them?"

"Oh, yes, certainly! They are going along through the wood, almost the same road that we are taking with the carriages. They are only some twelve or fifteen yards away from us; I heard them a little while ago. As soon as I see them I shall leave you!"

M. de Clagny called to Bijou in order to warn her about a hundred things to avoid. In the coppice she was to beware of the branches; that very morning he had been almost taken out of his saddle when galloping in the wood. She was to take care, too, of the burrows—the wood was full of them; and then she was not to jump all in a heap, as it were; she must never do that, but always remember to lean forward or hold back.

She listened to all this advice smilingly, and with a certain affectionate deference.

"How good you are, Bijou!" he finished up with at last. "How is it you do not tell your old friend who worries you so to go about his business?" [259]

Just at this moment a horseman crossed the road about two hundred yards in front of the carriages, and entered the forest.

"Ah!" said the count, "there's Bernès throwing his paper! he's gone in for the right way of doing things, that is, to go along the whole route first in the opposite direction, dropping the paper, then afterwards one has only to fly along, without troubling about anything."

"What time is it?" asked Bijou.

"Twenty minutes to three," answered Bertrade, looking at her watch. "We shall get to the meet much too soon."

M. de Clagny let his horses walk, and Bijou caught up with the landau again, and began talking to Jeanne. Suddenly she bent her head as though listening to something.

"Ah, there they are!" she exclaimed. "I can hear them!"

"Whom do you hear?" asked the marchioness.

"Why, the others; they are there, and I am going to them. Good-bye, grandmamma." She crossed the ditch at the side of the road, and then pulled up, and, throwing a kiss to Jeanne, called out: "Good-bye to you, too."

But the landau was some distance on, and the coach was just passing. Giraud, seated at the back with the children, was the only one who was looking in Bijou's direction, and it was he who received the farewell kiss she threw to her friend. [260]

"Are you sure to find them?" asked the count, turning round on the box-seat.

"Why, they are only a few steps away," she answered, pointing to the wood. "I have just seen Henry."

Whereupon she disappeared in the thicket, and M. de Clagny looked after her, with an anxious expression on his face.

As soon as she had found a path, Bijou set off at a gallop, going straight ahead, listening eagerly, and looking out as far as she could see in front of her through the gloom of the wood.

Quite suddenly she turned abruptly aside, and rode some little distance into the brushwood, where she remained without moving, and doing all she could to prevent Patatras from making the dead branches crackle under his feet.

Along the path which she had just left came Henry de Bracieux, Jean de Blaye, and Pierrot.

When they were almost level with the spot where Denyse was hiding, they pulled up to wait for a horse that they heard galloping quite near them. [261]

"Whatever have you been doing?" asked Henry, as M. de Rueille appeared in sight. "It is quite ten minutes ago since we saw you at the bottom of the Belles-Feuilles road."

"Where is Bijou?" asked M. de Rueille anxiously, without replying to Henry's question.

"She left us in the lurch, and started with the carriages," answered Pierrot contemptuously.

"Ah!" exclaimed Rueille, in a disappointed tone. And then, turning to his brother-in-law, he continued: "What have I been doing? well, I stopped a minute or two to speak to Bernès, who was with his lady-love; she had come in a cab to a quiet spot, where no one would think of meeting her, just for the sake of seeing Bernès for two or three minutes; they cannot go a day without seeing each other. She's a very pretty girl."

"Yes," said Jean de Blaye, "and a sweet little thing too; and she's been well brought up."

"I had never seen her so near before."

"Now that your horse has had a rest, Paul, we had better get on our way, or we shall miss the start."

"Yes," answered M. de Rueille, setting off again; "but we have plenty of time. Bernès is behind me, you know."

As soon as they had gone on some distance, Bijou came out of the brushwood again. Her complexion was wonderfully brilliant, and eyes shone with the deep blue flame which sometimes made their usually gentle expression disconcerting. [262]

Hubert de Bernès stayed a few minutes, after M. de Rueille had left him, talking to Lisette Renaud.

"Well, then, it is settled?" asked the pretty actress. "In spite of the dinner, you will come early to the theatre?"

"Yes."

"You will stay in my *loge*?"

"No! I must appear in the theatre."

"But you have a horror of *La Vivandière*,—which I can quite understand—and yet you are going to see it again?"

When Bijou had invited Bernès to come into Madame de Bracieux's box, he had refused, knowing that it would grieve Lisette to see him there.

Mademoiselle de Courtaix was very well known in Pont-sur-Loire, and was greatly admired by society women and those who were not society women. Her costumes were imitated, and her wonderful beauty envied, for it was said that she was quite irresistible. The young lieutenant was perfectly aware that he, too, had been fascinated by her charms the last few days. His affection for Lisette had hitherto rendered him proof against all such fascination. He was passionately fond of the faithful and devoted young actress, who, for the last two years, had loved him so truly, and who would never accept from him any presents but flowers or trifling souvenirs, which were of no pecuniary value. [263]

Lisette earned some thirty pounds a month at the Pont-sur-Loire theatre, and she had declared that she would not receive from him any presents whatever of any value. He had not dared to insist, as he had feared to wound her feelings, or to cause an estrangement between them. She was very beautiful, but he loved her more for her qualities of mind and heart than for her beauty.

Since he had begun to pay attention to Bijou, whom, until now, he had scarcely ever noticed, he had felt greatly disturbed. It was all in vain that he had said to himself, over and over again, that Lisette, with her large expressive eyes, her delicate complexion, her dazzlingly white teeth, and her beautiful, elegant figure, was far prettier than Mademoiselle de Courtaix. In spite of all this, Bijou's violet eyes, her curly hair, and tempting lips, haunted him. [264]

Lisette, although she had no idea that her happiness was in danger, felt a sort of uneasiness take possession of her, and a vague sadness come over her. She could not understand why Bernès should answer her question in such a harsh way.

"I shall have to see *La Vivandière* again because, in order to refuse a seat that was offered me in a box, I was obliged to say that I had promised to go with some of my brother-officers to the theatre."

"Who was it who offered you a place?"

"An old lady whom you do not know—Madame de Bracieux—you are much wiser now, are you not?"

"Madame de Bracieux," she said, feeling sad, without knowing exactly why she should feel so. "She is the grandmother of Mademoiselle de Courtaix."

"How did you know that?" he asked, in surprise.

"Why, just as everyone else knows it in Pont-sur-Loire."

"In the meantime," he said, in an irritated tone, "I shall miss the meet if I don't look out."

"Don't stay," said Lisette regretfully, "enjoy yourself—and I shall see you this evening?"

"Yes—this evening." Just as he was entering the wood, he turned round in his saddle, and called out: "Above all, take care that they do not see you; don't go where the carriages are." [265]

And then, taking the path along which Bijou had gone, some little time before, he put his horse to a sharp gallop, in order to make up for lost time. Suddenly he stopped short, trying to distinguish something which he saw some distance ahead of him.

"Well!" he said to himself, "if it isn't a horse without its rider!—some fine gentleman has got himself landed already." As he drew nearer, he saw that the horse had a lady's saddle, and he uttered a cry as he perceived Bijou lying on her back on the grass to the right of the path. One of her arms was stretched out crosswise, and the other was down at her side, her eyes were closed, and her lips parted.

Bernès sprang to the ground, fastened his horse up, and then taking Denyse in his arms, tried to prop her up against a tree. When, however, the girl's head fell languidly on his shoulder, he drew her to him, and, bending over her, kissed her soft curly hair over and over again.

"Bijou, dear Bijou!" he murmured, in spite of himself; "listen to me, will you? answer me—speak to me—I am so wretched seeing you like this." [266]

At the end of two or three minutes Denyse gave a very gentle sigh, and opened her eyes slowly.

At the sight of Bernès her grave face lighted up with a smile.

"Ah!" she murmured, "wasn't it stupid, that fall?"

"How did you manage it?" he asked.

"I don't know. I fancy my horse put his foot in a hole."

"And you went up in the air?"

"That was it," she answered, laughing.

"Are you hurt?"

"Not the least bit in the world!" And then she added pensively: "It's very nice of you to trouble about me, and all the more so as you do not like me, I know."

Hubert de Bernès turned as red as a tomato.

"Oh, mademoiselle, how can you think—"

"I do think so—"

"Well, but," he began, in an anxious voice, "tell me at least whatever makes you imagine such a thing?"

"Oh, everything and nothing; it would take too long to explain. Well, this morning, for instance, when I asked you to go with us to the theatre, you looked quite annoyed, and you refused; oh, yes [267]

—out and out. Well, why did you refuse?"

