The Project Gutenberg eBook of Sans-Cravate; or, The Messengers; Little Streams, by Paul de Kock

This ebook is for the use of anyone anywhere in the United States and most other parts of the world at no cost and with almost no restrictions whatsoever. You may copy it, give it away or re-use it under the terms of the Project Gutenberg License included with this ebook or online at www.gutenberg.org. If you are not located in the United States, you'll have to check the laws of the country where you are located before using this eBook.

Title: Sans-Cravate; or, The Messengers; Little Streams

Author: Paul de Kock

Release date: November 12, 2011 [EBook #38001]

Language: English

Credits: Produced by Chuck Greif and the Online Distributed Proofreading Team at http://www.pgdp.net (This file was produced from images available at The Internet Archive)

*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK SANS-CRAVATE; OR, THE MESSENGERS; LITTLE STREAMS ***

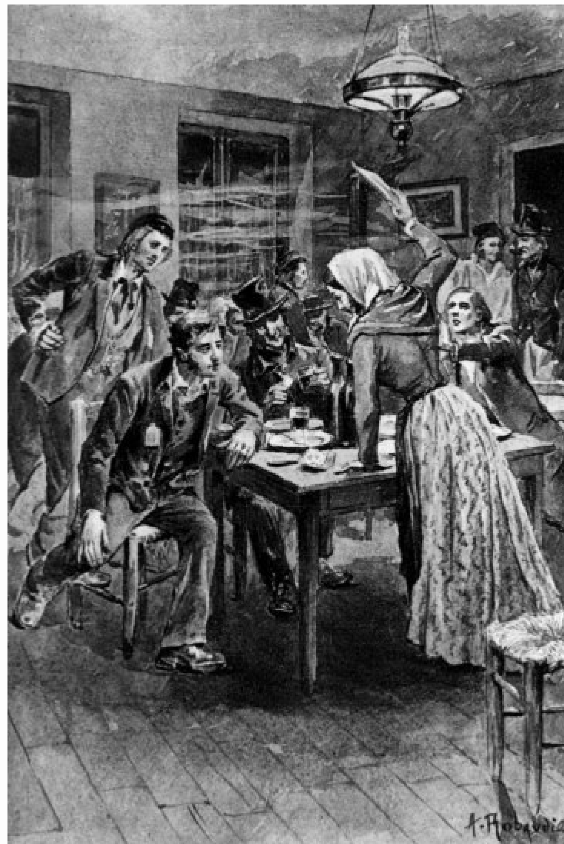
Novels of Paul de Kock, Volumes III and IV

Sans-Cravate: Volume I: I, II, III, IV, V, VI, VII, VIII, IX, X, XI, XII, XIII, XIV, XV, XVI, XVII, XVIII, XIX, XX, XXI, XXII

Volume II: XXIII, XXIV, XXV, XXVI, XXVII, XXVIII, XXIX, XXX

Little Streams: I, II, III, IV, V, VI, VII, VIII, IX, X, XI, XII, XIII, XIV, XV, XVI, XVII, XVIII, XIX, XX

Copyright Copyright 1903 by G. Barrie & Sons.



THE QUARREL AT THE WINE SHOP

———

Bastringuette, with a violent wrench, released her arm from the hand that held it; and snatching a plate from the table, held it over Sans-Cravate's head, as if to strike him with it.

NOVELS

BY

Paul de Kock

VOLUME III

SANS-CRAVATE;

OR,

THE MESSENGERS

VOL. I

PRINTED BY ARRANGEMENT WITH

GEORGE BARRIE'S SONS

THE JEFFERSON PRESS
BOSTON NEW YORK

Copyrighted, 1903-1904, by G. B. & Sons.

SANS-CRAVATE;

OR,

THE MESSENGERS

I

THE IDLERS.—BOULEVARD DES ITALIENS

Three young men, arm in arm, were walking, or, to speak more accurately, loitering, along Boulevard des Italiens, looking to right and left, scrutinizing the women at close quarters, especially when they were pretty; commenting aloud on the face of one and the bearing of another, interspersing their reflections with jests, puns, foolish remarks, and bursts of laughter; and, lastly, smoking cigars, an accomplishment which is now indispensable to the young men of fashion whose ordinary promenade is the Boulevard de la Chaussée d'Antin.

It is a little world in itself that frequents Boulevard des Italiens, a fashionable, aristocratic, eccentric boulevard, where, none the less, many of the promenaders affect manners, dress, and language which remind us forcibly of Diogenes. Each portion of a large city has its quarters, with their habitués and their residents, whose dress, language, and manners have their own peculiar characteristics. Thus, there is a marked difference between the costume of an annuitant of the Marais and that of the ex-young man of the Chaussée d'Antin; between the dress of a grande dame of Faubourg Saint-Germain and that of a bourgeois housewife of the Cité; between the grisette of Rue Saint-Jacques and her of Place Bréda, who has lately taken the name of lorette. Of course, the residents of one quarter do not remain altogether on their own territory, and they may sometimes be met with in a neighboring section. But, even then, a practised eye never makes a mistake; it recognizes the strangers at once, and does not confound them with the natives of the quarter. In vain do the former try to assume the bearing and manners of the

latter—the natural instincts, when we try to drive them away, return at a gallop, and it would be as difficult for a government clerk who lives on Rue Saint-Antoine to resemble a clerk in a banking house on Rue Laffite, as for a siren of Place Maubert to copy the manners of a young lady of Faubourg Saint-Honoré.

Boulevard des Italiens is no ordinary promenade; it deserves the attention of the observer; indeed, it is worthy of a chapter in the history of Paris, for it has changed its name more than once in accordance with political exigencies.

At the time of the Revolution of '89, this segment of the boulevards was called Coblentz, and it retained that name under the Empire. Not until 1815, at the time of the Second Restoration, did it exchange the name of Coblentz for that of Gand. The former name recalled the place of rendezvous of the *émigrés* of the Revolution; the other, the second return of Louis XVIII. The French have always loved to bring politics into the most trivial things; they have brought it into their ballads and into the names of flowers; so they could consistently give a political tinge to the name of a fashionable promenade. But the great majority of the ladies who resort to Boulevard des Italiens in search of conquests put no politics in their smiles; they are cosmopolites, for they have been known to dart glances impartially at republicans and legitimists, at old soldiers of the Empire and favorites of the Restoration; it has been observed, however, that they affect more particularly the partisans of the *juste-milieu*.

But do not believe that all the ladies who occupy the chairs along the boulevard of a pleasant evening go thither to make conquests! The very best society was often to be seen on Boulevard Coblentz, and later on Boulevard de Gand; and may be seen sometimes, but more rarely, on Boulevard des Italiens.

People go there to discuss the new ballet at the Opéra, the last performance at the Bouffes, the reception of Madame la Comtesse Blank, and the ball recently given by the richest banker of the quarter. Some meet there by appointment; some pay visits there. You will see young men approach a party of ladies, stop before their chairs, salute them and pay them compliments as they would do in a salon; and, after a few moments' conversation, take leave of them and continue their stroll, stopping again, perhaps, a little farther on, to speak to others of their acquaintances.

Some years ago, it was the fashion to make a careful toilet before going to Boulevard de Gand; the ladies would exhibit a new style of head-dress, the men were all fashionably dressed; when one of them appeared with a coat of a new cut, the fashion was instantly adopted by the dandies of the capital.

Other times, other manners! It is no longer the fashion to dress for a stroll on Boulevard des Italiens. Now that the cigar has invaded that quarter, and most of the men smoke, the most fashionable young men seem to affect a simple, even severe, costume, which makes them resemble the Puritans, as their beards remind one of the young noblemen of the time of François I.

Let us return to our three idlers.

The one in the middle, who was not more than twenty-two years of age, was above medium height; he was well built, slender, easy and graceful in his bearing, and wore with much grace a morning costume, whose cut betrayed the hand of an ultra-fashionable tailor. He wore patent-leather boots, and carried in his hand a pretty little switch, the head of which was a beautiful bit of chased silver. The young man's face did not clash with the attractions of his dress and bearing. He was dark, and his large black eyes emitted an incessant gleam, wherein wit, mockery, fun, and sometimes emotion and sentiment, shone in turn. An irreproachable nose, a well-shaped mouth, supplied with teeth so white as to justify a feeling of pride therein; an oval face, with thin black whiskers and a small moustache connecting them;—such was young Albert Vermoncey; one could not justly deny him the title of a comely youth.

On his left arm leaned a young man who was apparently some years older than the fascinating Albert, but who was also one of the lions, or, if you prefer, beaux, of the day. But his bearing lacked the grace wherein lay his companion's charm. He was taller and stouter, but there was stiffness in his gait, and affectation in the way he carried his head on one side, and in the way he wore his hat over his ear. The difference in the faces of the two was even more marked; taken separately, the features of this second member of the party were not bad, but the whole effect was far from pleasant. The color of his eyes was uncertain; and then, too, he kept the lids lowered, and rarely looked at the person with whom he was talking. Lastly, his face commonly wore a sarcastic expression, which was sometimes insulting; one would have said that he was always inclined to pick a quarrel with someone. This young man's name was Célestin de Valnoir.

The individual who walked at Albert's right, but not on his arm, was of about his age, but much shorter, and possessed of a very pronounced embonpoint. His hair, which had a reddish tinge, curled naturally and fell in abundance on each side of his face, which was round and fresh and rosy, but a little too fat. He had attractive features: eyes almost round, but of a very clear blue; a small aquiline nose, which seemed to point to an Israelitish origin; red lips and very handsome teeth, and a dimple in the middle of his chin. All these combined to make a very attractive, chubby angel's face, which lacked character only, for its expression very rarely varied; it was that of a person who is overjoyed to be in the world. It required some very serious cause to banish his stereotyped smile; but it disappeared when he thought that he had lost his handkerchief or a piece of money. At such times an extraordinary revolution took place in his features: his nose increased in size, his mouth contracted, his eyes seemed to be on the point of starting from their orbits; in fact, he became so ugly that he was almost unrecognizable.

This third idler was dressed with more pretension than taste; he had a huge scarfpin, with a cameo; a heavy hair chain, which he wore about his neck, fell over his waistcoat and held a little square monocle, which he put in his right eye from time to time. Add to these a very fine Malacca joint, with an enormous gold or gilt head, which he often held by the middle and twirled in the air, and you have a fair portrait of Tobie Pigeonnier. His baptismal name often led people to think that he was born in the Jewish religion; but whenever he was questioned on the subject, he seemed to take offence at the suggestion that he was a descendant of Jacob.

Let us listen to the conversation of these young gentlemen; that is the best way of making acquaintance with people.

Albert Vermoncey was telling his two friends an anecdote which seemed to amuse them mightily:

"Yes, messieurs; it was at Madame Baldimer's last reception. You know whom I mean? that American who has made such a sensation in Paris, because she is very beautiful, very bright, and very original."

"And who is supposed to be very rich," said Célestin.

"Well, isn't she?" queried Tobie Pigeonnier, rubbing his nose with the head of his cane.

"Why, people are beginning to doubt it; she gives very few big dinners now."

"If she gives many small ones, that amounts to the same thing."

"What a stupid creature you are, Tobie! Pray let me finish my story. Madame Plays was there with her husband. Good God! what a husband! he ought to serve as a model for them all."

"Because his wife has given him a pair of horns that wouldn't pass under Porte Saint-Denis?"

"Oho!" said Tobie, laughing uproariously; "do you mean to say that poor Monsieur Plays is a stag?"

"I say, Célestin, to think that Tobie didn't know that! Where have you been, my dear fellow—to the Marquesas Islands? to the kingdom of Lahore?"

"As if Tobie knew anything! When a man has passed his youth on Rue Beaubourg, he is bound to be far behind the times."

"Oh! I have lived on Rue de la Ferme-des-Mathurins more than three years now."

"Look, messieurs! see this coming toward us, with the little lilac hat and the pink dress. I rather like the looks of it. Here's a chance to shoot off your monocle, Tobie; especially as the wind makes the lady's dress cling close to her thighs, and we are going before the wind."

"She isn't pretty," said Célestin, as the person with the lilac hat passed them.

"Gad! Célestin, you shouted that in her ears; I'll bet that she heard you."

"Well, suppose she did? aren't opinions free? I say, Tobie; speaking of Rue Beaubourg, I thought that nobody but Jews lived there."

"That's a fable, you see, as I lived there."

"That's no reason. You may be of that religion yourself."

"I have told you many times that I am a Lutheran, of Polish descent. I don't know why you insist on calling me a Jew."

"Well, suppose you were a Jew," said Albert; "what harm would it do you? Aren't there men of merit, men of genius, in all religions? and in respect to the arts, fortune, and talents, the Jewish nation is one of the most richly endowed at this moment. We are not living in the barbarous times when the people loved of God were so badly treated, when the children of Israel were compelled to wear a distinguishing mark on their clothes and their hats."

"It was a yellow mark," said Célestin, with a sneer.

"Yes; and now that color has become so fashionable that a yellow mark would not be distinctive at all. Ah! there's a young actress from the Variétés. Whom is she with to-day?"

"With an Englishman who is in a fair way to ruin himself for her. It won't take long; she makes her adorers strike a fast pace."

"She is right; she is the fashion now, and she is making the most of it. It doesn't last long in Paris."

"But it seems to me that I could mention several ladies of her stamp who have been the fashion for fifteen years at least. What a pile of money they have fricasseed, eh?"

"Do you know, I like the word *fricasseed*; it's a fact that they spend it with all sorts of sauce."

"If only they had the sense to put some of it by; then they wouldn't be obliged to end as box openers, after cutting a brilliant figure on the stage."

"Put money by! that's a reflection quite worthy of Tobie! What I can't understand is, how he ever made up his mind to buy such a big pin, with a cameo. How much did your cameo cost, Tobie? and your cane must have cost a lot, too. Damnation! what a swell! he denies himself nothing!"

"True," said Célestin; "but it would be well to know if it's all real gold."

Monsieur Tobie Pigeonnier blushed to the end of his nose; but he affected to laugh heartily, and replied:

"Ah! Monsieur de Valnoir, how unkind of you! When you find me wearing anything that isn't of the first quality, you will be very sharp. I care for nothing, of any sort, that is not really choice. It's the same with my linen—I must always have the very finest. The shirt I am wearing cost me seventy-five francs."

"Have you many dozens of that sort?"

"Why, yes; I like to have a lot of linen; I was brought up to that habit. My mother had five or six large wardrobes filled with sheets—all fine Holland. When I go into partnership with my aunt, I shall deny myself nothing; I shall have only the finest damask on my table——"

"Have you an aunt in business?"

"Yes; she sells all sorts of goods on commission. It's a big establishment: twelve clerks and eight travelling men. She promised long ago to put me at the head of it; and if it hadn't been for some escapades of mine, she'd have done it before now."

Célestin began to whistle between his teeth, and Albert, who had not been listening to Tobie for several minutes, suddenly exclaimed:

"Isn't that Madame Baldimer in that little *citadine*?"

Albert's two companions thereupon looked into the street, and Célestin, after glancing at a carriage which was passing, replied:

"Yes, that is she."

"Was she alone?"

"I think not; I thought that I caught a glimpse of a moustache beside her face."

Albert's face became clouded; he looked after the *citadine*, which was already some distance away, then stopped and seemed to hesitate as to what he should do next.

"Well! what's the matter with you?" said Célestin, looking at his friend as if he would have liked to read his inmost thoughts; "do you think of following that carriage?"

Albert tried to smile, as he replied:

"The fact is that I am curious to know—— This Madame Baldimer is a great flirt, but she has no lover, so far as anyone knows; she allows everybody to pay court to her, and seems inclined to make sport of her adorers."

"Why is anyone foolish enough to pay court to her?"

"Why, because she is lovely."

"There's no lack of lovely women in Paris."

"Nor in the suburbs," said Tobie. "I knew one at Nanterre. Such a love of a woman!"

"Did she sell cakes?"

"Ah! you joker! cakes! She was a woman of very high position."

"Did she live on a hill?"

"She had a villa, monsieur, a magnificent villa."

"At Nanterre? That is strange; I never happened to see any fine houses there."

"It wasn't just at Nanterre, but in the neighborhood."

Albert Vermoncey was lost in thought; he walked very slowly, and turned his head from time to time to see if he could still see the carriage.

Monsieur Célestin, who, without seeming to do so, closely watched his companion's movements, said, after a moment, dwelling significantly upon his words:

"A carriage is a very convenient thing, especially in Paris, where you can always be certain of finding one with blinds. If you have a secret errand to do, if you don't know where to meet your lover for a little chat—why, you step into a *citadine*, you join the person in question at the appointed place, she enters with you, you close the windows and lower the blinds; and then—go where you choose, driver, you are hired by the hour!—Drive through the most crowded streets of Paris, pass as close as you please to a husband, or a rival—he will see nothing. Sometimes, indeed, he will be the first to smile when he sees a hermetically closed carriage, and will say: 'That probably conceals some intrigue.'—Oh, yes! a carriage is a great convenience, I say again."

"It is, and it is not," said young Tobie, affecting a cunning expression; "because—— Still, if all the streets in Paris were paved with wood, it would be all right."

"Madame Baldimer did not hide," said Albert; "the blinds of her carriage were not lowered."

"Perhaps they are now," murmured Célestin.

Albert clenched his hands as if he had had a spasm of pain.

"I say, my dear Albert," said Tobie, after trying, but in vain, to fix his little glass in his right eye, "are you in love with this Madame Baldimer, that you seem inclined to follow her carriage?"

"I, in love with her? upon my word! Do you suppose that I am idiotic enough to fall in love with a woman again? I love them when they are pretty; but it lasts just so long as is necessary to triumph over them; that is quite enough. Mon Dieu! that is the best way to succeed with women. But if you really love them, you become melancholy, jealous, a bore to your friends; and your fair one no longer listens to you, and, what is worse, deceives you. Madame Baldimer is very beautiful; I have been attentive to her, as to many others."

"Yes," rejoined Tobie, sucking the gold head of his cane; "that is our business, to pay court to the ladies. Ah! if I should write my adventures—I had an idea of doing it once; but it would have taken too long; I hadn't the time, and the current forced me along."

"Did Madame Baldimer listen to you favorably?" asked Célestin, with a satirical glance at his friend.

"Why, not less so than to others. I have already told you that she plays the coquette with everybody and listens to no one."

"I should say that the gentleman who was with her in the *citadine* just now might think differently."

Albert frowned and tapped his boot with his switch, as he replied:

"You say that there was a man with her; I saw no one."

"Because your sight is not good, apparently."

"Ah! there's Désilly, the illustrious Désilly."

Two young men who were just passing our three idlers stopped in front of them. One of the two, who wore a broad-brimmed hat with a pointed crown, and had a beard a sapper might have envied, shook hands with Albert and Célestin in turn, saying:

"How are you, boys! we are out for a stroll. I tell you, this is something like! Who will give me a cigar? I've just finished mine."

Albert took from his pocket a dainty cigar case of Italian straw, and offered it to the two new-comers, each of whom took a cigar and lighted it from Albert's and Célestin's; meanwhile, Tobie whispered in Albert's ear:

"Is that the artist Désilly, who draws such amusing, clever caricatures in the paper?"

"Himself."

"Désilly," said Célestin, "you promised to show me the collection of your latest caricatures, which I want to send to Bordeaux. When would you like me to come?"

"My boys, don't ask me anything at this moment; I have a love affair on hand, and it is impossible for me to think of anything else. It may last a week, perhaps two, but it surely won't go over a month; then I shall be at your service. Adieu!"

And the artist went off with his friend.

"He has a love affair on hand," said Monsieur Tobie; "and it seems to engage his attention to the exclusion of everything else."

"Yes; but he knows the measure of his sentiments, and he never makes a mistake. He is wiser than those men who when they are attacked by a new passion imagine that it will last forever!"

"Do they think that, nowadays?" said Tobie, toying carelessly with his hair chain. "By the way, Albert hasn't finished his story of Madame Plays, whose husband is a second Acteon. I demand the rest of the story, or my money back."

"Yes, yes, the rest of the story," said Célestin.

Albert resumed his narrative, but with much less animation, and as if he were doing it solely to oblige.

"Well, messieurs; Madame Plays was at Madame Baldimer's dance. The company was slightly mixed, as you can

understand. A foreigner who has lived in Paris only a year cannot know very many people; and when she chooses to give receptions and balls, she must necessarily accept with confidence such guests as are presented to her; and her confidence is often misplaced."

"Sapristi! you are as verbose as a lawyer to-day, Albert."

"Madame Plays was superb; she is somewhat massive, as you know, but a very beautiful woman. Tall Saint-Clair, who was there, did not lose sight of her, and made eyes at her—Gad! it was enough to make one burst with laughter. Madame Plays responded, for lack of something better to do. She is a woman who must always have occupation. All of a sudden, it came into my head to rob that idiotic Saint-Clair of his conquest. I had never before given a thought to Madame Plays, although I had frequently met her in society. I had no sooner conceived the project, than I set to work. Supper had just been served; I seated myself beside the emotional Herminie—that is her name—and overwhelmed her with little attentions, interspersed with tender words. Ah! if you knew what success I had! it went so quickly that I was almost frightened. She went so far as to tell me that I had done very wrong not to declare myself sooner."

"Peste! the lady regretted the time she had lost. And Saint-Clair?"

"Oh! he was in an extraordinary state: as he was unable to obtain a seat beside his passion, he stood behind her at first; then, when he found that she didn't answer him, or pay any attention to him, he went off in a rage and sat at the other end of the table, where he began to eat and drink with a sort of frenzy; indeed, I think that he ended by getting a little tipsy, for, when we returned to the salon to dance, he was sitting in a corner, beside Monsieur Plays, and some people declared that he wept while he was talking with him. I should not be at all surprised if he had confided to him his chagrin at having failed to make him a cuckold."

"That would be charming. But the husband replied, no doubt: 'Never fear, my friend; somebody else will.'"