"But, mademoiselle, I—I assure you—"

"There you see, you cannot find a word to say, not even the most common-place excuse."

Shaking her head so that her hair came down and fell over the young man's shoulder and against his face, she went on talking, laughing all the time, and still leaning against him for support.

"I don't mind, though, at all, for whether you want to or not now, you will have to come with us to the theatre; you cannot refuse."

"But—"

"Oh, there is no but about it. I will have that now for the payment of our bet."

"Our bet?"

"Well, did we not make a bet? I, that there would be an accident, because there always are accidents, you know; and you, that there would not be one at all."

"Yes, but—"

"Well, it seems to me that this is one. Don't you consider it enough—my accident? Well, I wonder what more you want?"

"Yes, it's true," he managed to stammer out. "What an idiot I am! the fact is, I was so frightened—if you only knew." [268]

She looked up at him with a sweet expression in her beautiful eyes, and he was fascinated by her sweetness.

"Thank you again," she said, holding out her little hand to him; "thank you for looking after me; and now you had better go on quickly."

"But can you mount again?"

"Not just yet—I feel a sort of stiffness, and a tired feeling all over. No, will you go on and tell M. de Clagny to come with his carriage and fetch me; don't say anything about it to the others; I don't want grandmamma to know."

As Hubert de Bernès was holding her hand pressed against his lips, Bijou went on impatiently:

"Go now, quickly! ask M. de Clagny to leave his carriage on the road, and explain to him that he will find me in the wood near the road, just where I left him a little while ago. And will you fasten Patatras to a tree before you go away? Thank you!" She looked at him again with her sweetest expression, and asked once more: "It's settled, then, for this evening, isn't it?"

"Yes, it's quite settled," he answered.

As soon as he was out of sight, she lay down again in exactly the same position in which Bernès had found her. [269]

A little later the sound of carriage-wheels was heard along the road, and M. de Clagny, getting down from his coach, entered the wood. At the sight of Bijou, he uttered a cry of horror, and, rushing to her, took her in his arms in his anxiety and anguish.

"Bijou, my love! my darling! dear little Bijou!" And then, like Bernès, he added: "listen to me, Bijou dear; answer me; please speak to me!"

He kissed her soft hair, and drew her closer and closer to him, until at last she opened her eyes, and looked up at him with her pretty, innocent expression; and then, as though she were going to sleep again, she murmured, as she laid her head confidingly against him:

"Ah, you are so nice to me; and I am so happy like this! I should like to stay here always!"

XIV. [270]

"Come in!" called out Bijou.

She was standing in front of the glass, brushing her hair leisurely. The more she brushed, the more her hair curled, and scented the atmosphere at the same time with a delicate perfume.

"The Count de Clagny has come, mademoiselle, to ask how you are?" said the maid.

"How I am?"

"After the accident yesterday."

"Ah, yes! I had forgotten it!" And, going to the window, she asked: "Is he driving?"

"No, mademoiselle, he came on horseback; but he is in the drawing-room."

"Oh, very well, I will go down!"

As soon as the domestic had gone, Bijou slipped on another *peignoir* quickly. She then put on some pink kid slippers without heels, which made her little feet look delightfully droll, and with her hair hanging loosely down over the frilled collar of her long, loose dress, she ran downstairs to M. de Clagny. [271]

On seeing her enter the room, the count rose quickly. His face looked drawn and tired, and there was a sad expression in his eyes.

"How good of you to have put yourself about to come so early on my account!" said Bijou, holding out both her hands to him. He pressed them to his lips whilst she went on: "Why, it is scarcely eight o'clock! you must have started from La Norinière awfully early!"

"Don't let us trouble about me; but tell me how you are?"

"Why, I am perfectly well, thank you! You saw yesterday that I followed the paper-chase just as though I had not had any fall beforehand; and then, in the evening at the theatre, I did not look ill, did I?"

"No, not exactly ill; but at the theatre it seemed to me that you were a little excitable and nervous." And then he added sadly: "I did not see much of you though, either; you scarcely troubled about anyone but Hubert de Bernès, and you quite forsook your poor old friend."

She got up and went to him.

"Oh! how can you imagine—" she began, in a coaxing way, but he interrupted her.

"I did not imagine, alas! I saw for myself; and I am not reproaching you, my dear little girl—young people of course prefer young people, it is quite natural!" [272]

"Oh, no!" said Bijou, with evident sincerity; "not at all—I am not so fond as all that of young people generally; and, above all, I cannot endure young men about the age of M. de Bernès."

"Yes, I remember that you told me that once before; you said so the first time I saw you; it was here in this room, when we were waiting together for the arrival of your guests to dinner."

Denyse laughed.

"Well, what a memory you have!"

"Always, when it is a question of you." And then, in a voice which trembled slightly, he asked: "Do you remember something you said to me yesterday?"

"Yesterday?"

"Yes, yesterday, when I was holding you in my arms, and you were nestling against me like a little trembling bird!"

Bijou appeared to be trying to remember what it was. She opened her large eyes wide, and they looked just then like pale violets.

"No, I don't know what it was; I don't remember! I was a little upset after my accident, you know!" And then, as M. de Clagny remained silent, she asked: "Tell me, what could I have said that was so interesting?" [273]

He repeated her words slowly, watching Bijou all the time attentively, as she listened with an amused air, her pretty lips parted.

"You said, 'I am so happy like this; I should like to stay here always.'"

"I don't remember saying that; but, anyhow, I was quite right, because it was perfectly true, you know!"

He drew Bijou to him, and asked:

"Truly, would it not alarm you to see me always near you like that?"

"Why, no, it would not alarm me! Oh, no, not at all!"

"Really and truly?"

"Really and truly! but why do you ask me that?"

"Oh, for no reason at all. Do you know whether Madame de Bracieux is up yet?"

"She does not get up before half-past eight or nine o'clock, especially when she is up late like last night; it was nearly two o'clock when we came in!"

"And you are just as fresh-looking and as pretty as though you had slept all night. Really, though, I should very much like to see Madame de Bracieux." [274]

"You want to speak to her yourself, or is it any message I can take to her from you?"

"No; I want to speak to her myself."

"Well, you know she will probably keep you waiting 'a spell,' as they say in this part of the world."

"Well, I will wait."

Bijou looked at M. de Clagny in surprise. He was pacing up and down the long room.

"What's the matter?" she asked at last, in her curiosity, "for there certainly is something the matter!"

"Oh, no!"

"Oh, yes! You keep marching backwards and forwards. That reminds me—one day I saw Paul de Rueille pacing about like that."

"I saw him, too; it was the night of the La Balue, Juzencourt & Co.'s dinner, whilst you were singing."

"No, oh, no! It was one day when he had some ridiculous duel, and he did not know whether it would be better to tell Bertrade, or not to tell her."

"And what did he do?"

"I fancy he did not tell her anything about it."

"Oh, well, he had more pluck than I have." [275]

"Have you a duel on?" Bijou asked impetuously.

"A duel if you like to call it that; and a ridiculous one most certainly—a fight with impossibilities. You cannot understand that, my dear little Bijou."

"And you think that grandmamma will understand it better than I could?"

"I do not know! Anyhow, she will listen to me, and she will pity me."

"But I, too,—I would listen, and I would pity you."

"I should not like to be pitied by you!" he said, and the expression of his face betrayed deep suffering.

"You do not care for me, then?" she asked.

M. de Clagny made a movement forward, then stopping himself, he said, with a calmness that contrasted strangely with the troubled look in his eyes and his hoarse voice:

"Oh, yes; I do care for you. I care for you very much, indeed." And then picking up his hat, which he had put down on one of the tables, he moved quickly towards the door, which led on to the terrace. "I will wait in the park," he said, "until the marchioness can see me." [276]

When he saw, however, that Bijou had left the drawing-room, he returned, and sank down on a chair, looking suddenly much older from the effect of some mental anxiety which was weighing on him.

The marchioness did not keep him waiting long. She entered the room, with a smile on her face.

"Well, you *are* an early visitor!" she began; but on seeing the worried look on her old friend's face, she asked anxiously: "Why, what is it? Whatever has happened?"

"A great misfortune."

"Tell me?"

"It is precisely for that I have come so early. You will remember that when I came here for the first time, a fortnight ago, I was admiring Bijou, and you reminded me of the fact that she was your grand-daughter, and might very well be mine?"

"Yes."

"I answered that I knew that perfectly well, but that all that was mere reasoning, and that when the heart remains young it does not listen to reason."

"I remember perfectly well! What then?"

"What then? Well, at present, I love Bijou! I love her with all my heart!" [277]

"Absurd!" exclaimed the old lady, lifting her hands in amazement.

"You are certainly consoling!"

"Well, but—my poor, old friend, what do you want me to say? You do not expect to marry Bijou, do you?"

His eyes were moist, and his voice choked as he replied:

"No; I do not expect to! And yet, I beg you to tell your grand-daughter what I have just confessed to you. I am fifty-nine. I have twenty-four thousand pounds a year. I am neither a bad lot, nor am I utterly repulsive-looking, and I love her as no other man can love her."

"But only think that you are—"

"Thirty-eight years older than she is; it is for me that this difference of age is more to be feared. Yes, I know that, and I am willing to accept all the risks of such a disproportion."

"And she?"

"She? Well, let her decide for or against me. She is twenty-one; she is no longer a child, and she knows what she is about."

"Yes; but that does not prevent me from having a certain amount of responsibility, and—"

"Ah, you see; you are afraid that she may consent!" [278]

"Afraid? oh, dear, no! I am quite convinced that such an ideal little creature has, about the man she dreams of for her husband, a vision of someone quite different from you."

"And, supposing, by chance—I do not expect this at all—but, supposing you were mistaken, what should you do?"

"What do you want me to do?"

"Nothing at all. And it is just this—I am afraid that you would use your influence with Bijou."

"No; I shall just tell her what I think; I ought to, under the circumstances—but nothing more."

"Then you *are* going to speak to her?"

"Yes."

"May I come again a little later?"

"Oh, no! give me until to-morrow. I shall not speak to her, probably, before this evening; but that need not prevent your coming to dinner if you feel inclined to. It was for the—for the answer that I was putting you off until to-morrow."

"If she should refuse, I shall go away."

"Where?"

"Oh, how can I care where?—my life will be over. I shall go and finish my days in some out-of-the-way spot."

"You talked like that some twelve years ago; and here you are to-day—I cannot say younger than then." The marchioness stopped short, and then continued, with a smile: "Why should I not say it, though? You really do seem younger to me now than you did in those days; you are perfectly astonishing, my dear friend, anyone would think you were about forty-five." [279]

"If only it were true what you say!"

"It is, I assure you! but you know that does not alter the fact that you are fifty-nine."

M. de Clagny rose to take his leave.

"Farewell!" he said, "until to-morrow." And then, with a pathetic little smile, he added: "Or until this evening. Yes,—towards the end of the day I shall be taken with a violent desire to see her again, and I shall come as I did the day before yesterday, and Thursday, and every day."

He took Madame de Bracieux's hand in his, and clasped it nervously, as he murmured:

"For the sake of our long friendship, I beg you, be merciful to me."

During luncheon the marchioness seemed preoccupied, and several times M. de Jonzac asked her what she was thinking about.

"Whatever is it?" he said; "you have certainly got the blues." [280]

"Aunt must have gone to bed very late," said Jean de Blaye. "I heard you all come in; it must have been two o'clock." And then, turning to Bijou, he asked: "And how did you enjoy yourself? was it nice?"

"Delightful," she answered, in an absent sort of way.

"That little Lisette Renaud is perfectly charming," said M. de Rueille, "with her beautiful, large sad eyes. You liked her, too, did you not, grandmamma?"

"Yes," answered Madame de Bracieux, "she is perfectly fascinating, and she has an admirable voice. I was astonished to find all that in Pont-sur-Loire; astonished, too, at the elegance of the house. There were plenty of pretty women, and very well dressed, too."

"Nearly all of them wore pink," put in Denyse, "I noticed that."

"Oh! that is through you," said M. de Rueille. "The Pont-sur-Loire ladies see you always arrayed in pink, and as you are considered by them to be *tip-top*, they have taken to pink, too." And

seeing that Bijou looked surprised, he asked: "Well, isn't that quite clear enough?"

"It is quite clear," she answered, laughing, "but a trifle imaginary. No one pays any attention to me, my dear Paul." And then, as Madame de Rueille turned towards her, Bijou appealed to her: "What do you think about the matter, Bertrade?" [281]

"I think that you are too modest."

"Oh, yes," said Giraud, who was gazing at the young girl with admiring eyes, "Mademoiselle Denyse is too modest. Yesterday evening everyone in the house was looking at her, and even the actress herself—"

"It's your imagination, Monsieur Giraud!" exclaimed Bijou, interrupting him hastily. "I never noticed that anyone was interested in our box; but even if they were, it does not follow necessarily that it was at me that—"

"Evidently not," remarked Henry de Bracieux, in a chaffing tone. "It was grandmamma in whom the natives were so deeply interested."

"No! but it might have been Jeanne Dubuisson."

"Yes, that's true! She is not known at all in Pont-sur-Loire, therefore the sight of her would naturally make a sensation."

Bijou shrugged her shoulders.

"You know that I have a horror of people making a fuss about me, and you say things like this all the time to tease me."

"If you have a horror of making a sensation," exclaimed Pierrot, "that great Gisèle de la Balue is not like you, I can tell you. She's one who would change places with you. Yesterday, at the paper-chase feed, she was bothering round everyone like a great meat-fly; even Bernès sent her about her business." [282]

"I think young Bernès is very nice," said the marchioness. "I was noticing him all the evening yesterday, and I like him very much. He is very natural, has good manners, and is not by any means stupid."

Jean de Blaye noticed that Bijou was screwing up her lips into a little pout of indifference.

"You don't appear to be of the same opinion as grandmamma?" he said.

"Oh, dear me! Yes, I am."

"Well, you are not enthusiastic; you may as well own it."

"Why, yes, I own it."

The marchioness turned to her grand-daughter:

"Ah! and what have you against him?"

"Why, nothing, grandmamma, nothing at all! I think he is just like everyone else, and so when I see him I can't go into ecstasies over him—that's all."

"I fancy," remarked M. de Rueille, "that the man isn't born yet about whom you would go into ecstasies. You are very good-hearted, very indulgent. You look upon everyone as all very well in a negative sort of way, but, practically, it is quite another matter." [283]

"Oh, you exaggerate!"

"I exaggerate? Well, then, just mention one man, one only, who is according to your fancy."

"Why, M. de Clagny, for instance!"

"You think he is nice; you like him?" said the marchioness. "Yes, but how? You would not marry him, I presume?"

"Oh, no!" answered Bijou, laughing, "I don't want to marry him."

Just as they were all leaving the table, Jean de Blaye asked:

"Has anyone any commissions for Pont-sur-Loire?"

"What!" exclaimed Bijou, in surprise, "you are going off to Pont-sur-Loire like that, all by yourself? Why, whatever are you going to do there, I wonder?"

"What am I going to do there?" he said, slightly disconcerted. "Why, I have some things to get."

"Will you take me?"

"Take you? But—"

Ever since the evening when he had told Bijou that he loved her, he had avoided, as much as possible, all opportunities of being alone with her. She, on her part, had not changed her behaviour towards him or Henry de Bracieux in any way. She was just as free and cordial in her [284]

manner with them as she had been before refusing them her hand; and, indeed, it seemed as though she had forgotten they had proposed to her.

"What?"—she asked, looking astonished. "You won't take me with you?"

Thoroughly uncomfortable, and dreading the long *tête-à-tête*, yet not daring in the presence of all the others to refuse to take Bijou, he answered, in a joking tone:

"Why, yes! On the contrary, I am highly flattered by the honour you are doing me!"

"That's all right, then. You are very kind."

"Oh, very; but, all the same, you will have to take someone else to be with you as well, because I have some business."

"Oh!" said Denyse, in a disappointed tone, "you don't want me with you when we get there."

"But, Bijou, my dear," put in Madame de Bracieux, "you could not, anyhow, go there—just you two! It does not matter if Jean is your first cousin; it would not be the thing, you know! You must take Josephine with you; and even then I don't know whether I ought to allow it—" [285]

"But whatever do you want to do in Pont-sur-Loire?" she added, after a pause.

"Oh, only some errands, grandmamma; you forget that there are always errands to be done for the house. And then, too, I can go and see Jeanne; it is just the day when M. Spiegel is busy and does not go so that I shall not interrupt their billing and cooing."

"It does not seem to me as though they do much billing and cooing!" said M. de Jonzac. "I was watching them yesterday at the paper-chase, and I'm very much mistaken if that engagement is not a very half-and-half sort of affair."

"But why should you think that, Uncle Alexis?" asked Bijou, looking troubled.