"I invited my conquest to dance. What a hussy she is! In the first place, she didn't spare the madeira and the champagne; but she's not like Saint-Clair, they didn't make her feel inclined to cry; on the contrary, she danced with such vigor, such enthusiasm! it was impossible to stop her. As we were all decidedly gay, somebody proposed dancing the cancan—the real thing. The superb Herminie dances it as well as a grisette from La Chaumière, and much more boldly than the lorettes at the Bal Saint-Georges. Gad! you ought to have seen us! We were truly admirable. The other women in the quadrille soon gave up their places, but Madame Plays kept on, with myself and six other men, three of whom danced as women. There was a great ring around us. Upon my word, it was a curious sight. I fancied that I heard somebody whisper that my partner had imbibed too much madeira and champagne, but I believe her to be quite capable of doing anything under heaven without the aid of liquor."

"And Madame Baldimer?"

"She didn't dance, but she laughed heartily."

"There is no need of asking you if that intrigue came to a successful end?"

"Oh! it was so easy. I assure you that conquests like that are not at all interesting, and there is so little difficulty about them that they do not even flatter our vanity. That happened a fortnight ago, and my only desire now is to rid myself of the passionate Herminie. Mon Dieu! that reminds me that I have an appointment with her for this evening. Messieurs, which of you would like to go in my place? I will turn over my conquest to him, with all my heart."

"Thanks," said Célestin, blowing a mouthful of smoke into the face of an old woman who was passing; "Madame Plays doesn't tempt me. She is too heavy for me."

"Why, I should say that you were strong enough to carry her," said Pigeonnier; "you have the build of an athlete, a gladiator. I am sure that you could easily carry a bag of flour that weighs three hundred and twenty-five."

"And because you suppose that I can carry a bag of flour, you suggest that I become Madame Plays's lover! The comparison is most flattering to the lady! What brilliant ideas that devil of a Tobie has!"

II

THE FLOWER GIRL

At that moment a young woman, with her head enveloped in a silk handkerchief, from beneath which long locks of chestnut hair emerged and hung in corkscrew curls on both sides of her face, approached the young men and accosted them with rather a brazen-faced air, thrusting divers bunches of violets almost into their faces.

"Messieurs, buy a bouquet of me, be the first to buy; you'll bring me luck."

"Aha! it's Bastringuette," said Albert, smiling at the girl, whose pale, thin face, eyes circled with black, and hoarse voice, suggested a very fatiguing profession.

"Come, buy of me; you always have some lady to give flowers to! you're a good customer!"

"You strike me at a bad time, my poor girl; my love affairs are too prosperous at this moment, I don't need to be gallant."

"I say, Bastringuette, what sort of business are you doing, that you have those black rings round your eyes, and look so fagged out?" said Monsieur Célestin, taking the flower girl by the chin. She had large brown eyes surmounted by heavy eyebrows, a large but well-shaped mouth, and would still have been a seductive person had she but a little fresher color and a less brazen expression.

"I do what I want! What odds is it to you who never buy anything of me?"

"Because I don't need to give bouquets to gain my ends, it is fair to suppose."

"Come, take away your paws! I don't wear anything false, I don't need to be felt of!—And you, my little love, won't you buy something of me? With such a face and style, you ought to have mistresses on every street, and even on the boulevards!"

This complimentary speech was addressed to Tobie Pigeonnier; he seemed to be exceedingly flattered by it, and, to manifest his satisfaction, rested his nose on each bunch of violets on her tray in turn, saying:

"She's very amusing, very clever, this flower girl! She has a pair of eyes—what pistols! how she fires 'em at you

point-blank!"

"Well, my dear boy, are you going to confine yourself to putting your nose on all the bouquets? Thanks! You may sprinkle 'em, but that's not the kind of dampness that keeps 'em fresh. Come, buy this bunch!"

"No, I have no victims to sacrifice to-day; unless you would like to be one—eh, hussy?"

"Stop that! You're too puffy for me! I don't like wax figures; I should be afraid you'd melt in my arms!"

Albert and Célestin roared with laughter at the wry face which Tobie made when he received this compliment from the flower girl. Having tried once more to place his glass in his right eye, he cast a disdainful glance at Mademoiselle Bastringuette, saying:

"You are like your flowers, my dear; when one looks at you too close, he sees that he would be cheated."

"*Dame!* that's not like you! one has only to glance at you to be satisfied that he gets nothing for his money."

Tobie's two friends laughed louder than ever; and he concluded to try to laugh with them, saying:

"The devil! we're dealing with a good fighter! I fancy I shall not have the last word with her."

"Not the last word nor anything else, my little fat man. *Dame!* all the pleasure we poor girls have is with our tongue! We must make the most of it, for it don't cost anything."

"Take care! The tongue is the best and the worst part of us. Æsop said that."

"I don't know the gentleman; but mine seems to be a good one, for it don't wear out at all. It ain't like your waistcoat; see, monsieur, it's giving out under the arms!"

And Mademoiselle Bastringuette, whose eyes detected the most carefully hidden secrets of a man's toilet, pointed out to Tobie's friends a place in his silk waistcoat, which, although it was almost hidden by his coat, she had discovered. There was a rent large enough to show the sleeve of his shirt, which was of a coarse and yellow linen vastly different from that of the front.

The stout young man made haste to button his coat.

"I must have torn it when I put it on," he said. "My tailor always makes the armholes too small! and then, *crac!* an accident."

"Oh! no, monsieur; that wasn't an accident! it's pretty well worn out on that side. See, it's like my dress! There's some attic windows for you!"

As she spoke, Mademoiselle Bastringuette lifted her arms and showed two great holes in her dress, under her armpits.

"I hope you'll believe that I've got another one to put on, though," she continued, with a smile. "Bah! what do I care! it won't hinder my selling my violets! And even if someone does see my skin! There's no harm done, after all. I haven't got a turkey's skin, like lots of women that have fine dresses and a dirty lining."

"She's very original; indeed, she's quite—original, is this girl," said Tobie, who was very glad that she had ceased to talk about his waistcoat; "she amuses me mightily."

"Why," said Albert, "didn't you know her before?"

"This is the first time I ever saw her."

"For a man who has lived in the Chaussée d'Antin for three years, that is very surprising. Everybody about here knows Bastringuette, the flower girl who sells violets on Boulevard des Italiens."

"I seldom buy flowers; their odor makes me ill."

"Yes, I sell violets when there are any," said Bastringuette; "but when they're all gone, I sell other things—oranges, nuts, green peas, lettuce. There's always something to sell, at all seasons, and that's why they call us *marchandes des quatre saisons*."

"It seems to me that your lover doesn't keep you very handsomely," observed Célestin, with a mocking glance at the girl.

"My lover! *dame!* I don't know how he does it, but he never has a sou; and he's little better off for clothes than I am; luckily, love don't need a new coat to keep warm."

"Are you still with Sans-Cravate?" asked Albert, taking the largest bunch of violets on the girl's tray.

"To be sure. Oh! we poor girls aren't like the great ladies; we don't change our bill of fare every day."

"What! is that ne'er-do-well of a Sans-Cravate your lover?" said Célestin. "I don't congratulate you, my poor Bastringuette! The fellow often beats you, I suppose, doesn't he?"

"Beat me!" cried the girl, contracting her heavy eyebrows. "When a man beats me, it will be because I have no teeth left to eat his eyes out, and no nails to tear his nose. You think that a man beats his mistress, just because he's a messenger! Oh, yes! that's all very nice, but it ain't our style. We ain't brutes, just because we belong to the common people. It's much more likely to be you who amuse yourself striking women! The men who wear jackets ain't always the meanest curs. There are some vile hearts under fine coats."

Monsieur Célestin de Valnoir seemed far from pleased by this apostrophe; he bit his lip, and there was something very like a threat in the look he gave the girl; but she sustained it without the slightest evidence of emotion.

Tobie, enchanted to find that she paid no further attention to him, and that somebody else was now the object of her sarcasms, twirled his cane like a drum-major, and laughed aloud, swaying from side to side as if he were on a tight-rope.

"And then," continued Bastringuette, rearranging her bouquets, "why should you say that Sans-Cravate is a ne'er-do-well? What has he ever done to be called that? because he's a bit noisy and quick-tempered and quarrelsome? because he gets a little tight, now and then? A great crime, that! That's what you call doing wrong! A man works, then enjoys himself—is that any more than fair? And all the fine things he's done—no one ever speaks of them, because he don't crow about 'em himself!"

"Oho! so Monsieur Sans-Cravate does fine things, does he?" sneered Célestin. "I've never read of any of them in the newspapers."

"The newspapers! they're great authority! Run by people who lie from New Year's Day to Saint-Sylvestre, and make up a lot of stories without any head or tail, that would drive you crazy if you believed 'em all. That's what happened to my poor mother. She didn't know any better than to stuff her head full of what a lot of papers said. She

read 'em in the concierge's room, at all the neighbors', and at the grocer's, and she used to say to us every day: 'Things are going wrong, children; the people are very discontented; there'll be an upset before long, for a body won't be able to sneeze without having to pay a tax to the government, and that will make it very expensive for people with colds in their heads. Bread will go to thirty sous a loaf, and we shan't be able to go out next winter without being murdered, and perhaps worse.'—'Well, then, mother,' I'd say, 'we'll just stay in the house, and eat potatoes if we can't get bread.'—But all that stuff turned her brain, I tell you; she died in six months; and the doctor himself said: 'Your mother died of indigestion caused by *canards* [ducks],' and the nonsense they stuff the newspapers with is canards. But here I am chattering like a magpie, and that don't sell my flowers."

"Here," said Albert, handing the girl a five-franc piece, "this is for the bunch of violets, which I will keep; for it wouldn't be fair to have made you talk all this time for nothing."

"Ah! thanks, my little darling! you're a nice boy, you are; that makes up for some of those who ain't!"

And Bastringuette went her way along the boulevard, crying:

"Buy flowers, messieurs and mesdames! buy some pretty violets! The spring has come; buy flowers for your ladies!"

"She's no fool," said Albert, looking after her as she walked away; "she is very amusing, and quick at repartee."

"That is to say," rejoined Célestin, "she is one of those people who say whatever comes into their head; and as there may happen to be an occasional witty remark in the midst of a mass of nonsense, it's the fashion to say that such people are very bright. That girl is exceedingly impertinent, and that's the extent of her wit, in my opinion."

"Messieurs," said Albert, "our meeting with Bastringuette interrupted our conversation, which was very interesting, however. We were speaking of Madame Plays, and I proposed to turn over to one of you my appointment for this evening. Are there no takers?"

"Do you make that proposition seriously?" said young Tobie Pigeonnier, patting the gold head of his cane.

"Most seriously, I assure you! I have never been in love with Madame Plays; I paid court to her, purely as a joke, to play a trick on Saint-Clair; but my one desire now is to break with my fair conquest."

"Really, Madame Plays is very attractive!" rejoined Monsieur Tobie, throwing away the end of his cigar; "she's a very fine woman, her face is extremely pretty; and then, you see, I have a penchant for plump women."

"In that case, you would be served to your taste," said Célestin.

"But to take your place at a rendezvous; how the devil can that be arranged?"

"Nothing easier," said Albert. "I am to be at the flower market on Boulevard de la Madeleine—near the church, you know—at half-past eight this evening."

"I know the place very well; I often walk there on market days. Some very distinguished women come there—women in carriages; I have noticed that the flowers were only a pretext, and that they came there for other things than orange blossoms and camellias."

"Very good; Madame Plays will be there. I will give you a little note for her, in which I will say that some unexpected business may detain me a little while, but that I send her one of my friends, whose discretion is unquestionable, and who will escort her to a place where I will join her as soon as I possibly can. With that note, you will go to the rendezvous in my place, you will hand the note to Madame Plays, and take her where you choose, pretending that it is a place selected by me, and that you are to stay with her, for company, until I come. I fail to appear, the lady is furious with me, and you console her. Faith! it seems to me that that will go of itself."

"It's an intrigue all cut and dried for you," said Célestin.

Tobie shook his head; the scheme evidently pleased him, but he seemed to feel that it required reflection.

"Do you think Madame Plays will accept my escort?" he asked; "won't she be angry when she sees that you have let me into the secret of your intrigue with her?"

"Don't be alarmed, my dear Tobie; I know the person I am sending you to; of course, I wouldn't do this with all women; but I know Madame Plays; she's a jade who snaps her fingers at what people may say, and is proud of her conquests. The fair Herminie is almost a man in petticoats."

"The devil! I hope that that is true only with respect to her moral qualities."

"Never fear; physically, she is superbly feminine. Her husband pays no sort of heed to what she does. Indeed, she leads him by the nose. If she should tell him that the obelisk of Luxor had made her a mother, he would believe it, or would pretend to; if she takes a fancy to you, the affair is done."

"Oh! in that case, I have some chance of success. I accept; faith! yes, I accept; I will try the experiment; he who sows, reaps. Sapristi! no one can deny that we are sad rakes; I have several mistresses already, but the fair Plays tempts me."

"I give you my word that she is a very agreeable woman—pretty face, well built, solid as a rock! in short, everything that can tempt an amateur. If I had nothing else in my head just now, I would not have left her so quickly. —So it's a bargain. Now, I must give you the note you are to hand her. It is exactly like giving a letter of recommendation."

Little Tobie was enchanted; he laughed aloud, he walked with a swagger, and twirled his cane; in the extravagance of his delight, he seemed disposed to leap and turn somersaults on the boulevard; so that Célestin said to him:

"I say, young Pigeonnier, just calm down a bit; anyone would think, to see your insane joy, that you had never had a love affair."

"Oho! I have no lack of them, I assure you; I have my choice every day; but this will be such an amusing experience! Ha! ha! ha! to take another man's place! ha! ha! it is delicious!"

"There is nothing commoner than that; it's an old opéra-comique idea. Now, messieurs, I propose that we dine together. We have begun the day well, we must finish it as well. We will dine at the Maison-Dorée. Mouillot and Balivan will dine with us; they are two good fellows, as you know, and we shall find them at the Passage des Panoramas at half-past five; I have an appointment with them. Tobie does not meet his charmer until eight; so that he will have plenty of time to dine. Then we will have a little game of bouillotte at the restaurant, and Tobie will come back and tell us the result of his adventure."

"Good! I agree!" cried Albert; "especially as I have had hard luck lately at bouillotte. That Mouillot is a lucky devil; he always wins, and he owes me a terrible revenge.—Well, Tobie, doesn't the plan suit you? You often say: 'We must dine together, and have a little spree;' but when we try to fix a day, you never can. Here is a good chance, it seems to me. My dear fellow, if you want to succeed with Madame Plays, I warn you that you must act a little cavalierly."

Tobie seemed to hesitate for a moment, but at last he struck the ground with his cane and cried:

"Well, I accept! yes, let us dine together, and make the day complete! feasting! cards! women! that's my idea of life! Ah! what libertines we are!"

"Now, messieurs," said Albert, "we will step into the café on Passage de l'Opéra, and I will write the note for Madame Plays; and I have another letter to write and send off before dinner."

"And so have I," said Célestin.

"And I," said Tobie; "I have an important errand to be done."

"Let us go, then."

The three young men entered the café at the corner of the boulevard and the Passage de l'Opéra, and ordered writing materials, together with three glasses of madeira. Each of the three wrote very busily. Albert let his pen run over the paper, but it seemed not to travel fast enough to express the thoughts which thronged the mind of him who guided it. Monsieur Célestin de Valnoir wrote more slowly, but, from the expression of his face, it was evident that he was carefully considering his words. As for Tobie Pigeonnier, he wrote the least rapidly of the three, either because his ideas did not come readily, or because his subject was a difficult one to treat; he scratched his forehead, looked up at the ceiling, wrote two words, stopped, ran his hand through his hair, and began again; his letter caused him much toil, but he did not confine himself to a single one; after sealing the first, he at once began another. Albert and Célestin, who had finished theirs long before, said to him:

"Well, Pigeonnier, how many letters are you writing? will this be a long one?"

"One moment, messieurs; let me finish this one, I beg; it is very important. You see, in order to dine with you, I have to miss two most seductive appointments. The poor little women! they will be in despair, but, at all events, I shall not keep them waiting for me in the cold. Just a word of love, and I shall have finished."

"Parbleu! that's not hard to find. Put *yours for life*, and let it go at that."

"That is too common; I am going to write something different."

Monsieur Tobie finished his correspondence at last. Albert paid the waiter, and the three young men rose and left the café.

"The next thing is to send my letters," said Tobie.

"Oh! I have my regular messenger—Sans-Cravate," said Albert; "he is always at the corner of Rue du Helder, close by; let us go there."

"For my part," said Célestin, "I employ his comrade, Jean Ficelle; he's a very intelligent fellow. There's a third one, whose name is Paul, I think, who stands with them; he will do Tobie's errand."

"All right, messieurs," said Pigeonnier. "Let us go and find our messengers. By the way—how about my letter for the fair Herminie?"

"Faith! I forgot to write it; but we have time enough, I'll write it at the restaurant; we must hurry, it's five o'clock now."

III

THE MESSENGERS

On Rue du Helder, near the boulevard, in front of a handsome house, three street messengers had their regular stand.

On the afternoon of which we are writing, all three were at their post. One lay at full length on his *crochets*, which he had placed on the ground, horizontally, in such wise as to form a sort of cot-bed; it was rather narrow, but its occupant had become so accustomed to it that he had no difficulty in maintaining his place, and never fell over the side.

Another was sitting on a stone bench against the house. He was smoking a pipe, and had in his hands a disgustingly greasy and dirty pack of cards, with which he was apparently practising the false cut and divers other tricks of that sort.

The third messenger was on his feet, leaning against the wall, with his eyes fixed on the topmost floor of a high building almost opposite.

The man lying on the *crochets* seemed to be in the prime of life; he was of medium height, but the breadth of his shoulders and the size of the muscles in his sinewy limbs pointed him out as a man with whom it would be dangerous to quarrel. His face was frank and good-humored; his small, light blue eyes expressed recklessness and merriment; his nose was rather large, and sometimes red at the end; his full lips denoted a kindly and obliging disposition; and his abundant light hair, which blew about at the pleasure of the wind, surmounted a high forehead, wherein the brain must have had ample room to exercise its faculties.

He was dressed like most messengers,—a jacket and loose trousers; but he wore no neckerchief; his shirt, fastened by a button, disclosed a neck much whiter than one would have supposed from the color of his hands and face. The invariable habit of wearing nothing about his neck at any season of the year, even when the cold was most severe, was responsible for the sobriquet of *Sans-Cravate*, which had come to be the only name by which the messenger was known to the persons who employed him, and even to most of his friends.

The person seated on the stone bench, who seemed intent upon his cards, was short, and heavily pock-marked; his hair was dark brown and very thick, and hung low over a narrow forehead; the man's face indicated intelligence and cunning, and the evil expression of his gray eyes seemed to forbid the judgment we are accustomed to form of a person with a low forehead. A small nose, much too retroussé, tightly closed lips, and a protruding chin, made of

Monsieur Jean Ficelle a decidedly ugly individual, and one who would by no means inspire the confidence which we like to feel in a messenger, unless his unusual mobility of feature were successful in deceiving those who tried to read his thoughts.

The third messenger, who stood against the wall, with his eyes constantly fixed on the attics of the opposite house, was a tall, slender young man of graceful figure; although he also wore loose trousers and a jacket, there was in his bearing an indefinable something, which, while perhaps it could not be called refinement, distinguished it from the vulgar slouchiness of his companions; and as, generally speaking, a person's face almost always fulfils the promise of his bearing, so this young man, whose features were regular and attractive, had not the usual expression of those of his calling. A high, well-shaped forehead; beautiful black hair, brushed aside with a lack of coquetry that was not without charm; brown eyes, with a tender and melancholy expression; a mouth of an ordinary type, supplied with handsome teeth; an oval face, almost always pale, but indicative of a delicate constitution rather than of ill health—such was that one of the three messengers who was known as Paul, and who, in truth, seemed but ill adapted for his trade.

"If Bastringuette hasn't sold her violets, I shall have a chance to sup in my mind's eye to-day. Business is dull, but the appetite keeps right along. *Crédié!* what a lot of rooms there are to let in my belly! and unfurnished lodgings in my stomach! How the devil am I to furnish it all?

"'Dip your bread, Marie, dip your bread,
Dip your bread in clear water!'

We'll sing that song for our supper, and we shan't be troubled with indigestion. But Bastringuette don't like that tune—nor do I, for that matter."

It was Sans-Cravate who made these reflections aloud, as he turned over on his *crochets*. After a moment's silence, he continued:

"If a fellow hadn't his cutty to comfort him when his pocket's empty, how he would curse his destiny! Bah! what's the odds! Am I going to have an attack of the dismals? am I going to join the ranks of the snivellers? Never! It don't bring in a sou to be sad; and then, as another song says, which I like much better:

"'Courage! courage!
One's friends are always by!'

"Isn't that so, boys? Well! don't all answer at once; I shouldn't know you if you did."

As he spoke, Sans-Cravate turned and looked at his comrades. He shrugged his shoulders when he saw Jean Ficelle playing with his cards, and muttered:

"The deuce! there's Jean Ficelle practising his tricks! Cards are his vocation. But damn me if I ever play piquet with you again! Infernal Ficelle![A] you are too well named."

The person addressed paid no attention, he was so engrossed by his cards. Thereupon Sans-Cravate turned to Paul and said, with a smile:

"Ah! this is a bird of another color. 'Tis love, love, love, that makes the world go round! And here's a young spark as has laid in a good stock of it. Well, Paul, even if you give yourself a stiff neck standing like that, with your head in the air, you won't succeed in opening the windows on the fourth floor, if Mademoiselle Dumanchon, the dressmaker, wants 'em to stay shut. Mademoiselle Dumanchon don't let her girls go out to walk the streets; indeed, she has plenty of work, because, they say, she knows her business. She makes dresses that give a bust to women without any, and that hide the hips of those who have too much. That's genuine talent! I am surprised that she lives on the fourth floor; to be sure, lodgings in this quarter are pretty high.—Come, Paul, tell me, haven't you seen your little girl to-day?"

The young messenger who was looking in the air turned to Sans-Cravate and replied:

"My little girl? What do you mean? I don't understand you."

"Oh, well! if we're going to play the stupid, if we have secrets from our friends—that's a different matter, and you'd better say so. Do you suppose I don't know that you're in love with one of the dressmaker's apprentices, a pretty little thing named Elina, who takes short, quick steps when she passes us, which doesn't prevent her casting a sly glance in your direction?"

"Really, Sans-Cravate! do you think she looks at me when she passes?"