"Because the girl looks sad, and the professor indifferent. Haven't you noticed that?"

"No; but then I don't notice things much," she answered.

On the way from Bracieux to Pont-sur-Loire, Bijou and Jean were silent.

In the town just near the station, they met Madame de Nézel, who had come in from The Pines by the half-past two train. On seeing her, Bijou made a little movement, and was just about to speak to her cousin, but, on second thoughts, she said nothing, and only looked up at him, with a sweet [286] expression in her bright eyes. Jean, feeling awkward and confused, had pretended not to see Madame de Nézel, and she, instead of going on into the centre of the town, had turned down a narrow street, by some waste ground and gardens. As she got out of the carriage with Josephine at the Dubuissons' door, Bijou asked:

"Where shall I find you? And at what time?"

"At the hotel; I will tell them to put the horse in at six o'clock if that will suit you?"

"At six o'clock!" she exclaimed, in astonishment. "Oh, well! you *must* have plenty of things to do! Three hours and a half of shopping in Pont-sur-Loire!"

Impatient and wishing above all things to escape Bijou's innocent questioning, Jean offered to start earlier, but she refused.

"Oh, no! why should you? I shall be delighted to stay as long as you wish with Jeanne!"

Mademoiselle Dubuisson was at home. Denyse thought she looked sad, and her eyes had dark circles round them.

"What is the matter now?" she asked. "There's something wrong."

"Yes, things are not quite right." [287]

"Is—your *fiancé*?"

"Oh, it's just the same."

"Which means——"

"That I think he has got—well—a little cool. But there is something else that has upset me to-day."

"What is it?"

"Oh, well! it is an event that really does not concern me at all; but it has made me feel wretched all the same." She avoided looking at Bijou as she continued: "You know that—Lisette Renaud?"

"Yes. Well?"

"Well, she is dead—this morning."

"Dead!—What of?"

"People think she killed herself," said Jeanne, almost in a whisper.

"But how?"

"By taking morphia. You know they could not go into details before me, but I understood, from what they were saying, that it was after an explanation she had had with M. de Bernès."

"When?"

"Yesterday after the theatre, or else this morning. Papa and M. Spiegel were talking of it at luncheon; but in a vague sort of way, so that I should not understand." [288]

"How fearfully sad!—I can quite understand that it should have upset you."

"Yes; it is only natural, and all the more so as, just now, troubles from love affairs touch me very nearly—and for a good reason!" she added, with a sad little smile.

"That poor little actress!" said Bijou, in a tone of regret. "As a rule, I don't care much for women who are on the stage, but this one seemed to be nice, and then, she really did sing well—it is a pity!—M. de Bernès must be wretched!"

"Do you think people really are so wretched when they cause others to suffer?" asked Jeanne, still not looking at Bijou. "I don't think they are! There are the thoughtless people, who make others suffer without knowing it, and then there are the others, who cause people to suffer because it amuses them; and neither the former nor the latter know what it is to feel remorse—"

As Jeanne stood still, lost in thought, a far-away look in her eyes, Bijou stroked her friend's face gently.

"There, don't think any more about these sad things, Jeanne, dear," she said. "Your grief won't change anything when the mischief is already done, and you are making yourself wretched all in vain. Come, now, let us talk about our play, and about dress, or no matter what—oh! by the bye, [289] about dress, does yours fit well at last?"

"It fits; but it does not suit me!"

"Oh, that's impossible!"

"No, it's very natural, on the contrary! I have not your complexion, remember! I am paler than you are, and that pink makes me paler still; and then I am thin, and the little gathered bodice, which shows up your pretty figure to perfection, makes me look no figure at all—it does not matter, though—it's of no importance whatever!"

"What do you mean by saying it is of no importance?"

"Why, yes, don't you see, Bijou dear, that whether one is well or badly dressed, if one is just common-place as I am, one would always pass unnoticed by the side of anyone as beautiful as you are."

Bijou turned her eyes up towards the ceiling, and said, in a half-serious, half-joking way:

"My poor dear child, you are wandering—you don't know at all what you are talking about!" And then suddenly changing her tone she asked: "What time do you start to the races to-morrow?"

"I don't know. Papa will have arranged that with M. Spiegel. Ah, tell me! shall you go early to the [290] Tourvilles' dance? I don't want to get there before you."

Denyse was looking at her watch.

"Oh! I must go!" she exclaimed. "They want some gardenias at home for button-holes; I don't know where I shall be able to get any; someone told me of a florist up by the station somewhere."

"By the station? but there are only market-gardeners there, no florists."

"Yes, it seems that in that little lane—you know—to the right of the quay—"

"Lilac Lane, I know where you mean; but there are only vegetable gardens there, and some waste ground, and then a few small houses, that are generally rented by officers because they are near to the barracks."

"Well, anyhow," said Bijou, getting up, "I'll go and look round there!"

Denyse was the first to arrive at the hotel. Jean de Blaye was rather behind time, and when he did appear, he looked sad, and his face was very pale. He had met Madame de Nézel by appointment, but she had only come to break off entirely with him, and this freedom was of no use to him now; but, at the same time, there was nothing left for him to do but accept his fate. [291] They were both wretched and discontented with each other, and yet they had been obliged to stay together at their trysting-place, because Bijou, escorted by the old housekeeper Josephine, had been rambling up and down the lonely lane for a good part of the afternoon. She had gone

backwards and forwards as though in search of something, and with a persistency which Jean could not understand, and which made him feel very uneasy.

When they were driving across the square by the station at three o'clock, she had, perhaps, seen Madame de Nézel turning down Lilac Lane. If that were so, she had probably wanted to assure herself whether her suspicions were correct. How inquisitive and fond of ferreting she must be, then—this Denyse whom he loved so dearly, and who had, without knowing it, ruined his whole life.

He apologised for his unpunctuality, and helped Bijou into the carriage, whilst she assured him in the sweetest way that he was not late at all.

Just as he was wondering how he could ask her what she had been doing, she volunteered the information he wanted.

"Do you know you will have your gardenias for to-morrow after all? But it *has* been difficult to get them. I have been running about all over Pont-sur-Loire nearly all the afternoon. They sent me to [292] the queerest little streets, where I got lost, and never found the place at all."

Delighted at this proof of Bijou's innocence, Jean exclaimed involuntarily:

"Ah! that was what you were hanging about for in Lilac Lane?"

She fixed her large astonished eyes on him, as she asked:

"However did you know? Did you see me?"

"I did not," he answered quickly; "one of my friends told me."

"Who was it? Do I know him—your friend?"

"I don't think so; he's an officer in Bernès' regiment. Ah, by the bye, what do you think! The poor little actress you heard last night—well, she has killed herself!"

"Yes, I know; it is a great pity!"

Bijou said this in a tone which made it impossible to continue the conversation on this topic. She was so dignified, and her meaning was so plain, that Jean almost regretted having said a word to her of this affair, considering that it was a trifle delicate; but, after all, as he said to himself, Bijou was no child; she would soon be twenty-two!

[293]

At four o'clock, M. de Clagny arrived at Bracieux, his heart beating fast at the thought of seeing Bijou again, and of seeing her quite free and unconstrained as usual, for she would not yet know of his proposal.

He was very much disappointed on hearing that she was at Pont-sur-Loire, and that she had gone there with Jean. He asked the marchioness to tell him candidly just what she thought would be the result of his advances with reference to the young girl, and Madame de Bracieux replied that she could not approach the subject now, as Denyse had declared to them all that very morning that "she thought M. de Clagny charming, but that she should not like to marry him."

He stood the shock fairly well, but insisted that Bijou should be told that evening of his proposal. She would then have until the next day to think it over, and that was what he wished.

Denyse and Jean returned just at dinner-time. When they came downstairs, everyone was at the table, and the topic of conversation was the death of poor Lisette Renaud.

M. de Rueille had been out riding, and had met some officers, who were on duty there, and who had, of course, told him the story.

"It is fearful," said Bertrade, "to think of that poor girl killing herself; she was so pretty, and so [294] young."

"It is just because one is young that one would commit suicide, if unhappy; otherwise one would have to go on being wretched for so long a time," said Giraud in a strange voice, which resounded in the spacious dining-room.

XV. [295]

The marchioness decided not to speak to Bijou about M. de Clagny that evening, as she did not want to disturb the young girl's rest.

The following morning, however, she sent for her, and Bijou arrived, gay and lively as usual. She gave a little pout of disappointment when her grandmother informed her that she wished to speak to her about something very serious.

"It concerns one of my greatest friends," began Madame de Bracieux, "and he is also a friend of

yours."

"M. de Clagny?" interrupted Bijou.

"Yes, M. de Clagny. You must have seen that he is very fond of you, haven't you?"

"I am very fond of him, too, very fond of him."

"Exactly, but you care for him as though he were your father, or a delightful old uncle, whilst he does not care for you either as though you were his daughter, or niece; in short, you will be very much astonished—" [296]

"Astonished at what?" asked Bijou timidly.

"At—well, he wants to marry you, that's the long and short of it."

"He, too?" murmured the young girl, looking bewildered.

"What do you mean by 'he, too'?" exclaimed the marchioness, bewildered in her turn; "who else wants to marry you that you say 'he, too '?"

Denyse blushed crimson.

"I ought to have told you all that before, grandmamma," she said, sitting down on a little stool at Madame de Bracieux's feet; "but we have been so dissipated just lately, what with the paper-chase, the theatre, the races, and the dances, that I don't seem to have had a minute, and then, too, it was not very interesting either."

"Ah! that's your opinion, is it?"

"Well, considering that I don't want to marry either of them."

"Well, but who is it, child, who is it?" asked the marchioness.

"Why, just Henry and Jean. Jean spoke to me first for Henry, who, it seems, had got him to ask me whether I would allow him to ask your permission to marry me. I answered that he ought to have asked *you* first and not me—"

"You are a real little Bijou, my darling." [297]

"But that it really did not matter, as I did not want to marry him."

"He is not rich enough for you, my dear."

"Oh, I don't know anything about that. And then, too, all that is quite the same to me, but I should not like Henry for a husband. I know him too well."

"Ah! and what about Jean?"

"Jean, too, I should not like as a husband. That is just what I told him, when, after I had refused Henry, he began again on his own account."

"They go ahead—my grandchildren. Now I can understand how it is that, for the last few days, they have had faces as long as fiddles."

There was a short silence, and then Madame de Bracieux remarked, as though in conclusion:

"I know then, now, what your answer is to my poor old friend Clagny."

"How do you know, though?"

"Because if you will not have either of your cousins, who are, both of them, in their different ways, very taking, it is scarcely probable that you would accept an old friend of your grandmother's."

"But he, too, is very taking!"

"Yes, that's true; but he is sixty years old!"

"He does not look it!"

"He is though." [298]

"I know; but that does not make any difference to the fact that I should not mind marrying him any more than I should Jean or Henry."

"You do not know what marriage is; you do not understand."

Bijou half closed her beautiful, bright eyes.

"Yes," she said, speaking slowly, "I do understand quite well, grandmamma."

"Well, all this is no answer for me to give to M. de Clagny."

"Is he coming to-day?"

"He is coming directly."

Bijou moved uneasily on her footstool, and then, after a moment's consideration, she said:

"You can tell him, grandmamma, that I am very much touched, and very much flattered that he should have thought of me, but that I do not want to marry yet—" And then, laying her head on the marchioness's lap, she added: "because I am too happy here with you."

"My little Bijou! my darling Bijou!" murmured Madame de Bracieux, stooping to kiss the pretty face lifted towards her, "you know what a comfort you are to me; but, all the same, you cannot stay for ever with your old grandmother. I am not saying that, though, in order to persuade you into a marriage that would be perfect folly." [299]

Denyse looked up at the marchioness, as she asked:

"Folly? But why folly?"

"Because M. de Clagny is thirty-eight years older than you are, and he will be quite infirm just when you are in your prime; and such marriages have certain inconveniences which—well—which you would be the first to find out."

Bijou had risen from her low seat on hearing the sound of carriage-wheels, which drew up in front of the hall-door. She looked through the window, and then ran away, saying:

"Here he is, grandmamma!"

During luncheon, Madame de Bracieux announced, in a careless, indifferent way:

"M. de Clagny is leaving here; he came to say good-bye to me this morning."

Bijou looked up, and Jean de Blaye remarked:

"He is leaving here? Why, it seemed as though he had taken root in this part of the world."

"Oh," put in M. de Rueille, "old Clagny's roots are never very deep."

Bijou turned towards the marchioness.

"When is he leaving, grandmamma?" she asked anxiously. [300]

"Why, at once; to-morrow, I think. Anyhow, we shall see him to-night at Tourville; he is going to the ball in order to see everyone to whom he wants to say good-bye."

"And he is not going to the races?"

"No, he is busy packing."

"And our play to-morrow!" exclaimed Denyse, in consternation. "He had promised me over and over again to come to it."

The marchioness glanced at her grand-daughter, and said to herself that, decidedly, even with the kindest heart in the world, youth knows no pity.

Bijou's arrival at the Tourville ball was a veritable triumph. In her pink crêpe dress, which matched her complexion admirably, she looked wonderfully pretty, and different from anyone else.

"Just look at the Dubuisson girl," said Louis de la Balue to M. de Juzencourt. "She has tried to get herself up like Mademoiselle de Courtaix. She has copied her dress exactly, and just see what she looks like. She might pass for her maid, and that's the most she could do. How is it, now?"

M. de Juzencourt laughed gruffly.

"Why, it's just that if the outside is the same, what's inside it isn't the same. Isn't she going to be married?" [301]

"Yes, she's going to marry a young Huguenot, who must be somewhere about, hiding in some corner or another. Ah! No! he isn't in a corner either. There he is, like all the others, fluttering round 'The Bijou.'"

"And you? You don't flutter round her?" asked M. de Juzencourt.

"I? I'd marry her—because, sooner or later, one's got to get married, or one's parents make a fuss, because of keeping up the name, you know—but as to fluttering round—By Jove, no! that isn't in my line!" and then, in a languid way, he went off to Henry de Bracieux.

"How hot it is," he began, glancing at him dreamily, and speaking in a low voice, with an affected drawl. "You are lucky not to turn red. You've got such a complexion, though, that's true. You look like a regular Hercules, and yet, with that, your complexion is as delicate—"

As he was leaning towards him, and looking sentimental, Henry exclaimed impatiently, in his full,

sonorous voice:

"Oh! hang my complexion!" and turning away, he left young La Balue planted there in the middle of the drawing-room, and went off himself to Jean de Blaye, who, with a melancholy expression on his face, was standing at some distance off, watching Bijou through the intricacies of a dance, for which six partners had all tried to claim her. [302]

When M. de Clagny approached Denyse, and bowed to her ceremoniously, she said at once, without even returning his bow:

"Grandmamma has told me that you are going away. I am sure that it is because of me?"

He nodded assent, and she put her little hand through his arm, and moved in the direction of another room, which was almost empty.

"Please," she began, in a beseeching tone, "please, do not go away."

"And I, in my turn," he answered, deeply moved, "must say, please, Bijou, do not ask what is impossible. I have not been able to be with you without getting as foolish as all the others. I have let myself go on dreaming, just as fools dream, and now that all is over, I must try to become wise again, and to forget my dream, and in order to do that I must go away, very far away, too."

"You thought that—that I should say yes?" she asked.

"Well, you were so good to me, so sweet and confiding always, that I did hope—yes, God help me—I did hope—that perhaps you would let me go on loving you." [303]

"And so it was my fault that you hoped that?" she said dreamily.

"It wasn't your fault—it was mine; one always does hope what one wants."

"Yes, I am sure that I ought not to have behaved as I did with you." And her eyes filled with tears as she murmured, almost humbly: "I am so sorry! will you forgive me?"

"Bijou!" exclaimed M. de Clagny, almost beside himself. "My dear Bijou, it is I who ought to ask your forgiveness for causing you a moment's sadness."

"Well, then, be kind—don't go away! not to-morrow, at any rate! Promise me that you will come to Bracieux to-morrow to see us act our play! Oh, don't say no! And then, afterwards, I will talk to you—better than I could this evening." And gazing up at him with her soft, luminous eyes, she added: "You won't regret coming, I am sure."

Jean de Blaye was just passing by at that moment, and Bijou stopped him, and said, in a coaxing way:

"Won't you ask me for a waltz? do, please, you waltz so well."

And laying her hand on his shoulder, she disappeared, just as Pierrot arrived to claim his dance. [304]

"Leave your cousin in peace," said M. de Jonzac, who was seated on a divan watching the dancing. "You are much too young to ask girls to dance with you—I mean girls like Bijou."

"Ah, how old must I be then before I can ask them—not as old as you, I suppose?"

"You certainly have a nice way of saying things."

"I say, father, why do Jean and Henry say that young La Balue gets to be worse and worse form?"

"Young La Balue? Oh, I don't know."

"They say that he makes himself up."