"You don't see her yourself, I suppose, you fox?"

"Oh! I assure you, Sans-Cravate, that I have never said a word to that young woman which could make her suspect that I dare to think of her. I think her very pretty, that is true; and then, she is so pleasant and so courteous when she gives me an errand to do! There are so many people who treat us messengers as if we were brutes or savages!"

"When anybody takes that tone with me, I pay him back in his own coin. If people are decent, I am amiable; if they're insolent, then I'm brutal! and be damned to 'em!"

"But when one is obliged to work for his living, he must work for everybody."

"Not at all! I choose my patrons. Indeed, I very often fold my arms."

"Several times Mademoiselle Elina has taken me with her to carry boxes, and she always talks to me so kindly——Ah! it makes me forget that I am only a poor messenger."

"In short, you are in love with the girl; that's the whole story."

"Oh, no! Sans-Cravate, you're mistaken; and, anyway, what good would it do me to love that charming creature? Can a man of my class, one of the common people, presume to raise his eyes to someone who will not come down to his level?"

"Look you, a man always presumes, and does his reasoning afterward. And then, it don't seem to me that a dressmaker's apprentice is such a very great personage; and, even if you are a messenger, aren't you as good a man as another? If a duchess would have me, I'd adore her, duchess and all.—Great God! if Bastringuette should hear me,

she'd make me go without tobacco."

"Yes," said Paul, with a sigh, "a messenger's trade requires that he be an honest man. I don't blush for my calling, I assure you. And yet, there was a time when I was justified in hoping that I might occupy a higher station. A most excellent man, happening to see me, when I was ten years old, in the charitable institution where I was brought up, took a fancy to me and offered to take charge of me, as he needed someone to do errands for him. Monsieur Desroches was a respectable tradesman, and his proposition was thankfully accepted. I left that refuge of the unfortunate, where I had passed my childhood, and went to live with my new patron, in the Marais. As he was satisfied with the zeal and promptitude with which I did the errands he gave me to do, Monsieur Desroches had me taught to read and write and cipher, and employed me in his office; and every day he would give me a friendly tap on the shoulder, and say: 'You're doing well, Paul; keep on, and you'll make your way.'"

"Good! He was what I call a fine old cove! And that's how it is that you know so much, and that you're so much better set up than the rest of us. Well, why didn't you stay with that fine old fellow? I suppose you played some prank or other. *Dame!* boys will be boys!"

"Oh, no! not that at all! I would never have left good Monsieur Desroches. But after I had lived with him eight years, he and his wife treating me like their own child, my benefactor was utterly ruined by a bad failure; and the poor man died of grief, because he was compelled to ask for time to pay his notes."

"Sapristi! you ought to have kept some of that man's seed. His kind are not common in the market."

"I was eighteen years old at that time. I tried to find a place, to get into some business house; but I couldn't find anything. However, I had to earn money, for one must live; so I soon made up my mind: I bought a pair of *crochets* and started in as a messenger."

"And you did well. There is no foolish trade, as one of the old troubadours said! But how did you happen to come into this quarter instead of staying in the Marais, where you were known?"

"That was just the reason. People there had seen me every day, dressed—I might almost say, fashionably, and I didn't care to have them see me in this jacket. For, I tell you, Sans-Cravate, although you may set your mind on making the best of it, there are times when you can't help remembering the past."

"I understand your feeling, especially as I myself—— Mine is another kind; but the idea's the same. I mean that I sometimes think of my father, and my poor mother, and my sister Adeline, or Liline, as I call her—such a pretty creature she is. Ah! I might have stayed with them all, in our little village in Auvergne. My father often said to me: 'Stay with us, Étienne (they didn't call me *Sans-Cravate* there), stay with us and take care of my little farm. We have enough to live on. What are you going to do in Paris?'—But, damnation! my feet itched; I couldn't stay still. I said to my father: 'Let me go; I mean to make my fortune, and bring back a big marriage portion for Liline.'—So he let me go, and it's amazing how I pile up the money! I never have a sou! I tell you, Paul, when I think of that, I am ashamed of myself; I would give myself a good thrashing, if I could."

"Don't get excited, my dear Sans-Cravate; if your father has enough to live on, of course he doesn't count on you."

"I went to see them two years and a half ago; I knew it would please father, and I myself was glad enough to see 'em all and give 'em a kiss. I had succeeded in saving thirty francs, and I said to myself: 'With thirty francs and a good stick, I can walk home as comfortably as you please.' So I started; but Jean Ficelle started with me, and the second day my money was all gone. However, I got there after a while. I saw my sister, who was fifteen then—I am six years older than she is; she is almighty pretty, and such fine manners and language! There's a Madame de Clermont, who has taken a fancy to her and often sends for her to go and visit her. Then my poor father is left all alone in the village. But he says: 'I can't interfere with what that lady chooses to do for my child's good.'—He hoped I would stay with him, but I couldn't. When a man has had a taste of this rascally Paris, can he make up his mind to live in a village?—I said to my father: 'I am in a fair way to get rich; I must go back to Paris, or else I shall miss my opportunity; I will come back when I have money enough.'—And off I went; and when I got here, my trousers were torn so that you could see my posterior; and at the barrier, they thought I was trying to smuggle, and ran after me, singing out: 'What are you hiding there?'—'I'm hiding nothing,' says I; 'on the contrary, I'm showing too much; collect a duty on it, if you choose.'—And—— Well, you don't seem to be listening. So much for talking to a lover; it's the same as talking to yourself."

While Sans-Cravate was speaking, Paul had turned his eyes toward the dressmaker's windows again, and seemed, in fact, to have ceased to listen to his comrade. But at that moment the third messenger, who had not spoken, uttered a grunt of satisfaction and jumped up from the bench, crying:

"I have it, I have done it; oh! I have it as neat as you please!"

"What is it that you have, Jean Ficelle?" asked Sans-Cravate.

The person addressed raised his head and replied, with a disdainful glance at his comrades:

"Oh! something that I can use to take greenhorns in."

"Another new game, I'll bet; for you're a very devil of a gambler!"

"Well, why not? Games of chance are tabooed in Paris, but the sharks and blacklegs in good society find a way to play, all the same. They have secret meetings, where they can ruin themselves as nice as you please, on the pretence of having a little dance."

"How do you know?"

"Oh! I know everything. Well, then, why shouldn't the small fry, the less select society, have the same chance? But they go about it more openly. The men who run games of chance set them up in the open air, all ready to cut stakes at sight of a policeman or a detective. You don't know anything about it, you fellows; you are greenhorns. Just listen to me a minute, for your instruction."

"A nice kind of instruction we are likely to get from you, I fancy."

"But it's always a help, even if it's only to keep you from being taken in by sharpers.—Come, Sans-Cravate, come and sit down with me."

Sans-Cravate concluded to take his seat on the stone bench, beside Jean Ficelle, who continued, with the important air of one who considers himself much more intelligent than those to whom he speaks:

"Near the barriers, under the arches of the bridges, on the outer boulevards, and in the neighborhood of the wine market, are the places where you will usually find the men in blouses and plain caps who are called *croupiers*, which

means: men who run a game. In the summertime, if you should go and look under the arches of the bridge over the canal near Pont d'Austerlitz, you would see a number of games in full blast. You see groups of men—first, the *croupiers* and their confederates (for wherever there's games of chance, there's confederates); then, peasants, countrymen, and workmen with their loaves under their arms; these are the pigeons, who let themselves be plucked by the bait of a possible gain."

"What a lot this Jean Ficelle knows!—You seem to have made a study of it!"

"In my own interest, in order not to be a pigeon! They play *biribi*, *table-basse*, *jarretières*, *trois noix*, and sometimes *loto*; but the first three are played most. The game of *jarretières*, you know, consists in sticking a pin into the edge of a piece of cloth. The man who runs the game always uses the skirt of his frock-coat. If I had one on, I'd show you how it's done. He lifts up one corner, presses it very tight, and holds it out to you in such a way that to stick a pin into the edge seems to be the simplest thing in the world."

"Well?"

"But not much; because the *croupier*, when he picks up the hem of his coat, is smart enough to turn it under; so that you always stick your pin into the middle of the cloth when you think you're sticking it into the edge."

"I'd stick it into his ugly mug!—And *table-basse*, what's that?"

"You see a little table with a lot of little, numbered holes. They hand you a dicebox, with some balls; you throw the balls on the table at random, and they roll into the holes; then they add up the numbers and give you the prize corresponding to the total. The big prizes are never won; you never get the silver watch, the piece of plate, or the drinking cup, that they show to entice you; but a flint and steel, or a save-all—that's all your twenty sous ever wins."

"Very pretty, indeed! a choice lot they must be! But what did you mean just now when you sung out: 'I've got it! I know how it's done!'"

"Oh! that's the most popular of all the games—*biribi*."

"*Biribi?*"

"I'll show you that; you play it with just three cards, see; and one of 'em's *biribi*. Look, the ace of hearts! Now, to win, all you have to do is guess where *biribi* is. But the *croupier's* skill consists in always showing you the under card, and that is always *biribi*; then he moves his cards this way and that, and you think you can follow it with your eyes. Like this: now, follow the ace of hearts, follow it carefully; do you know which of the three it is now?"

Sans-Cravate, who had kept his eyes on the cards, placed his hand on one of them, saying:

"This is the ace of hearts."

"How much do you bet?"

"A glass of beer."

"Done!"

Jean Ficelle turned the card and showed his wondering comrade that it was not *biribi*.

Sans-Cravate was stupefied. Jean Ficelle repeated the trick twice, and won two more glasses of beer.

"Are you a sorcerer?" cried the other.

"Oh, no! But you don't see that, when I move the cards about, I always throw the one that's on top, although I make believe to throw the one on the bottom. That's how they gull the peasant, who thinks he hasn't taken his eyes off *biribi*. But if by any chance the pigeon guesses right, just when he's going to put his hand on the card which is really *biribi*, a confederate, who is always on hand, says to him: 'Not that one, my man; the other one, to the left. I am sure of it, and, to prove it, I'll bet a hundred sous.' The peasant is persuaded by the confederate's confidence, he takes up the card on which the other has bet five francs, and he is *smoked*.—I say there, you man of sighs, come and play *biribi* with us a while."

Paul glanced at the cards and shook his head.

"I don't care for card playing," he said.

"We must kill time, especially when we've nothing to do. Come and play for a glass of beer—that won't ruin you."

"I don't want to play."

"Humph! what a poor cuss that fellow is!" said Jean Ficelle, turning back to Sans-Cravate. "He'll never spend a sou with his friends. I don't call that being a man, myself."

"Paul is more sensible, wiser, than we are; he saves his money and he does well."

"Saves his money—hum! I don't feel so sure what he does with his money; he gets mighty little good out of it. He's pale as an egg, and his jacket's all patched at the elbows. *Dame!* perhaps he spends it all to seduce his girl. Women aren't to be caught with nothing but sighs. They like to have money spent on 'em—dressmakers, especially. They say that they have to have dinners and theatre tickets and jewelry. Little Elina probably spends it all for him. She has the look of a sly little coquette——"

On hearing Elina's name, Paul ran up to Jean Ficelle, seized his left arm, and shook it roughly.

"What's that you say?" he exclaimed. "You dare to talk about Mademoiselle Elina! If I am not mistaken, you had the effrontery to make remarks about that young lady! Be careful, Jean! I am not ill-tempered; but if you should be unlucky enough to insult her, why, I would stamp on you as I do on these cards!"

"Let alone of me, I say! Will you let alone of me? Stupid fool—to walk on my cards!"

"A terrible calamity! A fine business for a messenger, isn't it? to learn thieves' and blacklegs' tricks, to study ways of cheating other people! Instead of handling cards so skilfully, you would do much better to mend your *crochets* and your saw. But you prefer to play cards!"

"Ah, ça! isn't it about time for the fellow to stop? What airs he puts on! and why, I should like to know! A miserable foundling, with no father nor mother—and he undertakes to preach to other people! Go and hunt up your parents—that would be a better business for you."

Paul lowered his eyes at the word *foundling*, and his face assumed an expression of profound sadness; he released his hold on Jean's arm, and, stepping back to the wall, stood leaning against it without speaking a word.

But Sans-Cravate, who knew that nothing wounded Paul so deeply as to be reminded that he had been abandoned by his parents, and who saw the sorrowful expression of his face, rose abruptly and shook his clenched fist under

Jean Ficelle's nose, saying:

"You're a miserable cur! and if your nose wasn't so turned-up already that I can see your brain, I'd turn it up a little more for you. You know that the poor fellow is unhappy because he knows nothing about his family; but it isn't any crime, and it's better to have no family at all than to come of low-lived stock! But it hurts him when anyone speaks of it; and you remind him of it on purpose! It was a mean, dirty trick! I have a good mind to thrash you. Come, try a little bout with me; I'll give you a good dust bath, to cool you off."

Sans-Cravate had already seized Jean about the waist; but Paul hastened to intervene, and forced Sans-Cravate to release his hold.

"I don't want you to fight my battles," he said. "When I choose to teach Jean a lesson, I can do it myself all right. A man is always strong when he is not afraid. When he called me a foundling, he said no more than the truth, and I have no right to thrash him for that. But let him beware how he insults Mademoiselle Elina, or makes such remarks as he made just now about dressmakers—for then he would have a chance to see what my arm weighs."

Jean Ficelle eyed Paul contemptuously, and muttered, with a shrug:

"Yes, he's about as strong as a flea; he can't carry a commode upstairs!"

But a glance from Sans-Cravate made him change his tone on the instant, and he added, with an affectation of good humor:

"But why does he throw my cards on the ground? if it amuses me to play *biribi*, ain't I at liberty to do it? *Vive la charte!* When all's said and done, Sans-Cravate, you owe me three glasses of beer; are you going to pay them?"

"With what, I wonder? I wouldn't ask anything better than to rinse my gullet, for I'm dried up with thirst; but I haven't a *monaco*!"

Thereupon Jean Ficelle went up to Sans-Cravate, and whispered in his ear, with a glance at Paul:

"Borrow a little tin of him; you're a friend of his, and friends always lend to each other. If I had any, it would be at your service; but I'm as strapped as you are."

"Paul has no more than the rest of us," replied Sans-Cravate, in an undertone; "I saw him breakfasting this morning on an old dry crust and a glass of cocoa! When a man eats a meal like that, it means that he ain't lined with gold."

"But what does he do with his money, then? for he earns more than we do; his luck is indecent. As all the women of the quarter think he's good-looking, they always choose him to do their errands; the windfalls pass us by, and are all for him. So he must have money, for he never spends any; he always refuses to play cards, or drink, or go to the wine shop. I tell you again, he's a mean cuss, who saves up his money, like the miser he is!"

"There you go again! Jean Ficelle, you're spoiling for a thrashing. Paul is my friend, and I like him; let him do what he pleases with his money, it's none of our business. One thing I'm sure of is that he's a fine fellow, for I saw him one evening run after a gentleman and give him back a twenty-franc piece he'd given him by mistake for twenty sous. I'm not sure you'd do as much, Biribi."

"Bah! who knows! You're stuck on that greenhorn; and yet, if I chose to be mean, I could tell you some things about him that would open your eyes; but you see things crooked——"

"What are you talking about? More nonsense, I'll bet."

Jean Ficelle pretended to hesitate and to reflect as to whether he should say anything more, but at that moment three young men turned into Rue du Helder from the boulevard and walked toward the messengers.

"Ah! here come customers!" cried Sans-Cravate; "I shall have some supper to-night!"

IV

DIVERS COMMISSIONS

Albert, Célestin, and Tobie walked toward the messengers, while Sans-Cravate went forward to meet Albert, who employed him regularly and always paid him handsomely; so that the young Auvergnat felt a strong liking for the young man, whose free and easy manners and fascinating air pleased him mightily.

"There's a young man who knows what's what, who amuses himself and enjoys life!" he would exclaim. "*Crédié!* if I had his figure and his money, that's the kind of a life I'd like to lead! Three or four mistresses at once! that must be rather pleasant and amusing! a fellow would have no time to be bored."

So it was that Sans-Cravate listened with a smile on his lips and with interest and attention to what Albert said after leading him aside:

"Take this letter and carry it to Madame Baldimer, Rue Neuve-Vivienne; the address is on the envelope. I think that she is not at home; but if by any chance she is, you will ask for an answer; if not, go there again, about eight o'clock, to get the answer; and bring it to me at the Maison-Dorée restaurant, where I shall be at that time."

"Very good, monsieur. By the way, can I go up to the lady's apartment?"

"Yes, yes. You need take no precautions; there's no father, or husband, or aunt. And, Sans-Cravate, go to my house also, on Rue Caumartin, and ask the concierge if there are any letters for me; if there are, he'll give them to you, for he knows you; and you will bring them to me at the same place."

"Very good, monsieur; I understand."

Albert placed a five-franc piece in Sans-Cravate's hand, and left him.

Meanwhile, Célestin de Valnoir had taken Jean Ficelle, who was his favorite messenger, aside and handed him a letter, saying in a very low tone, after looking about to make sure that nobody could hear:

"Carry this note to Madame Baldimer—the lady to whose house I have sent you several times."

"Yes, monsieur, I know; I will go upstairs, as usual, and ask for Mamzelle Rosa, the lady's-maid, saying that I come from you."

"Exactly. And if Madame Baldimer is not at home, Rosa will tell you where you can find her; go there, and bring

me the lady's answer at the Maison-Dorée restaurant, where I shall dine. I will speak to the waiter, and he will let me know when you arrive."

"Very good, monsieur."

"By the way, it is possible that the gentleman who has just employed your comrade Sans-Cravate may be sending him also to Madame Baldimer's. As he must not know that I am sending you there, be prudent; let Sans-Cravate go first, and don't go in until he has come out."

"Never fear; I didn't get the sobriquet of Ficelle for nothing. He shall not know where I am going."

"Very well."

Célestin turned his back on the messenger, and joined Albert, who had returned to the boulevard.

Tobie Pigeonnier, meanwhile, had led Paul under a porte cochère, and there, after making sure that he was so far away from his two friends that they could not hear him, he said to the messenger:

"My boy, are you clever, faithful, and intelligent?"

Paul gazed in surprise at the little fellow who asked him the question with an air of mystery, as if he were about to admit him to the secret of a conspiracy.

"As to being faithful, monsieur," he replied, "it is my duty; I should be doubly guilty in my calling, if I betrayed the confidence of those who are good enough to employ me. At all events, monsieur, I am well known in the quarter, and you can inquire about me. As to my cleverness and intelligence, I have, as a general rule, had no difficulty in carrying out my instructions."

"Good, very good. I see that you are not too dull; you are the man for me, for I detest dull-witted people. Listen to me with the closest attention; stay—let us go a little farther; I have reasons for not wanting those gentlemen to hear what I have to say to you. There—let us stop in this corner. You will go—— By the way, what is your name?"

"Paul, monsieur."

"Paul; very good. You will go to the Temple, Paul, to the Temple Market—you know—where they sell clothing and linen for both sexes, and footwear too."

"I know the place, monsieur."

"You will go into the market, near the rotunda, where the stalls are,—they are called *ayons*,—to the part occupied by the milliners."

"Does monsieur mean the dealers in old hats?"

"Old hats!—why, they sell new ones too, and wreaths of flowers, almost new, and ladies' caps—in fact, all the pretty gewgaws that women always dote on. You will ask for Madame Abraham—she is well known—she is one of the largest dealers in the place."

"Madame Abraham; very well, monsieur."

"You will hand her this letter. Do you know how to read?"

Paul could not restrain a faint smile as he replied:

"Oh! yes, monsieur; very well."

"So much the better; I am very glad, because, in that case, you won't make any blunder."

But as he was not fully convinced that the messenger had told him the truth, Monsieur Tobie held up the letter he was about to give him, and said:

"What does that say?"

"*To Madame Agar Abraham, wholesale milliner, Marché du Temple.*"

"That's right, that's quite right; you read perfectly. You will give this letter, then, to Madame Abraham, and she will hand you some money for me; I have funds invested in her business. You will take the money, and—and——"

At that point, Tobie, seeing that a gentleman and lady were passing, raised his voice almost to a shout, and threw his head back and his chest forward:

"You will bring it to me at the Maison-Dorée, where I dine to-night. I dine at the Maison-Dorée; it is my favorite restaurant. You will ask the waiter for Monsieur Tobie Pigeonnier. I am very well known at the Maison-Dorée."

"I understand, monsieur."

The people who were passing being out of earshot, the stout youth continued in an undertone:

"One moment, Paul; that is not all. If by any chance—for we must provide for everything—if Madame Abraham should not give you any money for me—merchants are sometimes a little short—if, I say, Madame Abraham should give you nothing for me, then, and only then, you will go to the house where I live, on Rue de la Ferme-des-Mathurins—the address is on this other letter, and you know how to read. You will go there and give this letter to my concierge, Madame Pluchonneau,—the name is on the envelope,—and tell her you will wait for an answer. You may be obliged to wait some time, for I have told my concierge to do an errand for me. But you will wait in her lodge, she has a very fine lodge. Then my concierge, when she returns, will hand you some money, which you will bring to the Maison-Dorée."

"Very good, monsieur."

"You are sure that you understand, messenger? If you receive money from Madame Abraham, who will doubtless hand you with it a memorandum of the amount, then it will not be necessary to go to my house, and you will bring back the letter for Madame Pluchonneau. But if you get nothing at the Temple, then go to Rue de la Ferme-des-Mathurins."

"I understand perfectly, monsieur."

"Off with you, young Paul! You can send word to me by the waiter; don't give me my answer before those other gentlemen. Secrecy, above all things!"

"Very good, monsieur."

"Go! I will give you a handsome *pourboire.*"

And Tobie Pigeonnier returned to the boulevard and joined his friends, who shouted to him when he came in sight:

"Come on! What a long while it takes you to send a message to your charmers!"

"Here I am, messieurs. Oh! a man has to show some consideration. Let us be fickle, if you will, but we must not forget to be gallant; that is my nature."

While the young men walked away, the messengers came together again. Sans-Cravate held up the five-franc piece he had received, crying:

"Paid in advance! a cart-wheel! what do you think of that! There's a generous young man for you! I would fight for him."