"That's true."

"And that he gets to be worse and worse form! How?"

"If you want to know how, you have only to ask your cousins: they will tell you."

"They won't, though! I asked them, and Jean just said, 'Don't come bothering here.' Are we going home soon?"

"Going home? why, your cousin is sure to stay for the cotillion."

"I was very stupid to come here instead of staying with M. Giraud and the abbé."

"Ah, by the bye, why didn't he come—M. Giraud? Bijou asked for an invitation for him."

"Yes, but he wouldn't come: he is awfully down in the dumps, and has been for some time. He doesn't eat, and he doesn't sleep either; instead of going to bed, he goes off walking by the river all night." [305]

"And you don't know what's the matter with him?"

"The matter with him! I think it is Bijou that is the matter with him."

"What do you mean? Bijou the matter with him?"

"Why, yes, it's the same with Jean, and Henry, and Paul. You can see very well, father, that they are all running after her, can't you? not to speak of old Clagny, who isn't worth counting now." He stopped a minute, and then finished off, in a sorrowful way: "and not to speak of me either, for I don't count yet."

"Oh! you exaggerate all that," said M. de Jonzac, quite convinced that his son was in the right, but not wanting to own it. "Bijou is certainly very pretty, and it is not surprising that—"

Pierrot interrupted his father eagerly.

"Oh! it isn't that she is just pretty only, but she is good, and clever, and jolly, and everything. They are quite right to fall in love with her, and, if I were only twenty-five—"

"If you were twenty-five, my dear young man, she would send you about your business, as she does the others." [306]

"That's very possible," replied Pierrot philosophically, but at the same time sadly; and then, pointing to Bijou, who was just standing talking to Jeanne Dubuisson in the middle of the room, he said: "Isn't she pretty, though, father? Just look at her; she is dressed absolutely like Jeanne, their dresses are just alike, stitch for stitch, as old Mère Rafut says. I'm sure that, if they mixed them up when they were not in them themselves, there'd be no telling which was which after; and yet like that on them, I mean, they don't look alike at all! Do you think I might venture to ask her for a dance, father—Jeanne Dubuisson?"

"Oh, yes; she is good-hearted enough to give you one!"

A minute or two later and Jeanne went off with Pierrot for the next dance. M. Spiegel crossed over to Bijou, and asked her for the waltz which was just commencing, but she shook her head, saying:

"I am so tired, if you only knew!"

"Only just a little turn, won't you?" he begged. "Ever since the beginning of the evening I have not been able to get a single waltz with you."

"Oh, no; please don't ask me! I do want to rest; I—" and then, suddenly making up her mind to speak out, she said, "Well, then, no; it isn't that—I know I am not clever at telling untruths—I am not at all tired, but I don't want to waltz with you, because—" [307]

"Because?"

"Because I am afraid of hurting Jeanne's feelings—"

"Hurting Jeanne's feelings! But how?" he asked, in surprise.

"Well, it sounds very vain what I am going to say, but I must tell you all the same. Why, I think that Jeanne worships you to such a degree that she is jealous of everyone who approaches you, or who speaks to you, or who looks at you even!"

M. Spiegel looked displeased; he knitted his brows, and his placid-looking face suddenly took a hard expression.

"She has told you so?"

Bijou answered with the eagerness and embarrassment of anyone feeling compelled to tell an untruth.

"Oh, no—no, I have just imagined it myself; you know I am so fond of Jeanne! I know all that passes in her mind, and I should be so wretched if I caused her any unhappiness—or even the slightest anxiety; do you understand what I mean?" [308]

"I understand that you are just an angel of goodness, mademoiselle, and that it is no wonder they are all so fond of you!"

Bijou was looking down on the floor, her breath coming and going quickly, a faint flush had come into her cheeks, and her nostrils were quivering, as she listened silently to the young professor's words.

He put his arm round her waist, took her little hand in his, as she offered no resistance, and whirled her off into the midst of the dance. M. Spiegel waltzed divinely, and Bijou was passionately fond of the waltz *à trois temps*. With a flush on her cheeks, her eyes half-closed, and her lips parted, showing her dazzling white teeth, she went on whirling round as long as the orchestra played. Several times she passed quite close to Jeanne, without even seeing her poor friend, who was being jerked about by Pierrot. The youth kept treading on his partner's toes, or knocking her against the furniture; and when, now and again, Jeanne would stop to get breath, Pierrot would chatter away most eloquently about all kinds of sports, of which she was absolutely ignorant.

"You know," he said, putting out his enormous foot and his formidable knee, "I am a very second-rate dancer, but I'm very good at football. Our team is going to play a match this winter against the Pont-sur-Loire team; you ought to see it; it will be first-class! I keep goal; you should just see what jolly kicks—" [309]

He broke off as Jeanne did not speak. She was looking uneasily at her *fiancé* as he passed and re-passed, apparently happy in guiding Bijou along through the rapid whirl of the dance.

"I am boring you," said Pierrot; "shall we go on now?"

"No," she replied, in a changed voice; "I do not feel quite myself, and it is so warm! Will you take me across to papa—he is playing cards over there. I should like to go home!"

Whilst they were on their way to M. Dubuisson, Bijou stopped M. Spiegel just near the orchestra; and said, in a laughing voice:

"Why, you are indefatigable—one must get one's breath, though; besides, the waltz is just finishing now!"

She glanced at the four wretched musicians, who were in a deplorable state, with their shiny-looking coats, their limp shirt-fronts, and their faces bathed in perspiration.

"Why, Monsieur Sylvestre!" she suddenly exclaimed. "Good evening, Monsieur Sylvestre! Well, I never! I didn't expect to see you!" [310]

The poor fellow looked up eagerly, and, gazing at Bijou, with his soft, blue eyes full of deep distress, he stammered out:

"I did not expect to be seen either, mademoiselle!"

XVI. [311]

On going to bed at five in the morning, Bijou slept for two hours, and when, later on, she went to the marchioness's room, she looked as fresh and as thoroughly rested as after a long night's sleep.

"Grandmamma," she said, "I have been thinking a great deal ever since yesterday."

"About what?"

"Why, about what you told me as regards M. de Clagny."

"Ah!" said the marchioness, rather annoyed at a subject being brought up again, which she had thought over and done with.

Rather selfish, like nearly all elderly people, it seemed to her utterly useless to trouble about matters which were painful or sad, except just to settle them off once for all.

"I have been thinking," continued Bijou. "And then, too, I saw M. de Clagny last night at the ball —"

"Well, and what is the result of all this thinking and of this interview?" asked the marchioness, rather anxiously. [312]

"The result is that I have changed my mind."

"What do you say?"

"I say that, with your permission, I will marry M. de Clagny."

"Nonsense! you won't do anything of the kind."

"Why not?"

"Because it would be madness."

"Why, no, grandmamma, it would be very wise, on the contrary; if I did not marry him, I should never again all my life long have a minute's peace."

"Because?—"

"Because I have seen that he is dreadfully and horribly unhappy."

"No doubt; but that will all be forgotten in time."

"Oh, no, it won't be forgotten! And I told you I like M. de Clagny more than I have ever liked anyone—except you; and so the idea that he is wretched on my account—and, perhaps, a little through my fault—would seem odious to me, and would make me unhappy—much more unhappy even than he is."

"But you would be still more so if you married him. Listen, Bijou, dear, you know nothing about life, nor about marriage. I have, perhaps, been wrong in bringing you up so strictly, not letting you read or hear enough about things; there are certain duties and obligations which marriage imposes upon us, and about which you know nothing, and these duties—well, you ought to know something about them, before rushing headlong into such a terrible venture as this." [313]

"No!" said Bijou, with a gesture to prevent Madame de Bracieux continuing, "don't tell me

anything, grandmamma. I know what responsibilities I should have to accept, and what my duty would be, and I have decided—decided irrevocably—to become the wife of M. de Clagny, whom I love dearly." And then, as the marchioness made a movement as though to protest, she repeated: "Yes, I love him dearly; and the proof is that the idea of marrying him does not terrify me, whilst the thought of marrying the others made me feel a sort of repulsion."

She knelt down in front of the marchioness, and began again in a coaxing voice:

"Say that you will consent, grandmamma; say so—do, please."

"You are nearly twenty-two. I cannot overrule you as though you were a little child, therefore I consent, but without any enthusiasm, I can assure you, and I implore you to reconsider the matter, Bijou, my dear. I am afraid that you are following the impulse of your kind heart and of [314] your extremely sensitive nature and making a mistake that will be irreparable."