"But you probably have got to go a long way for him," said Jean Ficelle, with affected indifference.

"Oh, no! nothing at all. First to Rue Neuve-Vivienne—only two steps; then to his house on Rue Caumartin, and from there to the Maison-Dorée. It's all right in the quarter."

Jean Ficelle's eyes twinkled when he learned that Sans-Cravate was going to Rue Neuve-Vivienne, and he made haste to say:

"I have got to go much farther than that—Faubourg Saint-Honoré—and I ain't paid in advance."

"And I, too," said Paul, placing his *crochets* behind a porte cochère, "have got a long way to go, and I'm afraid it will take a long while."

"Where are you going?" asked Jean Ficelle.

"The gentleman who employed me told me not to talk; so it doesn't seem to me that I ought to tell where he sends me."

"Bah! you sneak!" muttered Jean, with a shrug.

"Well, my friends," said Sans-Cravate, as he donned his fur cap, "the day ends well. I don't know whether you'll be paid as generously as me; but, at all events, I'll treat; let's have supper together to-night at my regular little wine shop on Rue Saint-Lazare. Does that hit you?"

"It does me," replied Jean Ficelle; "we'll meet there to-night, then; it's agreed."

"I can't," said Paul; "I have business this evening; I must go to see a certain person, a long way from here, and——"

"Nonsense, Paul! I won't listen to such reasons as that; you can attend to your business to-morrow. I want you to have supper with us. I've invited you two or three times, and you always refuse. *Crédié!* if you don't come to-night, I shall think you're proud, and afraid of lowering yourself by sitting at the same table with me."

"Proud! proud of what, for God's sake?" muttered Jean, in so low a tone that Paul could not hear him. The latter hesitated a moment before replying:

"Oh! Sans-Cravate, you surely can't think that I am proud. Am I not a messenger, like you?"

"Very well, then; you'll come, that's settled. I must be off and do my errands. By the way, friends, if one of you sees Bastringuette before I do, just tell her where we sup. If we should feast without her, I should be a dead man to-morrow."

As he spoke, Sans-Cravate started off along the boulevard. Jean Ficelle waited a short time, then took the same direction, muttering:

"To be afraid that a woman will scold you, and not dare to treat yourself without her! that must be pleasant, on my word! And he calls himself a man! I call him a milksop. The real men aren't those who strike the hardest—but the sly dogs who know how to make dupes."

Monsieur Jean Ficelle had left the stand and Paul was about to follow his example, after a parting glance at the house in which the dressmaker lived, when a young woman with fair hair, blue eyes, and smiling red lips came out through the porte cochère, and, having nimbly crossed the gutter, walked toward the young messenger. She wore a coarse linen dress, and a black apron fastened about her waist by a silk cord; on her head was a very simple cap, unadorned with flowers or ribbons; but the simplicity of her costume did not prevent people from noticing her and, in many cases, from turning to glance after her; for her face was very pleasant to look upon, her figure perfectly proportioned, her carriage graceful, her gait light and springy; in a word, there was in her whole aspect that indefinable something which at once attracts and captivates the eye: a fortunate gift of nature, which carries with it all other gifts in the case of the women who possess it. I say *women*, because, in general, the *something* in question applies to women rather than to men. It is that indefinable something which compels us to submit to the empire of two eyes which do not need to be very large or very beautiful to lead us captive; it is enough if they have that *something.* O ye who possess it, envy not the regular beauties, the Greek or Roman profiles, the correct and faultlessly proportioned features, of your rivals! If you are not of those women whom men admire, you are of those whom they desire, and that is much better.

When he saw the girl coming toward him, Paul stood as if rooted to the spot; he could not go away. He quickly removed his cap, and at the same time lowered his eyes with a timid air, as if he dared not presume to salute the young dressmaker, but desired to manifest his respect for her.

But Elina stopped in front of him and said, with an amiable smile:

"Good-evening, Monsieur Paul! I am very glad to find you."

"Can I be of service to you in any way, mademoiselle? Pray speak; I am at your disposition, day and night, whenever you choose. I am so happy when you are good enough to employ me!"

As he spoke, Paul raised his eyes until they rested on the girl's face, who seemed not at all displeased; but in an instant, as if he repented of his temerity, he hung his head and sighed.

"You are always so obliging, Monsieur Paul, that I thought of you for—listen, it is this: I live with my aunt, Madame Vardeine, who has taken care of me since my parents died; she says that I owe her a great deal of money, although my father left me a little something—fifteen thousand francs, I believe; that isn't a fortune, but still it's enough to live on, and one can be very comfortable with that, if one has a trade too; isn't that so?"

"Yes, mademoiselle; with orderly habits and hard work, one may become rich with that amount of money."

"Do you really think so? It must be very nice to be rich! Well, as I was saying, my aunt is forever telling me that she does everything for me, that I cost her a great deal, that I spend much more than my money brings in—for she is my guardian. But, oh! Monsieur Paul, if you knew what she gives me for my breakfast and dinner, you would say that it was none too much! Luckily, I'm not a glutton, whatever she may say. Ten sous for breakfast and dinner—can one be a glutton with that?"

"No, indeed, mademoiselle. But it is very wrong of your aunt to give you so little for your food. Your money must certainly bring in seven hundred francs a year—which would give you about thirty-nine sous a day to spend. So if she gives you only ten sous for your board, she keeps twenty-nine for your lodging."

"Oh! I think you must be mistaken, Monsieur Paul; my aunt says that my money brings in barely twenty sous a day,—that's a long way from thirty-nine,—and that she has to use some of her own to clothe me."

"I am not mistaken, mademoiselle. I know how to reckon, for I haven't always been a messenger. For eight years, I was employed in a merchant's office, and I worked over figures and accounts all day."

"Really, Monsieur Paul? Ah! I thought—— You don't look like a messenger—like the others. You talk well, and you don't swear. Were you obliged to take up this business?"

"Yes, mademoiselle; my benefactor died, and I had not a sou. As I couldn't find a place, I thought it was better to be a messenger than to idle away my time and live, as so many do, at others' expense."

"You are quite right. After all, there is nothing despicable in being a messenger; you're not a servant, as the girls in our workroom are so fond of calling you. Oh! they say that to make me furious, because I always stand up for you."

"Stand up for me? You say that you sometimes talk about me in your workroom?"

Mademoiselle Elina blushed as she replied:

"Oh!—that is to say—we talk about messengers in general—and as we have employed you several times—— But I stand chattering here, when I came down to buy something at the linen draper's, and I haven't told you yet what I wanted to ask you. My aunt says that I talk too much. As far as that goes, perhaps she is right; it's such fun to talk—not with everybody, of course, but with people who—listen to you—and—that is to say—— Mon Dieu! it seems to me that I am getting all mixed up, and don't know what I am saying."

Paul ventured to glance at the pretty dressmaker once more. Her face wore such a comical expression, as she twisted a corner of her apron in her hands, that the young man smiled involuntarily, and his smile was reflected on Elina's lips; for between two persons who are sympathetic a smile is like a train of powder: the spark is hardly applied at one end before it reaches the other.

"I wanted to ask you, Monsieur Paul, if you could come and help me move to-morrow morning?"

"Yes, mademoiselle; with great pleasure."

"You must come very early, so that it can be all done before it is time for me to go to my work."

"I will come as early as you wish, mademoiselle. Where are you going to move?"

"Oh! in the same house. We live on Rue Taitbout, you know—for you have sometimes been kind enough to carry my bundles home for me, because, you said, they were too heavy for a young girl."

"It was a very great pleasure to me, mademoiselle. I am so happy when you deign to permit me—when I can—when I have the honor——"

Paul stopped, for he found that he too was getting confused; but Elina did not seem surprised; on the contrary, was it not natural that he should have the same experience that she had had a moment before? should not the same causes always produce the same effects?

"You see, Monsieur Paul, my aunt has found another apartment on the same floor, the fourth, which isn't so dear, and where she says we shall be quite as comfortable. She herself certainly will be, for she has a room as large as her other one, with a splendid fireplace. But it isn't the same with me; where we are now, I have a little room opening on the little hallway. It's pretty small; just big enough for my bed, a commode that was my mother's, two chairs, and a little table covered with red leather, which father used for a desk. Those things are all that I have that belonged to my parents, and I think a great deal of them. Well! where we're going to-morrow, there's nothing for me but a little box of a place, which was once part of a dark room used as a hall; and I never shall be able to get my commode and table into it. But my aunt declares that I shall be better off, that I shall be warmer, and that it's very healthy to sleep in a loft."

"Your aunt is very blameworthy, mademoiselle, to make you sleep in a loft, for it is very unhealthy, I say. You have the right to demand a room for yourself. She must be very miserly. If you like, I will speak to her, and make her understand that she mustn't treat you so cruelly, that you are not a burden to her, far from it, but——"

"Oh! no, no, Monsieur Paul; if my aunt knew that I had dared to complain of her, she would be angry and would scold me. No, you mustn't say anything to her. After all, what difference does it make if I haven't a room of my own? I am at home so little; I go away at eight in the morning to my work, and I don't leave the workroom till nine at night, sometimes later, when there's a press of work. So you see I am hardly ever in my room except to sleep, and at my age one can sleep soundly anywhere. And then, my aunt isn't really unkind, only she always thinks of herself first. Oh! she never thinks of depriving herself of anything, either for her breakfast or her dinner; but she says that a young girl ought to be economical and abstemious; she is quite right, too, and I assure you that with my ten sous I have all I need to eat. Indeed, there are some days when I don't spend it all; I keep a little for the next day, and then I have a feast. Mon Dieu! how I rattle on! My mistress will tell me I have been gone too long. It is a question of helping me to move, Monsieur Paul. As we are going to stay on the same floor, my aunt told me to get the concierge to help me, as he and I could move everything. But he is very old, and I'm afraid he isn't strong enough to move the things with me; so, if you can come——"

"Certainly, mademoiselle; I will move everything, never fear; there will be no need for you to tire yourself."

"Oh! I expect to help you. Well, then, Monsieur Paul, until to-morrow morning! come early, won't you?"

"Before daybreak, if you wish, mademoiselle."

"Oh, no! it is light before five o'clock now; if you can come at half-past five or quarter to six, that will be quite early enough."

"Very well, mademoiselle; I will be prompt."

"By the way, you must knock softly, so as not to wake my aunt; for she gets up very late. We can move everything except her bed."

"We won't make any noise, mademoiselle."

"Adieu, Monsieur Paul! Oh, dear! now I don't know what I was going to buy at the linen draper's; in talking with you, I have entirely forgotten."

"Thread, perhaps—or ribbon—or needles?"

"No, no. Oh! what a head I have! Never mind; I'll go back and say they hadn't any. Then madame will say that it's taken me a long time to find that out."

"Don't you want me to go up to Madame Dumanchon's, mademoiselle? I'll tell her that you have forgotten what color you were to buy, or how much."

"Oh, no! for then they would know that I have been talking to you; and the girls are always making fun of me now, because——"

"Because you are kind enough to employ me in preference to others?"

"Yes; and then, I—I said that you were above your calling. And I was right too, as you were in a merchant's employ for a long while; but still, they are so unkind! Well, it can't be helped; I must go back. I will admit that I have forgotten what I came out for, and I shall be scolded; but that's a small matter."

The girl turned and walked dolefully back toward the house opposite, and was just passing through the door, when she suddenly jumped for joy and ran back across the street, saying to Paul as she passed him:

"Whalebones, small, thin whalebones, to put in the back of a dress, I remember now. Adieu, until to-morrow!"

Paul looked after her until she turned into the boulevard; and even when he could no longer see her, he continued to gaze in that direction, as if it prolonged his happiness. But in a moment he exclaimed:

"Mon Dieu! I have forgotten that young gentleman's errands!"

He was about to start and make up for the time he had lost, when he felt a hand upon his arm. He turned and found that it was the flower girl who was detaining him.

"Let me go, Bastringuette, let me go!" he said; "I am in a great hurry; I have some errands to do."

"In a hurry, are you? I say! you didn't seem to be a minute ago, for you've been having a nice little chin with the little dressmaker. She plays a pretty game with her mouth, she does. You seem to have had lots of things to tell her, flatterer!"

"It's just because I have been talking so long that I am behindhand. By the way, Bastringuette, Sans-Cravate expects you to sup with him to-night at his wine shop on Rue Saint-Lazare. He means to treat everybody."

"Shall you be in the crowd?"

"Why—perhaps so."

"I want you to be—if not, I won't go. Monster! who knows that I love him, that I am cracked over his shape, and still he won't honor me with a look, while he talks yards at a time with little hussies of dressmakers!"

"I am not in the habit of making eyes at my friends' mistresses, Bastringuette; and Sans-Cravate is my friend."

"I don't care a hang; I haven't sworn to love the same man and no one else all my life. That would be too monotonous; it's all right for the swells to take that kind of oaths and then break 'em. I prefer to act on the square, and I wouldn't hesitate to say before Sans-Cravate that I am stuck on you."

"You are mad. Let me go, I insist!"

Paul succeeded in releasing his jacket from the flower girl's grasp, and ran off at full speed; while Bastringuette crushed one of her bunches of violets, muttering:

"That's what comes of loving such beasts! Well, it don't make any difference; the more he resists me, the more I love him. That's my nature! we can't make ourselves over."

V

CLOSER ACQUAINTANCE

Before returning to the three young men who were about to enter the Passage des Panoramas, let us say a few words with regard to them: it is always well to know the people with whom one has to do.

Albert Vermoncey, whose external aspect was so captivating, had not reached his twenty-second birthday, and yet he was leading the most wildly dissipated life that a man can lead in Paris. Spoiled prematurely by his success with the fair sex, he deemed himself in duty bound to deceive all the women with whom he had dealings, to have several mistresses at the same time, to keep ballet dancers, to seduce simple bourgeoises, to make sport of grandes dames, and to amuse himself with grisettes.

To lead such an existence, one must have wealth, or high office, or unlimited credit. Albert had no office; he had completed the course of study for the bar, and called himself an advocate. There is nothing more advantageous to a man in Paris than to have studied for the bar; he may do nothing, and still he has a profession. That is why young men of good family, as a general rule, are very desirous to study law. But, in order to cut a brilliant figure in that position, it is necessary to have wealth in addition; for it is not the fashion to retain an advocate who tries no causes, unless he becomes a business agent, in which case he assumes the pompous title of *jurisconsult*, and has a *cabinet*. Knowledge of the law is a great advantage to a business agent, because he is then in a position to handle business of all sorts. When he knows the *Code*, the *Digest*, and the *Authentiques*, he can undertake proceedings for separation, look after inheritances, adoptions, and prosecutions; and those things do not interfere with his writing vaudevilles or melodramas in his leisure moments. I should be much embarrassed to mention anything that a man cannot do when he has studied law.

But Albert had no *cabinet*, nor did he try causes; he had never been to the Palais de Justice, and he thought of nothing but enjoying himself; it is plain, therefore, that he was wealthy, or that his parents were,—which is not altogether the same thing, although young men sometimes overlook the distinction.

Albert's father was a man somewhat over forty years of age, who had once been very handsome, and presumably had had his day of success with the ladies. However, before he reached the age at which men are accustomed to reform (when they reform at all), Monsieur Vermoncey had renounced all worldly pleasures, as the result of a succession of cruel disasters which robbed him of all that he held dearest.

Monsieur Vermoncey, whose only possession was his comely face, married early in life a young woman of large wealth, and from that time fortune smiled upon him. He plunged into speculation, was continuously lucky, and soon found himself in possession of an income of twenty thousand francs.

In his home, as in affairs, destiny seemed favorable to him. His wife was amiable and gentle; he had married her solely for her fortune, but he soon found that she deserved to be loved for herself, and, unlike those husbands who are all fire and flame at first and then turn to ice, he proceeded from indifference to love.

Four children were born of the marriage, at brief intervals. Albert was the oldest, and he had two brothers and a sister. Monsieur Vermoncey was happy, and proud of his numerous family; he was as good a father as husband.

But that state of affairs was too happy to last; perfect happiness seems to be contrary to the designs of Nature, for she speedily sends something to disturb it. Perhaps it is to afford some compensation to the unfortunate by showing them that suffering spares the greatest no more than the smallest, the wealthiest no more than the poorest; to prevent them from envying too keenly those in exalted station, and to impress it upon them that sometimes under the humblest roof are to be found those inestimable blessings, those joys of the heart, which all the gold of Peru cannot buy.

The oldest child was but ten years old when Monsieur Vermoncey lost his wife; this calamity was soon followed by the death of his youngest son; two years later, his daughter also was taken from him; finally, Albert's last brother followed his mother to the grave. So that, of his large family, only one son remained to fill the places of all whom he had lost.

These events had caused Monsieur Vermoncey the most profound grief, which was always reflected on his features. His wife's death caused him a very bitter pang, and the loss of each succeeding child intensified his sorrow beyond words. He would often sit for hours at a time, crushed to the earth by his thoughts; and when he raised his eyes, they bore an expression of melancholy resignation which could not fail to touch the hardest heart.

All his affection was concentrated on Albert, his only remaining child. It is not surprising, therefore, that the young man had found in his father a boundless store of indulgence, upon which he relied to obtain forgiveness for his excesses.

However, Monsieur Vermoncey did not carry his weakness so far that he did not see his son's failings; he had urged him to lead a more orderly life; sometimes, even, he had tried to impart a tinge of severity to his advice; but his intense affection for his son soon carried the day; moreover, Albert always promised to mend his ways, and his father was only too glad to believe him.

Unfortunately for Albert, he had become intimate with one of those men who trade on the weaknesses of others, and who, not having means enough to lead a life of dissipation, and lacking the talent to procure it, attach themselves to those who are possessed of wealth, find a way to make themselves necessary to them, to take part in all their follies, to be included in all their parties of pleasure; so that they are able to lead a most agreeable existence with a very modest income, or even if they have not a sou. Paris swarms with such men. They are not thieves, strictly speaking, for they do not rob you; they are not mere *intrigants*, for they have a name and some position in society; but they are shrewd fellows, who risk nothing and make the most of everything.

Monsieur Célestin Valnoir, who called himself *De* Valnoir in order to obtain greater consideration, was an individual of this type. He had wormed himself into Albert's friendship, as men worm themselves into the friendship of those who own châteaux or large estates, or anything else that is worth preying upon. He had not a sou, and he was supposed to have at least fifteen thousand francs a year; he was the son of a butcher in the suburbs, and was believed to be of noble birth; he had no knowledge of music or of drawing, but posed as a master of all such subjects; in fact, he had received very little education, and he was looked upon as a profound scholar. But, on the other hand, he had certain qualities which, in society, often replace all others: an imperturbable self-assurance, and the art of turning the most trivial circumstances to his advantage.

Monsieur Tobie Pigeonnier was one of a very poor and very large family, and had sworn to make his fortune. To that end, at the age of eight he walked about the streets picking up pins, which he sold when he had obtained a certain quantity. Impressed by his business instincts, one of his uncles had taken charge of him and made him his clerk, with no wages beyond his board and lodging; still the young man succeeded in saving money, which seems a difficult task, when he earned none; but he sold his uncle's old clothes, which were the only perquisites of his position. In order to make those perquisites more valuable, by advancing the time when his patron's garments should be turned over to him, he often passed a large part of the night rubbing them with pumice stone, so that the cloth soon became as thin as paper and began to give way on all sides. But one morning, when the uncle happened to rise earlier than usual, he found his nephew engaged in polishing the back of his coat, and instantly turned him out of doors.

Tobie thereupon risked his little hoard in a speculation. A friend of his had just opened a pastry-cook's shop. *Galette* was just becoming fashionable in Paris; several large fortunes owed their origin to the fondness of the Parisians for that delicacy. Pigeonnier risked his funds, and at the end of a year he withdrew ten times as much. Thereupon, finding himself in a position to cut a figure in the world, Tobie became a dealer in chestnuts, on commission; but, despite his business ability, he made much less money than when he was the pastry-cook's partner; moreover, vanity had taken possession of him, and he had said to himself, like many another: "To become rich, it is necessary to appear rich; water flows to the river; consequently, in order to make money, I must act as if I already had a lot of it."—That is why young Tobie took so much pains with his dress, and affected the manners and habits of a wealthy dandy. To be sure, only the fronts of his shirts were of fine linen; the rest was of a very coarse, cheap quality; the head of his cane was hollow, his eyeglass German silver, his pin paste; but they all looked like the real thing. Furthermore, Pigeonnier never lost an opportunity to say:

"I dined at Véry's. I am going to breakfast at Véfour's. I sup to-night at the Maison-Dorée. I was at the Opéra last night. I am going to the Français to-night. I mean to go to the Bouffes to-morrow."

Whereas, in fact, Tobie Pigeonnier usually slipped into the most modest restaurants, except when he dined at home on a loaf of bread and a piece of Italian cheese; which did not prevent him from going to walk afterward in the garden of the Palais-Royal, with a toothpick in his mouth, and saying to all his acquaintances, as he unbuttoned two or three buttons of his waistcoat:

"On my word, I believe I ate too much dinner; I am suffocating. They treat you very well at Douix's. But it's foolish

to eat so much. I am a shameful glutton!"

And if he went to the theatre, it was only to take his stand under the peristyle just as the curtain fell, in order to hear what was said of the play; and when he did venture to buy a ticket, it was only because he could get it extremely cheap, there being only a scene or two to be played.

We have said enough to make it clear that he was very far from having as many mistresses as he claimed to have. Although he was rather a good-looking youth, especially in the eyes of those persons who like noses shaped like a parrot's beak, he rarely ventured to embark upon a love affair; because, as a general rule, such affairs require, first of all, that one should have money in one's pocket. A young man without a sou may inspire a passion, form a liaison, have a mistress who really loves him; and under such circumstances he is entitled to flatter himself that he is loved on his own account; but he cannot change mistresses very often—in short, he can hardly be what we call a man *à bonnes fortunes*. That is a calling which requires a constant expenditure of money and of health. Tobie asked nothing better than to spend the latter, but preferred to hoard his money.

When his fashionable friends proposed to him to join a party of pleasure, or to dine with them, he always found some pretext for refusing; but this time, the hope of making a conquest of Madame Plays overcame his usual reserve; for in that lady's acquaintance he foresaw many opportunities to advance his fortunes. Monsieur Plays was a commission merchant, and might offer him frequent opportunities to make profitable investments. All these considerations combined had induced Tobie to accept Albert's proposition; and although he was very short of money, he had decided also to be one of the dinner party at the Maison-Dorée.

Now, let us join the three young men in the Passage des Panoramas, where they were waiting for the two others whom Célestin had arranged to meet there.

"There's always a crowd in this passage," said Albert. "In summer, people walk through; in winter, they come here to walk, because the boulevards are muddy. If it rains, they come here for shelter; if the sun is very hot, they come here for shade; so that there's always a crowd here."

"Let's look at the statuettes. You told us, Tobie, didn't you, that somebody was making a caricature of you?"

"Not a caricature, but a bust, life size."

"That won't be so amusing."

"Have we got to wait for Mouillot and Balivan, I wonder! Mouillot is never on time."

"Oh! it isn't half-past five yet."

"Let's look at the new songs."

"That is to say, the new lithographs; for a song doesn't sell nowadays, you know, unless it has some pretty picture on the cover."

"That's not very flattering for the music."

"But it's a good thing for the artists. Brûlé's shop, Frère's successor, is always full of fascinating things of that sort. Look! there are some beautiful *albums.* I refer to the binding."

Tobie was standing in an ecstasy of admiration before a manikin in front of a draper's shop.

"Is that your bust you are gazing at?" asked Célestin, laughingly.

"You seem inclined to jest, messieurs; but I would like to resemble this manikin. I mean, in the way he's dressed. Just see how beautifully that frock-coat fits his back! It must be delightful to be dressed like that! I would gladly pay sixty francs for a coat that squeezed my waist that way."

"You can be squeezed for less than that. But you may set your mind at rest, young Pigeonnier; I assure you that you look a good deal like a manikin."

Tobie glanced at Célestin with an expression that said:

"You would be very glad to look like me!"

At that moment, Albert halted in front of a cap and ribbon shop, in which he spied two rather attractive young women behind the counter. He exchanged meaning glances with one of them, while the mistress of the shop was trying caps on a decidedly plain person who had just come in, and who found none of them to her taste, because she could not make up her mind that any one of them made her pretty.

As the throng about them became more dense, Tobie took his companions by the arm, saying:

"If you stand still like this, messieurs, look out for your pockets. The Passage des Panoramas is very pretty, very brilliant, and much frequented; but I must warn you that it is one of the places where the greatest number of thefts is committed every day. When an honest bourgeois stops in front of Susse's shop, or in front of Marquis's wonderful *postiches*, if he doesn't keep his hands on his fob and his pockets all the time, he is sure to find himself minus watch, purse, handkerchief, and snuffbox. Between six and nine at night, when the promenaders are most numerous, the thefts are most frequent; at that time, you see in these galleries numbers of men in blouses and caps, who certainly have no business in this quarter, and who wouldn't walk in this passage unless they carried on a criminal industry here."

"You are right, Tobie; and I can see at this moment some gentlemen with faces in which I should have very little confidence. Come, Albert, come—are you still in love with that shopgirl? Ah! I see our friends—and Dupétrain is with them! Good! we shall have some sport. He always has some extraordinary story to tell."

"Who is Monsieur Dupétrain?" inquired Tobie.

"Don't you know Dupétrain? Well, upon my word! All Paris knows him. He's a very good fellow—who is constantly having wonderful adventures. He's a frantic adept of magnetism. He'll put you to sleep, and make you walk in your sleep, if you like. Come, messieurs; come, I say!"

Three young men, walking arm in arm, halted in front of Albert and his companions. They greeted one another with smiles, exchanging handshakes and puffs of tobacco smoke.

The new-comers were: first, Mouillot, head clerk in a business house; a tall, fair-haired, red-cheeked youth, with an amiable, jovial face, whose appearance pointed him out at once as a bon vivant.

Next, Balivan, portrait painter; a typical artist's face, with unusual features, which could in all sincerity be called ugly, and a bearing in harmony with his features. He held himself sidewise, with his head sunk on one shoulder; he had a jerky walk, one leg always lagging behind; and he waved his arms about in space, so that at a distance they

resembled the wings of a windmill. But, with all that, his face had much character and expression; his forehead was that of a man who thinks, and in his eyes there shone the fire of intelligence, which, in a man, excuses ugliness and often triumphs over beauty.

Balivan had genuine artistic talent, which is never a disadvantage; but he was extremely lazy, a not infrequent trait among artists; in addition, he was very heedless, always making blunders, and extraordinarily absent-minded.

The third of the party was he whom Célestin called Dupétrain. He was a man between thirty and forty, with a square, bony face, and yellow skin, extremely ugly at first sight, and even more so when examined closely. His broad nose lay flat on his cheeks, like a negro's; his enormous mouth became a veritable cavern when he spoke, because, in order to give greater weight to his words, he articulated every syllable with a painstaking care that was very disagreeable to his hearers. His head was adorned with a forest of hair, which he always wore very long, and which gave him some resemblance to a lion; his small, sunken, glassy eyes seemed to be engaged in a constant effort to fascinate or at least to magnetize you. Such was the individual who answered to the name of Dupétrain.

"Ah! here's Pigeonnier!" exclaimed Mouillot, bringing his hand down on the corpulent youth's shoulder. "Does he dine with us?"

"Yes, messieurs; I am to have that pleasure."

"Famous! the man we can never get—who's always engaged."

"I have given up everything to-day to join you."

"But he doesn't tell you all. There's another affair—but, no! we will speak of that at dinner—without mentioning the lady's name, of course; for we must be discreet—eh, Tobie?"

"Where do we dine?"

"At the Maison-Dorée."

VI

A STAG DINNER PARTY

The young men established themselves in one of the pleasant salons of the restaurant. Mouillot called for pen and ink to prepare the menu, and Tobie whispered to Albert:

"We mustn't forget my letter for Madame Plays."

"True," replied Albert.—"Waiter, some note paper."

"Do you propose to order the dinner, too?" said Mouillot. "Can't you trust me to do it in style?"

"To be sure; I am going to write something else."

"A billet-doux, eh? Oh! for heaven's sake, let the women alone! We are here to eat and laugh."

"This is how it is, messieurs. There's——"

"Oh! my dear fellow," cried Tobie, hurrying to Albert's side, "let's not compromise anybody! we agreed to be close-mouthed!"

"So long as he doesn't mention the lady's name," said Célestin, "I don't see why he can't tell the story."

"Surely I can. I am turning over one of my mistresses to Tobie, messieurs,—assuming, of course, that she is willing to accept him as a substitute."

"You can't be certain of that," laughed Mouillot; "for he hasn't the figure."

"Do you say you've been drawn in the conscription?" inquired Balivan, who had not heard the beginning of the conversation.

"No, no; I have bought a substitute.—Come, Albert, write my letter; for I am afraid we shall hardly be in the mood for writing after dinner."

"I am sending Tobie to an assignation in my place," said Albert, "and I am going to give him a letter of introduction."

"Well, you can write your letter while I am writing the order for dinner. It will give you inspiration. Here come the writing materials."

Albert sat down opposite Mouillot, each of them took a pen; and while one sought words to write to his mistress, the other looked over the bill of fare.

Albert began, reading aloud as he wrote:

"Charming creature!"

Mouillot in like manner announced each dish that he selected.

"*Potage aux bistres.*"

"You know how dearly I love you."

"For three—that will be enough."

"Your image is always before me."

"Calf's head *en tortue*."

"When I see you, I instantly become——"

"*Andouillette de Troyes.*"

"Drunk with joy."

"With salmon."

"But I am detained at this moment by urgent business, dear heart."

"Truffled turkey."

"To save you the annoyance of waiting for me at our rendezvous——"

"Lobster——"

"I send one of my intimate friends."

"As fresh as possible."

"You can trust him absolutely."

"If it smells, we shall send it back."

"He will escort you to a place we have agreed on——"

"Asparagus——"

"And will stay with you till I come."

"With white sauce."

"I will join you as soon as I possibly can."

"Sweets, dessert, champagne."

"I send you by him a thousand assurances of my love."

"Serve everything hot."

"With such a letter of recommendation, it seems to me that you ought to receive a warm welcome," said Albert, as he signed his name.

"I call that a well-diversified little dinner, messieurs," said Mouillot, handing the order to the waiter.

As for Tobie, he thanked Albert and carefully pocketed the missive that was to open the way for him to a piquant intrigue.

"Above all things, serve the dinner promptly, and without interruption," he called to the waiter.

"Mon Dieu! why are we in such a hurry?" said the artist, who had already seated himself at the table and was blowing his nose in his napkin, which he mistook for his handkerchief. "For my part, I like to sit a long while at dinner."

"So do I; but I have an assignation for this evening."

"Well, upon my word! there's Balivan using his napkin for a handkerchief! That's the beginning of his freaks. We shall see some amusing sights, if he goes on."

"My napkin! Faith, that's true! I am always doing that; and the worst of it is that I did it not long ago at a grand dinner, at a banker's house, where there were marquises and deputies. Suddenly I saw that everybody was looking at me with a curious expression. Imagine my confusion, when a very pretty woman, who was sitting beside me, said in a most amiable tone: 'Of course, you are doing that for a wager, monsieur?'—'What, madame?'—'Using your napkin as a handkerchief.'—Then, of course, I realized my blunder; and what do you suppose I did, in my embarrassment? I put the napkin in my pocket! Luckily, everybody began to laugh, for they saw how absent-minded I was."

"Meanwhile," said Mouillot, "I request as a favor that I may not be seated next to Balivan, because absent-minded people are very unpleasant neighbors at table.—You ask him to pass the olives, and he'll pour water in your wine. If you want bread, he'll pass you the pepper. It's a constant succession of disappointments."

"Have you ever been magnetized?" inquired Monsieur Dupétrain, fixing his glassy stare on the painter.

"Oh! go to the devil with your magnetism! As if I took any stock in it!"

"Take any stock in it! Why, my dear fellow, don't you know that the power of magnetism is absolutely proved? that the most distinguished people are the most fervent adepts of Mesmer? that ladies of the highest social position go to the magnetizers now to be put to sleep, as they used to go to be mesmerized?"

"Parbleu! that's a convincing authority to appeal to! Women—who adore anything that promises a novel kind of sensation, and who seek pleasure instead of truth."

"But I'll wager, Balivan, that I can put you to sleep, incredulous as you are!"

"Put me to sleep! That is very possible; but it would be much harder to wake me."

"I say, messieurs, aren't you ready to stop talking magnetism?" cried Mouillot; "I supposed that we dined together to enjoy ourselves. For heaven's sake, Dupétrain, don't put us to sleep yet! Later, if you choose.—To the table, my friends!"

They took their seats, Tobie among the first. He examined the tableware, the hors-d'œuvre, the glasses of different sizes placed in front of each guest, and an ecstatic expression lighted up his face. From the way that he ate and drank, and lingered lovingly over every mouthful, one could divine that he was perfectly content, and that his thoughts took this turn:

"As I am here, I must make the most of it. If I spend money, at all events it will be of some benefit to me."

"Aren't we going to have any madeira?" said Célestin, after finishing his soup.

"I should say so! What do you take us for?" replied Mouillot.

"Yes, yes! madeira!" cried Pigeonnier. "When I am in the vein, I don't deny myself anything."

"Waiter! some madeira!"

"It is here, messieurs; what wine will you have next?"

"Beaune première, to begin with. After that, we will see."

"That's right!" said Tobie, gulping down the madeira. "Beaune première, the best there is! Is anything too good for us? Pass me the olives. Pass me the anchovies. Pass me the tunny."

"The devil! you might as well say pass me everything! How little Tobie pitches in! Be careful, my dear fellow; it isn't prudent to have your stomach too full when you are going straight away to an assignation."

"Oh! I have room enough. I'd like some madeira."

"Monsieur has a full, round face, which doesn't indicate a very nervous man," said Dupétrain, looking at Tobie; "but I'll bet that I can put him to sleep."

"Dupétrain," cried Mouillot, "you will be fined five francs every time that you mention magnetism during dinner."

"Oho! we're forbidden to speak now, are we?"

"Tell us something amusing—we would like that.—But you don't say anything, Albert! Have you an unrequited passion in your heart?"

"I, a passion! *Fichtre!* no—but I—— By the way, waiter, I expect a messenger. Let me know when anyone asks for me."

"The same with me," said Célestin.

"And me," cried Tobie, stuffing a handful of olives into his pocket; "let me know, waiter—for it's very important. I am Monsieur Tobie Pigeonnier. A messenger will ask for me."

"Do you propose to put all the olives in your pocket, Tobie?"

"I like them pocketed,[B] messieurs; they're much better."

"Yes," laughed Célestin, "and then, you have some the next day."

"Ah! they are better pocketed, are they?" said the artist. "Then I must try some."

And as the radishes were passed to Balivan a moment later, he seized a handful and put them in his pocket.

The first courses were discussed with great zest by the young men; but when the truffled turkey arrived, their enthusiasm had abated in some degree; Tobie alone seemed as hungry as ever, and filled his plate with truffles, crying:

"On my word, one can dine mighty well here!"

"You don't seem to be sure of yourself, Pigeonnier," said Albert, with a smile.

"Peste!" said Mouillot; "how you do work your oven!"

"Well, for all that," interposed Dupétrain, "I'll bet that I can put monsieur to sleep."

"Five francs, Dupétrain!"

"Give me some beaune, Balivan. Damnation! I knew it; he's mixed it with madeira! Would you like me to give you an idea of that fellow's absent-mindedness, messieurs? Not long ago, I went to see him during the day; his servant said: 'Monsieur is taking a bath; he sent out for one, and he's in it now.'—'Well,' I said, 'that needn't prevent my speaking to him. Men aren't afraid to look at one another in the water.'—So I went into the room where my gentleman was bathing. What did I see? Balivan, fully dressed, and with his boots on, seated in his bath and quietly reading a newspaper, absolutely unconscious that there was anything peculiar in his method of bathing."

"Ha! ha! ha! that is too much; we might say, like your fair neighbor at dinner: it was a bet, wasn't it, Balivan?"

"No, messieurs," the artist calmly replied; "I give you my word that I hadn't noticed what I was doing. If they had brought me my bath in decent season, it wouldn't have happened. But when I found that it didn't come, I went out; when I came back, it was all ready; I was in a hurry, so I just glanced at the clock, took the *Gazette des Tribunaux*, and jumped in. That infernal newspaper was at the bottom of it; for I was reading a very interesting case, and all I remember now is that the water seemed very heavy."

"You may be a somnambulist," said Dupétrain; "very likely you were asleep when you got into the bath."

"Asleep! damnation! I tell you, I had just been out to do an errand; I was in a great hurry, for I hadn't had my breakfast, and I got into the bath without thinking of undressing."

During this conversation, young Tobie, determined to waste no time, had slipped into his napkin a large part of the truffles that were on his plate, and, having wiped them carefully, stuffed them into his pocket. Then he said:

"Just pass me the turkey again, messieurs; I would like a few of the truffles with this chicken."

"I say, Pigeonnier, this is too much; you mean to outdo yourself, my dear fellow, to leave Albert in the shade!"

"Tudieu! what an appetite!" cried Mouillot. "That blade ought to pay for two; he beats us all."

"You see, messieurs, I am very fond of truffles."

"So we perceive."

Albert consulted his watch, and said, with an impatient gesture:

"Why doesn't that messenger come?"

"Neither of them has come yet."

"Have you been sending bouquets to your fair ones, messieurs?" queried Mouillot; "that reminds me of an experience I had with a blockhead of a messenger. My mistress at that time was a very attractive woman, an amiable little creature of about twenty-two, who seemed barely eighteen. She was married, and an old aunt of her husband lived with her and was supposed to keep an eye on her, because they knew she was a little giddy. So that we had to act cautiously. My charmer had asked me to send her a bouquet, because she was going to a ball, to which I also was going. During the day, I bought a lovely bouquet at Mademoiselle Prévot's, then took a cab, and told the driver to take me to the faubourg where my mistress lived. I got out at the corner of a street, two or three hundred yards from her house, and looked about for a messenger. At last I spied one; he was a man fifty years old or more, very dirty, and with the general aspect of a drunkard, but still the probabilities were that he knew his business. I beckoned to him and led him into a doorway. He tried to look cunning when he saw that he was to carry a bouquet. I pointed out the house, and told him the number, then said: 'There's no concierge; you must go to the rear of the courtyard, where there is only one little door, at which you will ring. If the door is opened by a man, or by an old woman, you will say simply: "Here's the bouquet madame ordered of a flower girl, to be sent to her," and then come away without another word; but if it's a young woman, then you will say to her: "Here is the bouquet, madame; the gentleman who sent it is at the corner of the street yonder," and listen carefully to what she tells you to say to me. I will wait here for you. You understand! no blundering!'—My messenger assumed his sly expression once more, and replied: 'Never fear, monsieur; this isn't the first time I've carried a bouquet.'—And off he went with mine. I followed him with my eyes. I wasn't very easy in my mind, for the fellow looked so stupid that I was afraid of some blunder. To begin with, I saw that he passed the house, although I had pointed it out to him plainly enough; however, after going beyond it, he turned back and found it; he went in, and I waited. After several minutes, which seemed painfully long to me, my man came back with a self-satisfied air.—'Well,' I said, 'to whom did you give it?'—'Two children, nine or ten years old, opened the door, monsieur; one was a little girl, and the other a boy. "My little friends," I says to them; "here's a bouquet somebody gave me for your mother; will you go and tell her?"'—'Great God!' I cried; 'did I tell you that the lady had children? Well?'—'Then, monsieur, a lady came.'—'Young and pretty?'—'Not bad-looking, monsieur, according to my ideas.'—'It must have been the old woman, then; what did you say to her?'—'I says: "Madame, here's a bouquet that the flower girl hopes you'll accept; it will give her great pleasure."—"What flower girl?" says the lady. "I haven't ordered any bouquet. Where is the flower girl's stand?"—"Faith! madame, the young man didn't tell me;

but it's paid for; my orders are not to take any money."'—'The devil take you!' cried I, as I dismissed him; 'I shall know you again, and I'll never send you to carry another bouquet.'—And, as it turned out, that brute was the cause of a terrible scene between my little lady and her husband, which led to a rupture between us. Moral: good messengers are rare in Paris. They try to show so much intelligence that, if you hand them an unaddressed letter, and say: 'You are to take this letter,'—they begin by grabbing it and running off; and you have to call them back to tell them where to carry it."

"I have another charge to make, messieurs," said Célestin. "Monsieur Tobie Pigeonnier is stuffing truffles into his pocket. I'm not surprised that they disappear from his plate so fast."

"Mon Dieu! just because I've taken two or three.—Come, waiter! The lobster—and the asparagus. Hot! hot!"

"At what time do you go to your rendezvous?" asked Balivan.

"Half-past eight."

"You have time enough."

"None too much; you see, I should like some dessert too."

"Oh! I see that you don't propose to abandon your share of anything."

"When a man has a good stomach, he ought to make use of it. If you play bouillotte this evening, I'll come back and join you."

"If we play!" cried Mouillot; "I rather think so—eh, Albert?"

"Oh, yes! I want my revenge."

"Bouillotte to the death!" said Balivan, absent-mindedly eating asparagus at the wrong end.

"And afterward, messieurs," said Dupétrain, "I will magnetize you all."

"Oh! he'll drive us mad with his nonsense! I say, Dupétrain, do you magnetize your mistresses, when you have any?"

"Certainly; I put myself in communication with them at once."

"He communicates his magnetic fluid to them."

"And as they confess, in the somnambulistic state, that they deceive him, that vexes him, and he goes off and puts others to sleep."

"Laugh as much as you please, messieurs!" rejoined Dupétrain, assuming a solemn expression and resting his elbows on the table; "but if I should tell you all the extraordinary things that have been disclosed to me by the power of magnetism, you would shudder from head to foot."

"*Fichtre!*" exclaimed Tobie, returning to the lobster. "Faith! they give you a good dinner here.—Is this story of yours very interesting?"

"Well, well!" said Albert; "here's Tobie burning with the desire to shudder from head to foot!"

"I'll tell you a single incident," replied Dupétrain, delighted to find that Tobie paid some attention to what he said.—"A young woman, whose husband was travelling——"

At that moment, the waiter opened the door of the salon and said:

"A messenger is here, asking for Monsieur Célestin de Valnoir."

"Very well," said Célestin, rising; "I'll go and speak to him."

He left the room and found Jean Ficelle waiting on the landing; he beckoned to the messenger, who said in an undertone:

"First of all, my comrade Sans-Cravate went to the same house that I did. I let him go first, as you told me; then I waited till he came out, before I went in."

"Very good. And he didn't see you?"

"It was impossible. The lady wasn't in, but I found the maid, Mamzelle Rosa, who told me where her mistress was—on Rue d'Angoulême, Boulevard du Temple, calling on one of her friends. I went there and found her, and gave her your letter. She read it, and then gave me this answer for monsieur."

With that, Jean Ficelle handed Célestin a letter. He tore it open, hurried to a gas jet to read it, and seemed satisfied with its contents. Having put it in his pocket, he took out a two-franc piece and handed it to the messenger, saying:

"Here, this is for you."

Jean Ficelle made a wry face as he took the coin, and muttered:

"Only that much for going to Rue Neuve-Vivienne, then to Rue d'Angoulême, and coming back here; it ain't very fat pay."

"You rascal! I'll wager that the lady to whom you gave my letter paid you, and paid you handsomely too; so that I really ought not to give you anything."

"Monsieur is too shrewd," replied Jean Ficelle, with a half-smile; "there's no way of being sharp with him."

"Off with you! keep your mouth shut, and I'll employ you again; when you're paid at both ends, it seems to me that you ought to be satisfied."

"He's a skinflint, all the same!" muttered the messenger, as he went away.

Célestin returned to his friends.

"The reply is evidently satisfactory," said Mouillot, scrutinizing his face. "His eyes have the proud gleam of a victor already. Is your Dulcinea very pretty?"

"Oh! messieurs, it isn't what you imagine. It's important business."

"Are you going to marry?"

"No. It's some business on the Bourse. A little money to invest."

"Oho! if you're going to be a millionaire, then you can afford to lose at bouillotte.—The champagne frappé, waiter. Now is the time!"