"I do not need to consider the matter any more; I have done nothing else ever since yesterday; and I know that this is my only chance of happiness, or of what at any rate seems to be the most like happiness. Don't say anything to anyone about it, will you, grandmamma?"

"Oh, dear no! you can be easy on that score; you don't imagine that I am in a hurry to announce such an engagement, and to contemplate the horrified, astonished looks they will all put on. Oh, no; if you think I am in a hurry, you are mistaken, my darling."

"And above all, don't say anything to M. de Clagny; I am enjoying the thought of telling him this evening."

"But he told me that he should not come—"

"Ah! but he promised me that he would come." And then, holding up her merry face to be kissed, she added: "And now I must go and attend to our scenery, and to the footlights, which won't light, and to my costume, which is not finished."

The marchioness took Bijou's head in her beautiful hands, which were still so white and smooth, and kissing her, murmured: [315]

"Go, then; and may Heaven grant that we shall have no cause to regret—your good-heartedness—and—my weakness."

The Dubuissons and M. Spiegel had promised to come at four o'clock. One of the scenes which did not go very well had to be rehearsed. Bijou, who was busy gathering flowers, went towards the cab when they arrived, and was surprised to see only Jeanne and her father.

"What have you done with M. Spiegel?" she asked.

It was M. Dubuisson who answered, in a confused sort of way:

"He is coming—with your cousin M. de Rueille, who was at Pont-sur-Loire and who offered to bring him."

"Don't disturb your grandmamma," said Jeanne, taking Bijou's arm. "Papa won't come in yet, he has his lecture to prepare, and he will go and do it, walking about in the park." And then, as soon as M. Dubuisson had moved off, she began again: "If M. Spiegel and I had not had parts in the play, and so had not been afraid of spoiling it for you by not appearing, we should not have come."

"You would not have come?" exclaimed Bijou, in astonishment; "and why not, pray?" [316]

"Because we are now in the most false and ridiculous position."

"You?"

"Yes, we are—our engagement is broken off."

"Broken off!" repeated Bijou, in consternation; "broken off! but what for?"

"Because I was quite certain that he cared for me very little or not at all," answered Jeanne, speaking very calmly, but not looking at Bijou, "and so I told him this morning that I did not feel equal to accepting the life of misery which I foresaw, and that I gave him back his liberty."

"Good heavens, is it possible—and you do not regret anything?"

"Nothing! I am very wretched, but my mind is more easy."

Bijou looked straight into her eyes as she asked:

"And it is—it is because of me, isn't it? it is because of M. Spiegel's manner towards me that you broke it all off?" Jeanne nodded, and Bijou went on: "And so you really thought that your *fiancé* was making love to me?"

"Oh, as to making love to you, no, perhaps not—but he certainly cares for you."

"And what then?"

"What do you mean by *what then*?"

"Well, what would be the end of that for him?" [317]

"Well, it would cause him to suffer; and who knows, he might have hoped—?"

"Hoped what? to marry me?"

"No—yes! I don't know; he might have hoped in a vague sort of way—I don't know what."

"And do you think that I can endure the idea of causing your unhappiness, no matter how involuntarily on my part?"

"It is not in your power to alter what exists."

Bijou appeared to be turning something over in her mind.

"Supposing I were to marry," she said at last abruptly. And then hiding her face in her hands she said in a broken voice: "M. de Clagny wants to marry me."

"M. de Clagny!" exclaimed Jeanne, stupefied, "why, he's sixty!"

"I said no; I will say yes, though."

"You are mad!"

"Not the least bit in the world! I am practical. The remedy is perhaps a trifle hard, but what is to be done? I love you so, Jeanne, that the idea of seeing you unhappy makes me wretched!"

"I assure you, though, that even if you marry M. de Clagny, I should not marry M. Spiegel. He said things to me just now which were very painful, and no matter how much I tried, I could not [318] forget them."

"Painful things, about what?"

"About my jealousy—he said that it was ridiculous—and yet I had not complained about anything. I kept it from him as much as possible, my jealousy; but at the ball, I did not feel well, and I asked papa to take me home, and he was displeased about that, he thought I was sulking."

"Oh, all that will soon be forgotten!"

"No! and so you see, Bijou, it would be for nothing at all that you would commit the very worst of all follies—marrying an old man."

"An old man! it's queer, he does not seem to me at all like an old man—M. de Clagny! I should certainly prefer marrying a younger man and one whom I should like in every respect, but now—"

Jeanne put her arm round Bijou and, resting her hand on her friend's shoulder, kissed her as she said:

"You must just wait for him in peace, the one 'whom you would like in every respect!' You have plenty of time!"

"No, I have quite decided! Whatever you do now will be useless, for, in spite of what you say, when once the cause of your little misunderstanding has vanished, the misunderstanding will [319] vanish in the same way. There now, kiss me again, and tell me that you love me."

"Well!" said Jean de Blaye, who now appeared with M. Spiegel, "is everyone ready; are we going to rehearse?"

For the last few days he had been in a nervous, excitable state, feeling the need of anything that would take him out of himself, and doing his utmost all the time to keep himself from thinking. "Yes," answered Denyse very calmly, wiping her eyes quickly, "we are ready; we were only waiting for you." And then, in a very gracious, natural way, she held out her hand to M. Spiegel, who took it, saying at the same time:

"You are not too tired, mademoiselle, after such a late night?" And then, glancing involuntarily at Mademoiselle Dubuisson's rather sallow-looking face, he added: "Why, you are looking fresher even than yesterday."

Jeanne came nearer to Bijou, and, as they moved away together, she said, pointing to the professor, and with a look of intense grief in her gentle eyes:

"You see your remedy would not do; he is incurable."

[320]

The little play was performed before a large audience of guests, who were highly amused. Bijou was so pretty in her costume as Hebe, she looked so pure and maidenly and so sweet, that, when the piece was finished, and she wanted to go and put on her ball-dress, everyone begged her to remain just as she was. As she was going away into a side-room to escape the compliments of the various guests, M. de Rueille stopped her, and said, in a sarcastic tone:

"And so that is the costume that was to be quite the thing, and which, in order to please me, you

were going to get Jean to alter?"

Jean came up just at this moment, with Henry de Bracieux and Pierrot.

"Accept my compliments," said M. de Rueille drily, turning towards him; "you certainly know how to design costumes for pretty girls; but, if I were you, I would have been rather more careful."

"Why, what's up with you?" asked Jean, without even looking at Bijou; "the costume's right enough!"

"Besides," remarked Bijou tranquilly, "there are only three persons who have any right to trouble themselves about my costumes—grandmamma, I myself, or my husband." [321]

"Yes, if you had one!"

"Certainly; well, I shall be having one!"

Jean de Blaye shrugged his shoulders incredulously, and Bijou continued:

"I assure you it is quite true! I am going to be married."

"To whom?" asked M. de Rueille uneasily.

"Oh, yes, what a good joke!" remarked Pierrot.

"Whom are you going to marry?" asked Henry de Bracieux. "Tell us!"

M. de Clagny had just entered the room, and putting her arm through his, she said, in a mischievous way, to the others:

"I am going to tell M. de Clagny." And then, turning to him, she added: "Let us go out-doors, though; it is stifling in here!"

"Isn't she æsthetic this evening?" murmured Pierrot, gazing at Bijou's long Grecian cloak of pale pink. "I should think M. Giraud would think her perfect to-night; he's always saying she isn't made for modern costumes."

"Ah, by the bye, where is he—Giraud?" asked Jean de Blaye; "he disappeared after dinner, and we have not seen him again!" [322]

Pierrot explained that he must have gone off for a stroll along the river, as he did nearly every evening. He was getting more and more odd, and had fits of gaiety and melancholy, turn by turn. That very morning he had left the schoolroom in order to go to Madame de Bracieux, who had sent to ask him to translate an English letter for her; and then he had come back some time after, saying that he had not ventured to knock, because he could hear that the marchioness was talking to Mademoiselle Denyse, and ever since then he had not uttered another word.

"Where the devil's he gone?" asked Jean; and Pierrot, speaking through his nose, began to imitate the street vendors on the boulevards.

"Where is Bulgaria? Find Bulgaria!"

When she was alone with M. de Clagny under the big trees, Bijou said, in the sweetest way:

"I came back home this morning, quite wretched at having caused you any sorrow. It seemed to me that I must have been too affectionate in my manner towards you—too free—and that I had made you think something quite different. Is that so?"

"Yes, that is just it—and so you have no affection at all for me?" [323]

"You know very well that I have!"

"I mean that you like me just as though I were some old relative or another."