"Messieurs," said Dupétrain, with his elbows still on the table, "I was about to tell you a very curious anecdote.—A young woman, whose husband was travelling, desired to know whether, when he was away from her——"

"Silence! No more stories! here comes the champagne!—Well, Albert, why don't you drink? You are not in good spirits."

"Because my messenger doesn't come," replied the young dandy, with a sigh which he extinguished in a glass of champagne.

"Nor mine, either," said Tobie; "but I don't care! he'll come in time. Meanwhile, let us drink and laugh and sing! Champagne till we drop! They treat you mighty well here."

"Yes, you seem to be getting along very well," said the artist, with a smile.

"Spare yourself, Pigeonnier, my boy; or else you'll make a fiasco, in spite of your letter of recommendation."

"I! why I could drink champagne all day without getting drunk; I am so used to it!"

Again the waiter appeared, and said:

"There's a messenger for Monsieur Albert Vermoncey."

"Ah! it's for me this time!" exclaimed the young man, springing to his feet. "I am coming! I am coming!"

In a second he had left the room and joined Sans-Cravate, who came to meet him, holding three letters in one hand and a single one in the other, and who said, almost without stopping for breath:

"I did just what monsieur told me: first, to the lady's house on Rue Neuve-Vivienne. Not in; I left the letter. Then to monsieur's house, Rue Caumartin. The concierge gave me these three letters. They smell good; you'd think you had your nose on Bastringuette's tray. And then I went back just now to Rue Neuve-Vivienne, and they gave me this letter for monsieur. That smells good, too."

"A letter from her! Oh! give it to me, give it to me!"

"Here's all of them; first, the three the concierge gave me."

And Sans-Cravate handed Albert the letters he held in his left hand. But the young man crumpled them up together and thrust them into his pocket; then, hurriedly breaking the seal of the other one, which the messenger had in his right hand, he stepped aside to read it unobserved, while Sans-Cravate whistled a *cachucha* between his teeth.

Albert had no sooner made himself acquainted with the contents of Madame Baldimer's reply to his letter, than his face assumed an expression of the most intense pleasure; he felt in his pocket and took out two five-franc pieces, which he put in Sans-Cravate's hand, saying:

"Here, Sans-Cravate; I am happy, and I want you to be happy, too."

"Ah! thanks, bourgeois. *Crédié!* it's a pleasure to work for you; you're very free with your cash. I am always at your service—day or night—no matter what time; whenever you need me, I'll be ready. And if you should be short of the needful, I'd work for you all the same; because, you see, when I once get attached to people, it isn't just selfishness that makes me work for them—it's the heart—it's——"

"All right, my good fellow, thanks! Some day, perhaps, I shall put your zeal to the proof. Go and enjoy yourself. I must return to my friends."

"Oh! yes, we are going to have rather a choice little spree!" cried Sans-Cravate, as he went downstairs four at a time. "Bastringuette will have a chance to let herself go; she's so fond of good things to eat! Three cart-wheels to spend: a tricycle! nothing less, by God!"

While Sans-Cravate left the restaurant, singing at the top of his voice, Albert returned to his place at the table.

"Give me something to drink!" he cried; "champagne! let us play cards and get drunk! I am in the mood now to do whatever you choose."

"It seems that all the replies are favorable," said Mouillot.

"Oh! very favorable!" rejoined Albert; "I make no secret of the fact that there was a woman who was inclined to play the prude with me, and with whom, of course, I was more in love than ever. But I have obtained an assignation—a tête-à-tête, at last."

"Oho! it's all settled, then."

"An assignation for this evening?" queried Célestin, with an indifferent air.

"No, not until to-morrow. So I can pass the evening, and the night too, with you. I am entirely at your service."

"So much the better; we will have a hot game."

"I shall win, for I am in a lucky vein."

"That's not certain; lucky in love doesn't mean lucky at cards; the proverb says just the opposite."

"For my part, I believe that luck in one brings luck in the other. So look out for yourselves to-night."

"Messieurs," said Dupétrain, with his elbows on the table, and glaring at each of his companions in turn, in order to attract their attention, "I think that the time has come——"

"To put us to sleep?" cried Balivan.

"No; but to tell you about that extraordinary occurrence that I started to tell you a moment ago."

"I say, messieurs," said Mouillot; "we may as well let him tell his story; if we don't, he won't give us a moment's peace this evening.—Go on, Dupétrain; but if it lasts too long, you won't be allowed to finish it."

"Oh! messieurs, I am sure that the anecdote won't seem long to you; it's too interesting for that.—A young woman had a husband, who was travelling——"

"You have already told us that three times."

"This young woman was very desirous to know whether her husband, while he was away from her——"

"A messenger wants to speak to Monsieur Pigeonnier," said the waiter, at the door.

All the young men roared with laughter at the expression of Dupétrain's face when he was interrupted for the third time at the beginning of his story. But Tobie left the table, saying:

"Excuse me a moment. Don't go on without me. I am coming right back."

Paul was waiting for Tobie; he seemed very tired, and the perspiration was still streaming from his face. But Monsieur Pigeonnier began by saying to him:

"It has taken you a very long time; you are very late; if I was a messenger, I would move quicker than this."

"It's not my fault, monsieur," Paul replied. "I went first to the Marché du Temple, to see Madame Agar Abraham."

"Speak lower, messenger, lower! Come to the foot of the stairs; there are too many people passing here."

They went downstairs, and Tobie led Paul into the farthest corner of the courtyard.

"Now, go on," he said; "I am listening."

"I handed monsieur's letter to Madame Abraham."

"Very good; where's the money she gave you?"

"She gave me no money for monsieur; but after reading the letter, she cried: 'My nephew is trying to make a fool of me! does he suppose that I am going to support him in his extravagance? I won't lend him another sou! not another liard! and if he don't pay what he owes me—— '"

"All right! all right! that's enough! Madame Agar was jesting; in the first place, I am not her nephew, but that's a favorite term of hers that she applies to everybody; she even calls some of her lady customers her nephews. I'll go and give her a lecture, to teach her not to be so familiar.—Then you went to my concierge, Madame Pluchonneau, who made haste to do what I wanted?"

"She didn't make any too much haste, monsieur. In the first place, she cried: 'If monsieur thinks I like doing such errands as this—carrying his coat to the Mont-de-Piété—— '"

"Hush! hush! not so loud! Those concierges are so infernally insolent. It's very warm in my room, the sun shines into it all day; I don't need to keep my winter clothes through the summer, for the moths to eat; and then, I have so many clothes, I really don't know where to keep them. Well?"

"Well, monsieur, your concierge went on with her dinner and didn't show the slightest zeal."

"I'll have my landlord discharge her."

"When she had finished her dinner, she went up to your room.—'If monsieur sends to the Mont-de-Piété so often,' she said, 'I don't know what he'll have left to cover his backside.'"

"Backside! she didn't use that word, I trust?"

"I beg your pardon, monsieur; I have repeated exactly what she said."

"She'll pay dear for that. She shall not do my chamber work any more—I mean, she shan't help my valet with my cooking. But let us skip these details; they are eating the dessert without me."

"At last, monsieur, your concierge did your errand. She was gone a very long time; that's why I could not return any sooner, as you told me to wait."

"True."

"She came back in a very ill humor, and gave me this for monsieur."

And Paul handed Tobie two five-franc pieces and one of two francs.

"Twelve francs!" he cried. "What does this mean? twelve francs for a superb silk-lined paletot, with a velvet collar! Messenger, she must have given you more than this."

Paul repressed with difficulty an angry retort, and handed Tobie a slip of paper, saying:

"No, monsieur; there wasn't any more money, but she gave me this paper with it, which will prove that I have handed you all that I received."

The paper was the Mont-de-Piété ticket. Tobie read it, and muttered:

"The Arabs! twelve francs! only twelve francs for a luxurious garment which cost me a hundred and nineteen! However, I won't let them keep it long, to teach them—— All right, my boy, all right!"

And Monsieur Pigeonnier started to go away without paying the messenger. He thought better of it, however, went back to Paul, and put a ten-sou piece in his hand.

"Here, my boy," he said; "here's your money."

Paul glanced at the ten-sou piece, and could not refrain from saying:

"What, monsieur! this is all you give me for more than three hours?"

"Three hours! three hours! it isn't my fault if you make a job last forever."

"But, monsieur——"

"I never give less than ten sous for an errand, and never more; it's quite enough."

"I did two errands for monsieur; I went first to the Temple, and——"

"Well, well, all right! here—for God's sake, don't whine!"

Tobie reluctantly took four sous more from his pocket and gave them to Paul, then ran quickly up the stairs; while the young messenger, evidently confused and humiliated by the way in which he had been treated, walked slowly away from the Maison-Dorée.

Tobie instantly resumed his seat at the table, and, to make up for lost time, stuffed himself with biscuit, fruit, preserves and confections; but, although he did full honor to the dessert, his face, when he rejoined his friends, was very far from expressing the lively satisfaction depicted on Albert's and Célestin's after their interviews with their respective messengers.

"This time," said Mouillot, "I fancy that the reply was not so agreeable as on the two preceding occasions. Young Tobie does not appear perfectly content. She no longer loves him!"

"I beg your pardon," replied Tobie, filling his glass with champagne; "on the contrary, she loves me too well."

"It's very strange, but one would swear that you were annoyed. Don't lie about it: your charmer has given you your walking ticket."

"Not at all! but she's a horribly jealous creature, with whom I was to dine to-day. I broke my engagement in order to join you, and she writes me that it is plain that I no longer love her, and that she's going to take poison; that alarms me a little, because she's quite capable of doing as she says."

"Nonsense! you must have read it wrong; it's fish [*poisson*] that she's going to take. Show us her letter."

"Impossible, messieurs! I must respect her reputation."

"I say! you're putting figs and raisins in your pockets now; do you like them pocketed, too?"

"Oh! I was absent-minded; that devil of a woman! Why need she disturb my enjoyment! Basta! I won't think any more about her. Another love awaits me! Give me something to drink!"

Monsieur Dupétrain, who had been coughing persistently for several minutes to attract the others' attention, replaced his elbows on the table, and began:

"Messieurs, as the three messengers you were expecting have all come at last and brought replies to your messages, and as you will not be called away again, I think that this is an opportune time to tell you my somnambulistic anecdote."

The young men prepared to listen; and Mouillot drew his watch, saying:

"I am going to see how long your story lasts; I warn you that I give you only ten minutes. Look, Dupétrain, you see that it's eight twenty-five."

Monsieur Dupétrain did not look at the watch, for he was already off.

"A young woman, the wife of a man who was on a journey——"

But at that moment, Albert, as if he suddenly recalled the plan he had formed, cried:

"Eight twenty-five! Well, Tobie, what about your appointment for half-past eight? You have no time to spare, for the lady is not very patient."

Tobie sprang to his feet, delighted to have an opportunity to leave in a hurry; without losing an instant, he threw down his napkin and seized his hat.

"Mon Dieu!" he cried; "that is true; and I had forgotten it for the moment. I must run. Excuse me, messieurs, but it is an adventure which I should be very sorry to miss.—Pay for me, Albert; I haven't time to wait for the bill."

"Very well! Will you come back this evening, to tell us the result of the interview?"

"To be sure; and to play a game of bouillotte with you. Will you be here?"

"No," said Mouillot; "if we want to make a night of it, we had better go to Balivan's; we shall be more at liberty there."

"My studio is at your service, messieurs; with pipes of all sizes, from all countries."

"All right; then I will join you at Monsieur Balivan's."

"You know my address? Rue Taitbout."

"I know, I know! Au revoir!—By the way, Monsieur Dupétrain, please don't tell your story till I come back."

Dupétrain made no reply; he had taken his head in his hands and was fascinating his plate. The young men laughed heartily, and Tobie disappeared.

VII

MADAME PLAYS.—THE SHOWMEN

Madame Plays was a woman of some twenty-five or thirty years, who looked her full age, because she had a large and powerfully built frame, and features in harmony therewith. But although women of that stamp seem to attain at an early age the summer of their existence, they have the satisfaction of retaining the aspect of that season when they are well advanced in their autumn; that is a compensation which may fairly be considered an advantage.

Madame was a fine figure of a woman; not too tall, but perhaps somewhat overdeveloped in the way of embonpoint; her outlines were still graceful, however, and her broad, well-rounded hips showed that she did not need to resort to artifice to imitate nature. A foot of medium size, with a gracefully arched instep, a stout but well-proportioned leg, a pretty arm, a soft, plump hand, with those taper fingers that seem destined to touch none but pleasant things—so much for the body. A face of a decidedly rustic type, but fresh and attractive; a large nose, a large mouth with pretty teeth, brown eyes which promised many things, and eyebrows which promised still more—so much for the features.

As for her mind, no one ever mentioned it; it was regarded as absent. She was all material and sensual; but she had had the tact to choose a husband well suited to her. A man of forty years, stupid as an owl, but in vigorous health; quite capable, when his wife was not otherwise provided, of fulfilling all the duties imposed upon him by his marital office, and deeming himself very fortunate when madame deigned to permit him to enter upon those duties. In a word, she led him by the nose, deceived him every day, and did not allow him to dine out without her permission.

A single incident will suffice to elucidate Monsieur Plays's character.

One day, one of his intimate friends met him a few steps from his home. When he accosted him, he noticed that Monsieur Plays, who was usually perfectly calm and placid, seemed somewhat excited, and that his eyes were rolling from side to side with an unaccustomed expression.

"I was coming to see you, Plays," said his friend; "but what's the matter with you, pray? you seem rather excited."

Monsieur Plays wiped his forehead with his handkerchief, and replied:

"Faith! I have good reason; just listen. I went home just now, unexpectedly, it is true, for I wanted to tell my wife that I have a box for the Bouffes; I opened her bedroom door, without knocking, and I found her—I found her—with one of my cousins—in a position—there was no mistake about it—you understand, don't you?"

"Oh! yes, I understand perfectly. Well, didn't you do anything?"

"Yes. I went out again and slammed the door with all my might! They must have seen that I didn't like it."

And the adventure had no other consequences, except that when he next appeared before his wife Monsieur Plays had a sheepish look, as if he were ashamed of the way he had ventured to slam the door.

Such was Herminie Plays's husband. He did a large commission business and made a great deal of money; which was very necessary in his household, as madame spent an enormous amount for her dress and her pleasures.

It was half-past eight o'clock. The weather was fair and warm, for it was still summer; but the daylight was

beginning to fade, and one had to be very near a person to distinguish his features plainly.

There was a large throng in the neighborhood of the flower market of the Chaussée d'Antin—that is to say, beside the Madeleine. There were not many flowers left; still there were enough to content the modest purchasers who came late in order to pay less.

For ten minutes, a woman dressed in the height of fashion had been walking back and forth in front of the rosebushes, myrtles, and orange-trees; sometimes she walked on the outer edge of the sidewalk, to avoid the people who were examining the shrubs; but her glances ranged over the whole market and its neighborhood; not a man passed without her looking closely at him to make sure that it was not he for whom she was waiting; you have already divined that the woman was Herminie Plays. There was an impatient gleam in her eyes, for a rendezvous of this sort was something to which she was not accustomed; and if Monsieur Albert Vermoncey had not been a very fascinating young man, it is probable that she would already have left the place.

Suddenly a short, stout young man came toward her, walking as rapidly as his little legs would allow. She saw him coming, but she was about to turn her head away, for he was not the young man she was expecting, when he halted in front of her and raised his hat, saying:

"It is surely Madame Plays to whom I have the honor of wishing a good-evening?"

"Yes, monsieur. Ah! it is Monsieur Tobie Pigeonnier! I did not recognize you at first—it is getting quite dark."

"I recognized you at once, madame; but you have one of those figures which it is impossible to mistake, and which attract one's eye instantly."

"You are too gallant, monsieur; but I beg your pardon—I am looking for somebody, and I am afraid——"

"Do not look for him, it is useless; he will not come—at least, not at this moment."

"What! what do you mean?"

"That I come from Albert Vermoncey, my intimate friend, who is prevented by important business from joining you just yet."

"What do you say? he has told you—why, that is very indiscreet on Monsieur Albert's part. Really, men are a hundred times more garrulous than women!"

"That is true! O mon Dieu! how true it is!"

"I trust that you do not believe——"

"I believe only that Albert is very fortunate when he is with you."

"That is too kind of you! but what did he tell you to say to me?"

"To offer a thousand excuses—and then, to escort you to a place where he will join us—a little later."

"Ah! he will join us—and he has sent you to keep me company?"

"If you will be good enough to accept the substitution."

"This seems to me rather inconsiderate on Monsieur Albert's part. I don't know if I ought to believe you."

"Here's a letter which he gave me for you, so that you might have full confidence in me."

Madame Plays took the letter, opened it, recognized Albert's signature, and tried to read it; but it was too dark, so she folded the letter and put it in her bosom, saying:

"I will read it later; but I see that Albert did really send you to me. What a harebrained performance! it is characteristic of him! Well, where are we to wait for him?"

"I will escort you. Will you deign to accept my arm?"

"I must. Oh! this is too absurd; but I can't help laughing at the idea. Ha! ha! what a madman that Albert is!"

Madame Plays took Tobie's arm, and leaned heavily upon it, because it tired her to walk; but her cavalier did not complain; he mistook for a tender pressure what was simply the result of the lady's embonpoint, and, in his turn, he began thus early to press amorously to his side the arm that was passed through his.

Pigeonnier led Madame Plays toward the Champs-Élysées. He knew that he would find in that direction an abundance of restaurants with private dining-rooms. It was so late, that the lady had surely dined; and he was not sorry for that, because he would have to regale her with ices or punch only, which were much less expensive; he had already considered all these little details. He preferred not to spend the twelve francs he had obtained on his coat, for he wanted to keep something with which to play bouillotte, hoping to win enough at that game to pay for his share of the dinner.

"Are you taking me to the Circus?" asked Madame Plays, when she saw that they were going toward the Champs-Élysées.

"No. That isn't where Albert is to meet us, but at a nice little restaurant over yonder."

"A restaurant! but I have dined!"

"Really—you have dined? Ah! that's a pity; however, we can take something all the same."

"You act as if you weren't certain of the place where Albert is to meet us."

"I beg your pardon—look—that is the place."

"What! under that mountebank's tent?"

"No; behind it—that café. Yes, that's the place."

Tobie led his charge into a sort of café, and told the waiter who came forward to meet them to show them to one of the private rooms on the first floor. Madame Plays did not seem at all alarmed when she heard her escort ask for a private room. She was afraid of nothing; indeed, she was strong enough to check any enterprise which did not please her. So she followed with an assured step as the waiter led them upstairs, then through a passageway, and opened the door of a small room looking on the Champs-Élysées.

"What can I offer you?" inquired Tobie of his charming companion; "ices, punch?"

"I will take an ice."

"Very good.—Waiter, some ices."

As the waiter left the room, Madame Plays exclaimed:

"Why don't you tell him that a gentleman will come and ask for us?"

"Ah! yes, to be sure."

And Pigeonnier ran out of the room, overtook the waiter in the hall, and said to him:

"Don't bring any biscuits or macaroons or cakes with the ices; madame doesn't like any of those things; nothing but ices, you understand."

"We always serve them with ices," replied the waiter, with an offended air; "but you're not obliged to eat them."

"Yes; but I tell you it isn't worth while to serve them."

"Very well, monsieur."

The corpulent young man danced back to the room in which he had left his charge, who had removed her hat and shawl.

"Excellent," said Tobie to himself; "she is making herself at home; she made no fuss about coming to a private room, so I conclude that the affair will go of itself."

"What can we see from here, I wonder?" said Madame Plays, walking to the window.

"Oh! nothing attractive," said Tobie, who preferred that the window should remain closed. "We are right above those travelling showmen, who have set up their booth close to the house, and exhibit bears and panthers and other monsters, I believe. If I were the proprietor of this restaurant, it seems to me that I wouldn't have them so near."

"Why not?" said his fair companion, with a smile; "everybody must live, must they not?"

"Everybody, yes, but not monsters. On my word, I detest monsters—but I idolize beauty."

As Tobie concluded this sentence, he took Madame Plays's hand and imprinted a kiss upon it; the charming creature allowed her hand to be kissed without objection.

The waiter brought the ices; as he placed them on the table, he looked with amazement at the lady who did not like biscuits; he spent a long time arranging the ices and spoons, and when he had finished he did not leave the room; so that Pigeonnier was obliged to say to him:

"That's all right; when I want anything, I will ring."

The waiter departed at last, and Tobie seated himself beside Madame Plays, placed an ice in front of her, and said:

"I trust that you will not be like this to me."

"What do you mean? flavored with vanilla?"

"No, no; I meant that—if you would not be like ice to me——"

"Indeed! Is that what Albert told you to say to me?"

"Oh! but you know—when one's friends are not by—and one has a burning heart—and one finds one's self beside such a charming woman——"

The waiter suddenly opened the door and said:

"I didn't bring any biscuits or macaroons, because madame doesn't want any."

"What! who told you I didn't want any?" demanded Madame Plays.

"Why, monsieur——"

Tobie's face became purple; he glared savagely at the waiter, and interrupted him with:

"What's that you say? what nonsense is this? I said: 'If your biscuits aren't fresh, I don't want any; if your macaroons are old, keep them.'—I do not wish to offer madame anything that is not—worthy of her."

"But, monsieur—just now, out in the hall, why—that wasn't——"

"If you don't hear straight, it isn't my fault. Go! we have heard enough; leave us."

The waiter made no reply, but glanced at Tobie with a cunning expression, as he left the room.

"That waiter is an idiot," said Tobie, eating his ice; "he made me lose the thread of my discourse."

"So Albert is detained by important business? a rendezvous with some other woman, perhaps? Doubtless you know all about it, as he confides his most profound secrets to you. All men are villains when they are together."

"One thing is certain—that I am very happy; and as for his confidence, I would willingly abuse it."

"Upon my word, that is very pretty!"

"Listen; if I had the good fortune to be in favor with so lovely a woman as you, I wouldn't send a friend to stay with her during my absence."

"It is true that that indicates——"

"Vast self-conceit, or perfect indifference."

"Ha! ha! how you abuse your friend!"

"The absent are always in the wrong; that proverb will be true as long as the world lasts."

"Do you think so? Perhaps I don't agree with you."