"More than that!"

"Well, but you do not love me enough to—to—love me as a husband?"

"I do not know at all. I cannot understand myself just what I feel for you. In the first place, I think you are very nice-looking, and very charming, too; and then, when you are here, I feel as though I am surrounded with care and affection. It seems to me that I breathe more freely, that I am gayer and happier, and I have never, never felt like that before—"

Very much touched by what she was saying, and very anxious, too, about what she was going to say, the count pressed Bijou's arm against his without answering.

"Well, then," she continued, "I thought that, as I liked you better than I have ever yet liked anyone, and that, on the other hand, I should never be able to console myself for having caused you so much sorrow, the best thing would be to marry you."

M. de Clagny stopped short, and asked, in a choked voice:

"Then you consent?" [324]

"Yes."

"My darling!" he stammered out, "my darling!"

"I told grandmamma this morning," continued Bijou, "and I must confess that she was not delighted. She did all she could to make me change my mind."

"I can quite understand that."

"She thinks that it is mad, for you as well as for me, to marry when there is such disproportion of age; and then, she did not say so, but I could see that there was something troubling her, which troubles me too, though to a much less degree."

"And it is?"

"The disproportion in money matters. Yes—it appears that you are horribly rich. Grandmamma said so yesterday, when she told me that you had asked for my hand."

"What can it matter, Bijou, dear, whether I am a little more or less rich?"

"It matters a great deal, with grandmamma's ideas about things especially. Oh, it is not that she thinks it humiliating for me to be married without anything, for I have nothing, you know, in comparison with what you have! No, she looks upon marriage as a partnership, or exchange of what one has. '*Give me what you've got, and I'll give you what I've got*,' as the country people here say. Well, you have your name, which is a good one, and your money, which makes you a very rich man; on my side, I have my name, which is rather a good one, too, and my youth, which certainly counts for something." *[325]*

"Very well, then, and how can the disproportion of what we have make your grandmamma uneasy?"

"Well, it's like this, you know—grandmamma is very fond of me, and she thinks that, as I am thirty-eight years younger than you, you might die before me, and that, after living for years in very great luxury, after letting myself get accustomed to every comfort, which, up to the present, I have not had, I might suddenly find myself very poor and very wretched at an age when it would be too late to begin life over again, and so I should suffer very much on account of the bad habits I had contracted, and which I should not be able to drop—"

"You know very well, my adored Bijou, that everything I possess is and will be yours. My will is already made, in which I leave everything to you, even if you do not become my wife."

"Yes, but she always says a will could be torn up." [326]

"If your grandmamma would prefer it, I could make it over to you in a marriage settlement."

Bijou laughed.

"Ah! she would imagine, then, that we might be divorced, and a divorce does away with all things —"

"But, supposing I make out in the marriage contract that the half of what I possess now is really yours, and supposing I made over the rest to you, only reserving to myself the interest?"

Bijou shook her head, and then, with a pretty movement of playful affection, she threw her soft arms round M. de Clagny's neck, and said:

"I don't want you to give me anything but happiness, and I am sure you will give me plenty of that. I hope you will live a very, very long time, and it would not matter to me, when I am old, if I were to find myself poor again, comparatively speaking."

"And I," he said, covering Denyse's face and hair with kisses, "I could not go on living with the thought that I might be taken away without your future being provided for in the way in which I should wish it to be."

"Don't talk about all those things," she murmured. "I want to think that I shall never be separated from you—never, never!" [327]

Trying, in spite of the darkness, to look into Bijou's eyes, he asked anxiously:

"Will you be able to love me a little, as I love you?"

Without answering, she held her pretty lips up to him, but just at that moment the sound of voices made them move away from each other abruptly.

Only a few yards away from them they could hear several persons talking in low voices, and also the sound of heavy footsteps walking with measured tread. It seemed as though just there, quite near to them, a heavy burden were being carried along, whilst, in the midst of the darkness, lights kept passing by.

"It's very odd," said M. de Clagny; "one would think something had happened."

Bijou, however, who had stopped short, her heart beating fast with anxiety, struck with the strangeness of the little procession, put her hand on the count's arm, and said, quite tranquilly:

"Oh, no! it must be the men going back to the farm. Just now they are at work up at the house

through the day, and then, when they have had something to eat, they go back home." [328]

"It seemed to me, though, that the lanterns were on the way towards the house."

She was walking along with her hand on his arm, and a thrill of joy ran through him as he drew this beautiful girl, who had just promised herself to him, closer still, in a passionate embrace.

They returned slowly to the house along the avenues, meeting several carriages, which were bearing away the departing guests.

"How's that?" exclaimed Bijou, in surprise. "They are going away already—but what about the cotillion? Is it very late?"

On arriving at the hall-door steps, they met the La Balues coming towards their carriage.

"How's this?" asked Bijou. "You are going? But why?"

M. de la Balue mumbled out some unintelligible words, whilst his son and daughter, looking very sad, shook hands with Bijou.

"Well, what long faces they are making," remarked M. de Clagny, beginning to get anxious in his turn. "Ah! what's that? Whatever's the matter?"

In the hall there was a long pool of water. The servants were going backwards and forwards quickly, looking awestruck, and then Pierrot came in sight, his eyes swollen with crying, and his [329] hands full of flowers. Madame de Rueille was following him, carrying flowers, too.

Bijou stopped short, thunderstruck; but M. de Clagny hurried up to Madame de Rueille.

"What has happened?" he asked.

"M. Giraud has drowned himself," answered Bertrade. "They have just brought him back here. It was the miller who found him near the dam—"

And then, seeing that Pierrot was gazing at her in consternation, shaking his flowers about at the end of his long arms in sheer desperation, she added, in a hard voice:

"Yes, I know very well that grandmamma has forbidden anyone to speak of it before Bijou, but, for my part, I want her to know about it."

XVII. [330]

As she stood waiting at the threshold of the little church for her Uncle Alexis, who was just getting out of the carriage, Bijou turned round, and, after giving a little kick to her long white satin train, and pulling the folds of her veil over her face, she gazed round at the motley crowd, who were hurrying towards the church-porch, with that quick look in her luminous eyes which took in everything at a glance.

She saw first the profile of Jean de Blaye towering above the others; he was advancing towards her with an indifferent, languid expression on his face, and talking to M. de Rueille, who looked slightly nervous and excited. Henry de Bracieux, with a worried look on his face, was listening in an absent sort of way to the marchioness, as she gave her orders to the coachman.

Pierrot had got one of the tails of his coat, which was too short for him, caught in the carriage-door, and, with his big, white-gloved hands, he was awkwardly endeavouring to get free, but [331] unsuccessfully.

M. Sylvestre, with an enormous roll of music under his arm, looking very nervous, and in a great hurry, was rushing towards the staircase which led to the gallery, without daring to lift his eyes from the ground; whilst Abbé Courteil, accompanied by his two pupils, passed by, looking very business-like—he, too, not venturing to glance in the direction of Bijou.

Jeanne Dubuisson, who had got rather thinner, was waiting with her father until the crowd made way for her to pass.

Among the Bracieux villagers, and just behind all the fine ladies and gentlemen, who had come from Pont-sur-Loire and the country-houses in the neighbourhood, Charlemagne Lavenue was pressing forward with long strides. He was dressed in his best clothes, and his square shoulders and ruddy complexion seemed to stand out against the background of blue sky.

As she stood there, with her eyes lowered, looking as though she had seen nothing, with the sun, which had brightened up the whole country round for her marriage, shining full on her, Bijou was [332] enjoying to the full the bliss of living, of knowing herself beautiful, and of being beloved by everyone.

The sound of her Uncle Alexis' voice as he offered her his arm, and said: "Are you ready?" woke her up out of her ecstasy.

Very graceful and beautiful she looked, as she moved along to the music of the organ, which was pealing forth.

A cabman, who had gone inside the church to see "the wedding," exclaimed, as Bijou passed up the aisle:

"Bless my soul! but ain't she a pretty one—-the bride?"

Whereupon one of Farmer Lavenue's day-labourers replied:

"I believe you. And I can tell you what—she's as good as she is pretty—she is! And even better nor that!"

THE END.

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Transcriber's Notes:

Table of Contents added to HTML; not present in original.

Missing or incorrect punctuation fixed.

Hyphenated and non-hyphenated versions of same words retained when occurring equally.

Unusual spellings retained, but obvious misspellings corrected.

P.6 and 65: "anyrate"(2) changed to more frequent "any rate"(11).

P.292: "got o st" changed to "got lost".

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