"Oh, yes! oh, yes! do agree with me! When one has eyes that——"

Again the waiter opened the door, and entered the room with two dishes, one filled with biscuits, the other with macaroons.

"There! they are perfectly fresh," he said, as he put them on the table. "Taste them. They were baked yesterday."

Madame Plays burst out laughing, for Tobie's eyes were like pistols; however, he dared not say anything, and the waiter was about to leave the room, when Madame Plays, having finished her vanilla ice, called him back.

"Waiter, bring me a fruit ice; what fruits have you?"

"We have strawberry, madame—and vanilla."

"I know you have vanilla, as I have just eaten one. But I ask you what fruit ices you have."

"We have strawberry, madame—and vanilla."

"I understand—you have nothing else."

"I beg pardon, madame; we have mixed ices too."

"What flavors?"

"Strawberry and vanilla."

"Bring me a strawberry, then.—And you, monsieur, won't you take a strawberry ice?"

This question was addressed to Tobie, who did his utmost to look pleased as he replied:

"Oh, no! I never eat more than one ice, myself. I shouldn't dream of doing it. I have noticed that if you eat more than one, they are likely to do you a lot of harm; they give you cramps in the stomach."

"Oh! I could eat a dozen; I could eat them all day, without the least bad effect."

"The devil!" thought Tobie; "it's lucky they haven't anything but strawberry and vanilla."

The waiter went out and soon returned with the strawberry ice. Again he busied himself arranging the plates and glasses and spoons, but he left the room at last. Madame Plays attacked the strawberry ice, tasting also the macaroons and biscuits.

"The cost is climbing up," said Tobie to himself; "this woman eats a great deal. If I don't divert her attention by making love to her, both dishes will soon be empty. I have heard it said that women must always have one sense at work. Let's try to give her something else to think about."

He drew his chair nearer to Madame Plays, looked her in the eyes, and heaved a tremendous sigh. The fair creature, who was of a very jolly disposition, exclaimed, with a smile:

"Mon Dieu! Monsieur Tobie, what's the matter with you? You make eyes at me, and breathe so hard!"

"Ah! madame—I see that Albert did very wrong to send me to you."

"How so? do you repent of having conferred a favor on your friend?"

"But if that favor deprives me of my repose, my happiness, my peace of mind!"

"Ha! ha! you are joking. How is your repose endangered, pray?"

At that moment, the showman, standing directly beneath the window of the room occupied by Tobie and his charge, began to announce the performance by tapping with a stick on a huge picture placed beside the entrance of the booth. His voice was so shrill and penetrating that it was impossible for persons in the private rooms not to hear every word he said, even when they paid no attention; and the following dialogue between the young man and his fair companion was necessarily interrupted by the mountebank's periods:

TOBIE (*trying to take Madame Plays's hand*).

You ask me how my repose is endangered. Is it possible that you have not divined! Great God!

THE SHOWMAN.

The show is about to begin, messieurs and mesdames; it is about to begin.

MADAME PLAYS.

Let alone my hand! you are sitting very close to me.

THE SHOWMAN.

Now is the time! the time has come! the show is about to begin!

TOBIE.

Ah! I would like to be even closer. I would like——

THE SHOWMAN.

Come in! come in! buy your tickets! there won't be enough for everybody!

MADAME PLAYS.

That fellow is insufferable with his yelling!

TOBIE.

Oh! I am not listening to him. I think only of you, whom I adore. Ah! if I could obtain a little corner in your heart!

THE SHOWMAN.

There are seats for six sous, four sous, and some for two sous, for the convenience of the public.

MADAME PLAYS.

But, Monsieur Tobie, really I was very far from expecting this! My heart does not give itself so quickly; and to win it——

THE SHOWMAN.

Military men are admitted for half-price, and may keep on their spurs.

TOBIE.

Ah! if it were necessary to love you like Orlando Furioso, I am capable of it. My love is boundless.

THE SHOWMAN.

It is a wonderful, astounding, miraculous exhibition.

MADAME PLAYS.

But how long have you loved me? It seems to have taken you all of a sudden! I can hardly credit it. Pray, what is there about me that attracts you so?

THE SHOWMAN.

Curiosities such as were never seen in any part of the world.

TOBIE.

What is there about you, madame! You ask me that? Why, in my eyes, you are a divinity!

THE SHOWMAN.

An ostrich with a neck as long as a giraffe, who shows his tongue when you don't ask him to.

MADAME PLAYS.

Hush! you say as much to many other women, I am sure. Tell me, Monsieur Pigeonnier, how many mistresses have you?

THE SHOWMAN.

Three panthers, which perform all sorts of tricks.

TOBIE.

Mistresses! I have none! and if I had the good fortune to please you, you would be to me——

THE SHOWMAN.

A real camel, which is absolutely tireless, and stays on its back whole days at a time.

MADAME PLAYS.

Mon Dieu! how tiresome that man is! hasn't he nearly done? (*She nibbles a biscuit.*)

THE SHOWMAN.

This is the hour for feeding the animals.

TOBIE.

Oh! let me kiss that soft, white hand, let me caress that shapely arm.

THE SHOWMAN.

This is the hour when the male camel plays all sorts of tricks on his mate.

MADAME PLAYS.

That clown sets my nerves on edge. What an idea to bring me here! Albert isn't very considerate in his choice of a rendezvous. Oh! Monsieur Pigeonnier, stop that; I won't allow you to touch my knees in that way.

THE SHOWMAN.

Buy your tickets!

TOBIE. (*trying to put his arm round Madame Plays's waist*).

What a graceful figure; you remind me of Venus.

THE SHOWMAN.

There is still room inside; if you are pleased with the show, tell all your friends and acquaintances.

MADAME PLAYS.

Well, well! what are you doing, Monsieur Tobie? such presumption!

THE SHOWMAN.

The curtain will rise in a moment, and you will see what you will see!

At this point, Madame Plays rose with an impatient gesture, crying:

"Oh! I cannot stand it any longer! such things as that clown says! they are too hateful to listen to!"

"He has finished; yes, he certainly has finished his announcement; that noise means that the people are going into the booth."

The booming of a bass-drum and several blasts of a bugle followed the conclusion of the showman's speech. A few greenhorns and idlers entered the booth; but most of the spectators walked away, being well aware that what one sees at the door of such spectacles is always much more amusing than the exhibition inside.

Tobie took Madame Plays by the hand and led her back to her seat, for he was eager to renew the conversation, which was just becoming interesting. The fair dame made no objection, but said, as she resumed her seat:

"Albert doesn't come, and his behavior begins to have a very strange look."

Pigeonnier threw himself at her feet, crying:

"Even so! if he doesn't come, that is an additional reason for you to forget him, to take your revenge, to yield to me."

Madame Plays seemed to hesitate, and somewhat abated her severity toward the young man at her feet; but, as she was arranging her collar, her hand came in contact with the letter she had placed in her bosom. She took it out, saying:

"By the way, I couldn't see to read Albert's letter, on the boulevard. Let us see what he says, and in what terms he recommends you to me. After that, I will decide whether I ought to listen to you."

"Read it! read it!" cried Tobie, thinking that Albert's letter could not fail to have an effect favorable to himself.

Madame Plays read the letter to herself; but as she read on, her cheeks flushed, her eyes shot fire, and her face assumed an expression of the most intense indignation. To understand this change, we must remember that the heedless Albert had written his letter while his friend Mouillot was preparing the menu for their dinner. With no suspicion of what he was doing, but thinking that he was writing only the sentences which came into his mind, he had interspersed some of the dishes which Mouillot mentioned aloud for the behoof of the company; the result was an epistle thus conceived:

"Charming creature, you know how dearly I love you.—For three, that will be enough. Your image is constantly before me.—Calf's head *en tortue*. To save you the annoyance of waiting for me at our rendezvous, I send one of my intimate friends—perfectly fresh. He will stay with you—with white sauce."

Madame Plays did not choose to read any further; she crumpled the note in her hands, threw it on the floor, sprang quickly to her feet, glaring at Tobie with an expression he was utterly unable to understand, and said to him in a voice that trembled with anger:

"Do you know the contents of this letter, monsieur?"

"Do I know it! Why, certainly, dear lady; I dictated part of it to my friend."

"Ah! you dictated it, did you? Then you and your friend are a pair of low-lived curs!"

With that, Madame Plays dealt Tobie a blow that nailed him to his place in utter stupefaction; then, seizing her hat and shawl, which she hardly took time to put on, the wrathful beauty rushed from the room, not deigning to bestow a glance on the person she left there.

Poor Pigeonnier did not stir for several minutes, he was so paralyzed by what had happened to him. At last, he rose and began to pace the floor, crying:

"Ah! this is too much! a blow, because I handed her a letter of recommendation; a blow, when, just before, she had let me touch her knee, and—— It is inconceivable! And, with all the rest, I am out of pocket.—Waiter! waiter!"

The waiter appeared; the expression of his face was even more ironical than before. Tobie had four francs fifty centimes to pay. He paid it, sighing profoundly, and saying to himself:

"If only I can win it back at bouillotte!"

At that moment the showman began again, tapping the canvas with his stick:

"Walk in, messieurs, mesdames; you will see what you will see. Buy your tickets! if you are not satisfied, you'll get your money back."

"The devil take you!" muttered Tobie, as he left the room. "I am not at all satisfied; I have spent money recklessly to-day, and I shan't get it back!"

VIII

THE WINE SHOP.—SCENES AMONG THE COMMON PEOPLE

On the first floor of a wine shop on Rue Saint-Lazare was a room containing several tables; the room was reached by a staircase, which started from the shop itself and ended almost in the middle of the room in question, which was frequented by drinkers who desired to be more at their ease than was possible below.

The room was ordinarily occupied by workmen, loafers, and an occasional peddler. The workmen, after a laborious day, came to the wine shop to take a modest meal and to rest their tired limbs; the others, after idling the greater part of the day, came thither to spend a large part of the night in the same occupation.

Those who had done no work, and consequently had earned nothing, generally spent the most money. Economy is almost always the companion of toil; dissipation, of idleness.

A journeyman mason sat at one of the tables, eating with evident enjoyment a piece of cheese, washed down with a mug of wine; the tempting invitations of his comrades were powerless to induce him to spend another sou, for he was determined to save money and not remain a mere journeyman all his days.

Near by sat a carpenter, with a red nose, bloated face, and eyes blinking with the vapors of wine; he had already emptied several bottles, and, instead of going home to his waiting family, was all ready to drink some more, inviting his acquaintances and even strangers to join him, in order to find an excuse for further tippling, aye, to spend the last sou of the wages he had just received, and for which his wife was waiting in order to buy bread for their children.

At another table was a man about fifty years of age, with gray hair and enormous whiskers, whose costume indicated no special profession. His chin was buried in a piece of ticking, which served him as a cravat; he wore a coat, but it was torn and patched and much too short for him; trousers whose color was no longer distinguishable, fastened behind with strings instead of buckles. On his head was a round hat, if the name can properly be given to a piece of felt torn in several places, and with only a few small fragments of brim. But all this did not prevent the

individual in question from carrying his head erect, scrutinizing everybody who came in, drumming on the table with his knife by way of accompaniment to the songs he sang under his breath, and, in a word, making as much noise as many parties produced, although his repast consisted of only a glass of beer and a piece of bread.

Among the tables surrounded by customers, there was one at which a supper was being served that aroused the envy of most of the other occupants of the room: it was the table occupied by Sans-Cravate, his mistress, and the other two messengers.

The flower girl was seated beside Sans-Cravate, who ate, drank, laughed, talked, sang, and served his guests with food and drink—all without a moment's rest; at times, indeed, he succeeded in doing several things at once.

Mademoiselle Bastringuette did not seem to share her lover's merry humor; she ate heartily, but spoke very little. From time to time, she fixed her eyes on Paul, who sat opposite her; but he always avoided meeting them, the result being that he kept his own eyes on his plate much of the time.

Jean Ficelle sat opposite Sans-Cravate; he did honor to the supper, and handled his knife and fork with great dexterity; but that did not prevent his glancing constantly to right and left, and seeing everything that took place in the room.

"Who wants some rabbit—a little more of the *gibelotte*?" said Sans-Cravate, helping himself from an enormous dish, in which the party had already made a considerable breach. "No one speaks, so I help myself."

"Give me just a bit," said Jean Ficelle, passing his plate.

"That's right!" cried Sans-Cravate, as he helped his comrade; "you're all right, you are! You never lag behind at table. But Paul—what a sluggard! he don't eat, he hardly drinks;—are you sick, my boy?"

"No, indeed," Paul replied, with a smile; "but I am not very hungry."

"Monsieur has something on his mind, and that fills the stomach at the same time!" muttered Bastringuette, sucking a bone.

"Never mind," rejoined Sans-Cravate; "I don't propose to scold him, as long as he came, although he don't seem to be enjoying himself any too much with us."

"*Dame!* we ain't in the dressmaking line, you know," said Bastringuette, in a sarcastic tone; "we don't help dress the swells, we don't spend the day in rooms with waxed and polished floors!"

"Do I?" said Paul, glancing sternly at Bastringuette.

"No; but you're acquainted with people that put on airs and wear gloves! Upon my word," continued Bastringuette, with a sigh, "I've a right good mind to change my trade. I'm not going to sell flowers any more; I'm going to fly higher."

"And sell oranges, eh?" said Sans-Cravate.

"Bah! better than that."

"Herrings, then?"

"What a fool! I tell him I'm going to rise in the world, and he wants me to lower myself to herring! I'm going to be a trousers maker, and save up money; save up money to buy a shop with. I sew well enough now, and I've always had a liking for trousers; that's not surprising, as my mother used to sell 'em under the pillars in the Market."

"Well, don't you worry, sun of my heart; if I often have days like to-day, I'll soon have enough nuggets to buy you a well-stocked shop."

"Oh, yes!" retorted Bastringuette, with a shrug; "all I've got to do is depend on you! it's surprising how you save money; you don't even know how to make people pay what they owe you——"

"What's that? does anyone owe you money?" cried Jean Ficelle, gazing at Sans-Cravate in amazement. "Do you mean to say you've got funds invested? have you had a legacy without telling a friend anything about it? Pass me some more rabbit, then."

"No, no! do you pay any attention to what Bastringuette says? she's talking about some people that I helped to move. There was mighty little to move, and it didn't tire me much; and then, I'd sawed half a cord of wood and done a few errands, so that they owed me six or seven francs, perhaps—a magnificent sum!"

"Oh, yes! it's always like that," rejoined the girl. "Look you—it was last winter; freezing cold, but bright sunlight, and I'd had an idea for a long time that I'd like to go by the railroad to Corbeil, and then take a walk in the forest of Fontainebleau, where they say there's snakes—and I'm very curious to see one, yes, and a big one, too; I've never been afraid of the beasts. So I says to Sans-Cravate: 'You're going to take me to Fontainebleau on the railroad, and we'll have a little spree down there in the country, on the grass; it'll be a little cold, but all the more fun for that; I like to eat and drink on the grass. It's a long time since I've been in the country, and it'll do me good.'—Sans-Cravate felt in his pocket, and found he had only five francs. I says: 'That's a little scant to do things up brown on the grass; we ought to have at least twice that. Let's see if there ain't some way of getting some more cash.'—At that, he says: 'I've got some customers that owe me something; among others that family that lives on the fifth in Rue des Martyrs, that I moved six months ago.'—'Well,' I says, 'if you wait any longer, they'll be moving again, and without your help this time. Go and get your money; a poor messenger has the right to ask for what's owing him, after six months.'—And I urged him so that he decided to go there, but what do you suppose he did?"

"Smashed everything to make 'em pay him," said Jean Ficelle; "at least, that's what I'd have done."

"Oh! no, you wouldn't," said Sans-Cravate; "if you'd seen the poverty of those poor people, you'd have done just what I did, for you couldn't have helped being touched. When I went into their room—they lived up under the eaves—it was near six o'clock in the morning; I found the man and his wife still in bed. They had old towels round their heads for nightcaps, that made 'em look like Turks. They had no bedclothes but an old quilt all full of holes, so they'd piled all their clothes on the bed—old dresses, a pair of trousers, and even old boots! all that to keep 'em warm! And then, in a recess, there was the child's bed—a pretty, red-cheeked little boy, two or three years old—I say, the bed, but it wasn't one! Guess what the child was lying in—an old muff, with hardly any fur left on it; they had stuffed the little fellow into that, and then taken out the drawer of a commode and put him in it for a bed. When he saw me come in, the man said: 'My dear friend, if you have come for what I owe you, I shall have to ask you to be kind enough to wait a little longer; for I've been out of work for a fortnight. We lie in bed as long as possible, because we haven't got anything to make a fire, and what is worse is that I don't know just now what we're going to breakfast on to-day!'—I'd just like to know if I could ask those people for money! I tried to comfort 'em a little, and then I went away."

"That's very well, but he don't tell you the whole story," cried Bastringuette; "he not only didn't ask 'em for what was owing him, but he left on that poor man's mantelpiece the only five-franc piece he owned; so, instead of bringing back twice what he had, so that we could have some fun, he came back without a sou!"

Paul seized Sans-Cravate's hand and shook it warmly, crying:

"Ah! that was fine, Sans-Cravate! that was a fine thing you did! you have a warm heart, you're a good fellow!"

"Oh! *pardi!* what a fuss over nothing!" rejoined the messenger, filling his glass; "of course, that little fellow in the muff had to have some breakfast! My credit's good at the wine shop, you see, so I could wait."

"If all creditors acted like that," muttered Jean Ficelle, "trade would be pretty bad.—I say, Laboussole, if your creditors gave you five francs, that would suit you down to the ground, eh?"

This apostrophe was addressed to the individual with the striped cravat, who had long since finished his beer, but was still chewing his bread and beating the table with his knife as if he were playing a drum. He thrust out his chin toward his interlocutor, and replied with a sprightly air:

"I should be a millionaire! as it is, I'm strapped. What do you expect? you see that every day! and I've known what it is to eat roast veal and lettuce, and to drink all the wine I wanted. We all have our ups and downs [*bas*]."

"But he hasn't any stockings [*bas*], just now," murmured Bastringuette, after a glance at Laboussole; "that fellow looks to me like an old pickpocket."

"Not at all," said Jean Ficelle; "he's a man who used to have great talent in his line. But, you see, he has had hard luck."

"What was his line?"

"He was an inspector at the Market."

"The devil! that's a good place; why did he lose it?"

"Oh! they put up a dirty game on him—stuffed fish and chickens in his pockets, and then said he stole 'em—a low-down trick, I say! One day, when he had a salmon in one pocket and a turkey in another, they had the cheek to arrest him and dismiss him for it."

"Couldn't the man tell when he had fish about him?" said Bastringuette.

"Apparently not; there's so much of it at the Market that you walk on it."

"All the same, his innocence looks to me almighty muddy! What does he do now?"

"He sells tickets for the *Belle-en-Cuisse* ball, on Rue des Martyrs, near the barrier. But when there's no ball, he's *smoked*, and that's the case to-day."

"I say, old boy, won't you have a drink with us?" said Sans-Cravate, raising his glass toward Laboussole, who accepted the invitation as soon as he understood it, and brought his glass to the messengers' table, saying:

"I never refuse a drink of wine."

Bastringuette made an angry gesture, and muttered between her teeth:

"What a stupid fool that Sans-Cravate is! As if we wanted that old fossil! But as soon as he has a shiner or two, he's for treating everybody he sees; so he don't keep 'em long!"

Paul seemed no better pleased than Bastringuette to be at the same table with the ex-inspector, and he moved his chair away from that gentleman's, who thereupon seized the opportunity to move close to the table; and drawing toward him the dish of rabbit, in which only the head remained, he began to lap it with his tongue, humming:

"'When a man knows how to love and please,
What other blessing does he need?'"

"Well, I think we'll have a little dessert," said Sans-Cravate; "we mustn't stop at rabbit stew.—Come, Bastringuette, what do you want for dessert?"

"Sausage with garlic," replied the girl.

"Agreed!—Here, waiter! four sausages with garlic, and see that they're spiced in the good old style—no, five, for Laboussole will take care of one—eh, old boy?"

"I never refused a sausage," replied that individual, continuing his perquisitions into every cavity of the rabbit's head.

"Good God! you're eating the eyes!" cried Jean Ficelle, who was watching Laboussole at work.

"I'd eat yours, if you was stewed. I'm very fond of that tidbit."

The sausages were brought. Each guest took one, except Paul, who declared that he was not hungry. Whereupon Jean Ficelle assumed his bantering air, and remarked:

"They ain't sweet enough for him."

And Bastringuette added:

"Perhaps his skirt cutter don't like the taste of garlic!"

"I say, comrade, you don't keep up your end!" cried Sans-Cravate, forcing Paul to let him fill his glass. "Don't you enjoy being with your friends?"

"There's no doubt about it," said Jean Ficelle; "Paul's acting damned queer. Anyone would say that it made him sore to be at the wine shop with us."

"Why do you attribute such thoughts to me?" rejoined Paul; "am I any different from you two? What am I but a messenger, like you? As for the wine shop, as I come here very seldom, it's not surprising that I don't seem so much at home as you."

"You say you don't come to the wine shop often?" cried Laboussole, eating his sausage with great zest. "You make a mistake, young man; the wine shop's the only place where one can enjoy life. It's the rendezvous of good company. I'd like never to leave it, myself!"

Paul made no reply, but turned his back on Laboussole, while Jean added maliciously:

"*Dame!* a man don't go to the wine shop when he can play the swell! and I'm told that friend Paul has been seen

now and then in a fine rig, with a hat instead of a cap."

"Oho!" cried Sans-Cravate, emptying his glass; "how's that, comrade, do you play the swell now and then?"

"It's all a mistake," murmured Paul, evidently annoyed by the question.

"I've got good eyes, myself," said Laboussole, tilting his remnant of a hat over one ear. "Yes, I saw our friend, not more than a week ago, in the Marais, and he was dressed a good deal like a wholesale grocer."

"Aha! aha!" said Bastringuette, fastening her great black eyes on Paul's face; "are you a prince disguised as a messenger? It seems to me that I've heard some such fairy tale as that. If that's so, and you want to make my fortune, don't be bashful—I'll accept."

"I am nothing more than I appear to be," replied Paul, with a sigh; "but I have good eyes, too, and I saw monsieur in front of a game of chance under Pont d'Austerlitz."

The ex-inspector was evidently embarrassed, and tried to pull his hat over his eyes; he glanced at Jean Ficelle and rejoined in a hoarse voice:

"That may be! What is there surprising in that? A man goes out for a stroll, and stops in front of any show he sees. That's the way we sail down the river of life."

"Come, let's drink and sing!" cried Sans-Cravate. "What's the odds how a man's dressed, or where he walks? Ain't we our own masters? ain't liberty as much for one man as another?"

"That's my opinion," replied Laboussole, holding out his glass, the contents of which he swallowed with the facility of an Englishman drinking champagne. "You're what I call a man, you are, Sans-Cravate! and I'm your friend from this minute."

"I don't doubt it!" muttered Bastringuette; "he's anybody's friend who'll treat him—eh, Paul? Well, Cupid, why don't you answer, instead of looking at the floor like a girl? Don't you know it's indecent not to look at a woman when she speaks to you?"

Paul seemed not to hear, and made no reply. As for Sans-Cravate, the frequent bumpers he had drunk were beginning to excite his brain and becloud his eyes. He did not notice the glances that his mistress bestowed upon her vis-à-vis; but Jean Ficelle, who saw everything, smiled malignantly as he muttered between his teeth, though loudly enough for Sans-Cravate to hear:

"What infernal traitors women are! If I had a mistress, I'd never take her into company, unless there was nobody else there."

"Well," observed the shabbily clad guest, attacking the sausage Paul had refused, "business don't seem to be very bad, my friends, for your life is watered with wine."

"I had a good evening," said Sans-Cravate; "fifteen francs for one errand!"

"Peste! is it a duke and peer that you work for, my friend?"

"No; but a young man who lives well! *Bigre!* that's the kind of a spark I like. He's open-handed, I tell you!"

"He ain't like mine," said Jean Ficelle; "he flung me a paltry two-franc piece for trotting about more than two hours."

"Mine gave me even less than that," said Paul; "and yet I had to wait a long while in several places."

"Ah! my patron's the boy for me," continued Sans-Cravate; "he's a jolly fellow, and a good one, too! He enjoys himself and wants other people to do the same. Yes, he's a good fellow; let's drink to the health of Monsieur Albert Vermoncey."

"That's the talk! Here's to him!"

"Well, Paul, aren't you going to drink?"

"I'm not thirsty."

"Does that prevent your drinking? Come on!"

"No; I've no desire to get drunk."

"Bah! what a soft-head! You're not a man, then; you're an old woman! As if a man ever refused to drink with friends!"

"No, no," said Jean Ficelle, who was doing his best to set Sans-Cravate against his young comrade; "he insults us."

"A man never refuses to drink," said Monsieur Laboussole, touching his glass to Paul's; but the young messenger took his glass and threw it on the floor, saying:

"I don't choose to drink with you, I say!"

The man with the shapeless hat seemed to view this rebuff with indifference, and contented himself with the retort:

"Young man, he who breaks glasses—you know the rest, don't you?"

But Sans-Cravate, inflamed by the wine he had drunk, sprang to his feet, crying:

"*Sacrédié!* I don't like such manners myself, and if it had been anybody else—— But you'd better not do it again, or ——"

"Well, what?" cried Bastringuette, rising also, and planting herself in front of Sans-Cravate; "are we going to kick up a row? If we are, why, I'll make more noise than you! Who ever heard of getting mad with a friend because he didn't want to drink? Ain't Paul his own master? For my part, I say he's quite right not to get drunk like you people! When you're drunk, you're just like brutes, you're good for nothing but fighting; and if you think anybody loves you, why, you're damnably mistaken!"

"See how she takes his part!" exclaimed Jean Ficelle; "if you was in love with the man, it wouldn't be any worse."

"If I'm in love with anyone," retorted Bastringuette, "it ain't with you, that's sure!"

Sans-Cravate, who was getting more and more excited, and whose jealousy was beginning to blaze under the influence of Jean Ficelle's hints and malicious remarks, seized the girl's arm, as she stood beside him, and shook her roughly.

"It seems to me, also," he cried, "that you take up my comrade's defence much too warmly! Do you know, I don't like that. Does it mean that you're inclined to play tricks on me?"

Bastringuette, with a violent wrench, released her arm from the hand that held it; and snatching a plate from the table, held it over Sans-Cravate's head, as if to strike him with it. Her face was pale, her eyebrows drew together, her eyes flashed fire. There was in her wrath something which embellished her features and almost imparted distinction to them; everyone was impressed, and Sans-Cravate stood perfectly still, apparently resigned to receive the threatened blow.

"I ought to break this plate over your head," said Bastringuette; "yes, that I ought, to teach you to shake my arm like that! If I still loved you, I'd do it; but as I don't love you any more, I forgive you."

As she spoke, she put the plate back on the table. Sans-Cravate glanced at her with a disturbed expression, and said in a faltering tone:

"Ah! you don't love me any more?"

"No," rejoined Bastringuette, dwelling upon every word. "I am outspoken. I don't propose to play tricks on you, as you seem to fear. But from this moment I am not your mistress; I take back my liberty."

"What! do you mean it?"

"Oh! I don't make any mystery of it, you see; I say it right out before everybody."

"But——"

"But what? We ain't bound together in such a way that we can't separate. Would you rather have me do like the women in society? stay with you, when I don't love you, and deceive you all day? That ain't my style."

"If you don't love me any more, then you must love somebody else!"

"*Pardi!* that's easy to guess!" muttered Jean Ficelle.

"No matter who I love! it's none of your business! Love whoever you please! I don't care a hair of monsieur's whiskers!"

And the tall girl pointed to Laboussole, who smiled and caressed his whiskers, saying:

"All women don't talk that way."

"Ah! so that's how it is!" cried Sans-Cravate, emptying his glass; while Bastringuette resumed her seat at the table, apparently much calmer. "All right! as you choose! To the devil with love, and women! Let's have a drink, my friends; let's have a drink!"

"But it's late," said Paul; "I hear them closing downstairs. Aren't we going now, Sans-Cravate?"

"Go, if you choose—I am going to stay, with my friends, with my true friends!" retorted Sans-Cravate, glaring angrily at the young man.

"No; you are going with me; you have had enough to drink; you mustn't get drunk!"

"What business is it of yours, if it suits me to get drunk? I'm my own master, too. I haven't any woman now to bother me, and bore me to death. *Crédié!* how I will make things hum now!"

"That will be very pretty!" murmured Bastringuette. "He'll do some fine things. For my part, I don't want anything more to do with men who make beasts of themselves with drink! I prefer a sober lover—they're more refined in their love making."

"Drink! drink! more wine, waiter!" cried Sans-Cravate, determined to befuddle himself still more, in order to avoid manifesting his chagrin over his rupture with his mistress.

"That's the talk!" said Jean Ficelle. "Sound men never sulk! Let the maggoty ones go! we can do without 'em!"

"O my friends!" cried Laboussole, in a sentimental tone, "when we are so comfortable together, we mustn't think of separating; let's stay here a week—what do you say? Good! we will!"

Paul leaned over toward Bastringuette, and said in an undertone:

"You are responsible for Sans-Cravate's getting drunk. He is drinking to forget the grief you have caused him by telling him that you meant to leave him! and it may result in some catastrophe."

"What do I care? I'm done with him. I don't love him any more; I love somebody else, and that somebody else is you."

Paul drew back without replying. At that moment, they heard roars of laughter in another part of the room, where the red-nosed carpenter, surrounded by drinkers, was saying:

"Yes. I'll bet I can do it. Yes, I say, I'll bet I can, and that nobody else'll do it after me. Bah! you're a pack of cowards, you don't dare to bet!"

"Ah! there's Cagnoux up to his tricks!" said Jean Ficelle; "challenging everybody, as usual."

Sans-Cravate left his place and walked to the carpenter's table.

"What is it you're going to do that the others won't do?" he asked. "That's a pretty good one! Do you think there's no cocks here of your size, Cagnoux?"

"That's so," muttered Laboussole, emptying all the bottles into his glass; "yes, we're up to anything, we are! you'd better not defy us."

The carpenter, who was completely drunk, succeeded in getting on his feet, nevertheless; and trying hard to stand without staggering, raised an enormous glass and said:

"You see this glass, don't you? holds a pint. Just fill it with brandy, and I'll empty it at one draught; there ain't one of you smart enough to do as much."

"Parbleu! that's a wonderful thing," cried Sans-Cravate; "to drink that glassful of brandy; that ain't very hard."

"Sans-Cravate is quite capable of trying it," said Jean Ficelle, who also had left his seat, to join the bystanders. "Yes, I know him; he'll do it. If I hadn't a pain in the stomach, I'd do it myself."

"I'll bet six quarts for the company that I'll drink that glassful of brandy at one draught, without stopping for breath; do you take me, old Cagnoux?"

"Done!" replied the carpenter; "shake."

Sans-Cravate stepped forward to take the hand that Cagnoux held out; but that worthy, being unable to keep his legs any longer, fell back on his chair, and the messenger's hand struck him on top of the head and knocked his old cap over his nose. This episode was greeted with shouts of laughter. The carpenter laughed with the rest, and,

having extricated himself from his cap, exclaimed:

"Bring the brandy, and, if he loses, I'll make the same bet."

Thereupon Paul rose, and, paying no heed to Bastringuette, who asked him if he would not go away with her, ran to Sans-Cravate and grasped his hand.

"Sans-Cravate, surely you're not going to take that bet. You are not going to be crazy enough to drink that enormous glassful of brandy!"

"Why not, I'd like to know?" rejoined the messenger, withdrawing his hand. "If I choose to do it, is it any of your business? Go and court Bastringuette, and leave us in peace!"

"You know very well that I am not in love with your mistress."

"Oh! she ain't my mistress any more; it's all one to me whether she's yours or not."

The tone in which Sans-Cravate spoke indicated that he was not so indifferent as he claimed to be with respect to the flower girl's becoming Paul's mistress; but the younger man tried to take his comrade's hand again, saying:

"Come, come, let's not say anything more about Bastringuette! Your quarrel with her is none of my business; and, besides, you'll make it up to-morrow. But I beg you not to drink that enormous quantity of brandy; it is very dangerous; it may kill you!"

"Bah! and if it does, I don't care!"

"The bet is taken! it's too late to back out," said Jean Ficelle, rubbing his hands.

"Yes, a bet's a sacred thing," observed Monsieur Laboussole, who had at last decided to leave the table, on which there was nothing more to drink, and join the crowd around Sans-Cravate and Cagnoux. "I don't know anything more sacred than a bet! Once I bet that I'd eat a tremendous great fried carp, with all its bones. When I'd put down about three-quarters of it, I found I was strangling; but I'd made the bet, so I kept on. I tore my throat with a bone, and it was sore for six months; but I won the bet, which was ten sous, and my honor was safe!"

The waiter appeared with a huge measure of brandy; while he was filling the mammoth glass, Paul went up to Sans-Cravate once more, and said to him:

"I am less excited than the others, and I am your friend; for heaven's sake, listen to me!"

"You're not my friend any more; besides, you broke your glass rather than drink with me—I haven't forgotten that."

"It wasn't you that I didn't want to drink with; it was Laboussole, and you'll see later whether I was right or not."

At that moment, there was a general cry of:

"The glass is full! Come, Sans-Cravate, now's the time to show what you're made of!"

"Here I am!" replied the messenger, roughly shaking himself clear of Paul's grasp and approaching the table on which stood the subject of the wager.

But Paul was too quick for him; he ran to the table, reached it first, and with the back of his hand knocked the glass to the floor, where it broke in a thousand pieces, and the brandy ran in all directions.

The young messenger's act was followed by a growl of dissatisfaction and menace. Some of the bystanders seemed to be dazed by the bare idea that a man could make up his mind to waste such an enormous quantity of the precious liquid; and Monsieur Laboussole, heedless of the danger of staining his trousers, instantly dropped on all fours, and, putting his tongue to the boards, tried to lap up a part of it.

But Sans-Cravate, beside himself with rage and crazy with drink, rushed at Paul and seized him around the waist, saying in a threatening tone:

"That's an insult! You meant to keep me from winning my bet, but you've got to give me satisfaction! We are going to fight, do you hear? Look out for yourself, for I shall strike hard!"

"Yes, yes!" shouted Jean Ficelle; "he insulted Sans-Cravate, he insulted Cagnoux, he insulted all of us, by breaking that glass. He must have a licking! we must give him a lesson! that will teach him to behave better in a wine shop."

And Monsieur Laboussole, still lapping the brandy on the floor, added in a voice half stifled by his attitude:

"We must beat him; or else make him pay for twice the quantity of brandy for the company."

Thereupon Bastringuette stepped into the midst of the men who surrounded the young messenger, and, planting herself in front of him, cried:

"Is the whole lot of you going to take sides against him? That's brave of you—a dozen against one! I tell you not to lay a finger on him, or I'll scratch all your eyes out!"

But Sans-Cravate pushed the girl aside with a turn of his wrist.

"He ain't going to fight any twelve men, but just me alone," he said.—"Come on, are you ready?"

"No," replied Paul, who had remained perfectly calm amid all the uproar, "no, I won't fight with you."

"Then you're a coward!"

"I am not a coward. Let any other man come forward, and I'll agree to fight with him; but not with you, Sans-Cravate, for you're out of your head now, and to-morrow you'll be sorry that you struck your friend."

"Ah! he's crawling! he's crawling!" cried Jean Ficelle. "He wants to make us think Sans-Cravate has drunk too much."

"I am the one you made a fool of by breaking that glass, and you've got to fight with me!" repeated Sans-Cravate. "*Crédié!* come on, and have done with it, or I'll knock you down!"

The powerful messenger shook his fist at Paul, who remained unmoved and seemed to have determined not to avoid the blow; while all the men who stood about drew back to leave more room for the combatants, upon whom every eye was fixed.

But an unforeseen incident interrupted the scene. Heavy, measured steps were heard in the wine shop below, followed by the sound of muskets striking the floor; at the same instant, the waiter appeared at the top of the stairs, with a terror-stricken air, crying:

"The watch! here's the watch! they're coming up here!"

"The watch!" muttered several of the bystanders; "what are they doing here?"—"It isn't twelve o'clock."—"We have

a right to drink."—"I won't go away, for one."

"They've come for something else," said the waiter; "there's two detectives with the soldiers; they've come to arrest someone, I suppose."

The workmen and the drunkards seemed but little affected by the news. But Monsieur Laboussole, who was still on all fours, crawled under a table, although there was no brandy there.

The soldiers and detectives came upstairs almost at the waiter's heels. They entered the room, leaving two soldiers to watch the stairway.

"Why in the devil do you come here and disturb us?" demanded Sans-Cravate. "We've no business with you. I'd like to know if we ain't at liberty to drink and sing, and quarrel a little too, if we want to?"

The detectives, who had already scrutinized everybody in the room, did not answer Sans-Cravate; but one of them went to the table under which the ex-inspector of the Market had taken refuge, and dragged him forth from his hiding-place by the legs.

"This is the gentleman we're looking for," he said.—"Come, up with you! you must go with us!"

"Messieurs," cried Laboussole, trying to bury his nose in his cravat, "this is a mistake, I assure you; I must be the victim of an unfortunate resemblance. I know more than twenty men who look like me."

"No, no, you're the man we want; come, off you go—and step lively!"

"What are you arresting this man for?" demanded Sans-Cravate; while Jean Ficelle pulled him by the jacket and whispered in his ear:

"Defend him! thrash the curs! you're strong enough."

"Because he's a thief!" replied the detective, pushing Laboussole toward the stairs.

Paul glanced at Sans-Cravate, who turned pale and neither moved nor spoke. The word *thief* had sobered him in an instant.

IX

A STUDIO PARTY.—A FETICH.—THE BURGUNDIAN

It is very disagreeable to be disappointed in one's expectations; but the disappointment is especially keen after an amorous rendezvous: you have dreamed of happiness in its most seductive form; your imagination has conceived the most touching pictures, the most gratifying situations. All these thoughts have heated your brain and your mind—when you have one—and your passions at least, in default of a mind; and when all your anticipations result in nothing at all, you beat a retreat in dire distress, like the crow in the fable. But if, instead of the kisses that you hoped to steal, you have received a blow, you are quite justified in being vexed and angry, as well as distressed.

It is said that a blow from a woman's hand does no harm; doubtless because, being often dealt in obedience to a hasty impulse, it is followed by repentance, and the recipient is accorded the privilege of earning another. But take a sharp, stinging blow, and nothing more. I doubt whether the fact that it was delivered by the loveliest of women and the prettiest hand would make it welcome to you.

You will say, perhaps, that Madame Plays had not given young Pigeonnier a rendezvous. True; but she had accepted his escort, she had consented to go to a private dining-room with him; and those concessions, in the judgment of discerning persons, would be tantamount to giving her consent that he should take Albert's place in every respect.

The little fellow reflected profoundly, as he walked from the Champs-Élysées to Rue Taitbout; he walked very fast, for one rarely moves slowly when intensely excited.

"Can it be that Albert didn't write what he dictated to himself?" he thought. "I ought to have read his letter before delivering it. Can he have written some insulting thing about her? Was it a deliberate scheme to make a fool of me? *Fichtre!* if I knew that, he'd hear something more from me! I don't propose to be made a guy of!"

In his excitement, the young man brandished his beautiful gold-headed cane, as if he proposed to break somebody's head; and in his gesticulations he came within an ace of knocking off the hat of a respectable lady, its somewhat exaggerated brim happening to be directly under his cane as he imitated the exploits of a drum-major. Luckily, the ribbons tied under the lady's chin prevented the hat from falling, and it was simply thrown back on her shoulders. But the gentleman who was with the lady, and who was indignant that a passer-by should presume to knock his wife's hat off with a cane, walked up to Tobie, and said to him in a threatening tone:

"I say, monsieur, what sort of a performance is this? You threaten us with your cane! You nearly put my wife's eye out, and you knocked off her hat, which would have fallen into the street if it hadn't been for the ribbons!"

"Oh! monsieur, madame, a thousand pardons!" stammered Tobie; "I was so preoccupied—I didn't see you."

"What! are we dwarfs?"

"No, monsieur—far from it; you are very tall. But when a man is thinking about something else——"

"That's a fine reason! We were thinking of something else, too, monsieur. Do you suppose we were thinking of your cane? By heaven! if you had destroyed my wife's eye, you wouldn't have taken your own home with you!"

"I am sure of it, monsieur; I ask a thousand pardons."

"When you carry a cane, monsieur, you ought to know how to use it."

"It was because I thought that I was using it that I was gesticulating with it."

During this colloquy the lady had readjusted her hat; and she drew her husband away, saying:

"Come, my dear; as monsieur did it accidentally, let's accept his apologies."

"Accidentally! upon my word, it would be very pretty if he had intended to do it! By all the devils! if I believed that——"

And the gentleman, becoming more and more enraged as he became more convinced of his adversary's terror, began to grind his teeth and act as if he proposed to fall upon Tobie; but Tobie was already far away; he had taken to

his heels, trying to thrust his cane into his pocket, as a means of avoiding any further disaster.

This incident calmed the young man's excitement.

"I cannot accuse Albert," he said to himself, as he reached the painter's door; "I have no proofs. I ought to have picked up the letter, when Madame Plays threw it on the floor. I'll go back to the café to-morrow and ask the waiter if he found it. Meanwhile, I won't be such a donkey as to tell what happened to me, for they would laugh at me unmercifully. On the contrary, I must make them think that my triumph was complete."

Balivan lived on Rue Taitbout, in the same house as young Elina and her aunt. His apartments were on the third floor; he had three small rooms, and a studio which was large enough for him, as he painted nothing but portraits.

Several times, as he was returning home, the young artist had met the little dressmaker going to her work; and he had been impressed by her beauty. Knowing that she was his neighbor, he had tried to form an acquaintance with her, and had proposed to paint her portrait, if she would be his model for a study which he intended to exhibit at the Salon. But Elina had declined his offers, and had always refused to enter the painter's studio. And yet, it is a very pleasant thing to have one's own portrait. How many women and girls allow themselves to be allured by such an offer, by the desire to see their faces at the Salon, and to have an opportunity to listen to the compliments certain to be lavished upon them. What joy to say to their companions in the workroom: "My portrait is at the Salon; I represent an Italian peasant—a Swiss peasant—and a wood nymph. The painter insisted on putting my face in all his pictures."—Elina, too, had been tempted; but she had resisted the temptation. To be sure, Balivan was very ugly.

The artist's studio was lighted by a lamp placed on the stove; its rays fell upon a full-length portrait of a very pretty woman in a ball dress, and upon the head of an old soldier, whose nose was not finished; scattered here and there, on the floor, or hung on the walls, were various canvases, in all stages of completion, from the merest sketch to the finished portrait. Some plaster busts, easels, a manikin in female dress, sketches, and several portraits refused admission to the Salon, or by the persons for whom they were painted, and relegated by the artist to the darkest corners of the studio, combined to give a unique aspect to the apartment.

Four young men, seated around a table in the middle of the room, were enjoying with great zest the pleasures of bouillotte. On a small table, close at hand, stood an enormous salad bowl filled with blazing punch; and glasses, pipes, cigars, tobacco pouches, and even snuffboxes, were scattered over another small table of Chinese lacquer, which had momentarily deserted the artist's salon to embellish his studio.

When Tobie appeared, the card table was occupied by Albert, Célestin, Mouillot, and a young man, who was not of the dinner party at the Maison-Dorée, but had joined the band of roisterers when they left the restaurant, and had asked for nothing better than to pass the night with them at bouillotte.

This young man, who was the possessor of an insignificant and utterly expressionless face, had hair so light that it was almost white, and eyebrows of the same color, which gave him some resemblance to an albino; still, in spite of that, he might have been considered a good-looking fellow enough, if his manner had been less indolent; but he had about twelve thousand francs a year, which his family permitted him to consume in Paris; the result being that in society, and especially among the high livers, Monsieur Varinet's company was much sought after. Not that he was amiable and jovial in society: he was always cold and impassive, and not even wine had the power to enliven him; but he spent his money with the same indifference which he displayed in every other action of his life; and he would lose large sums at cards without any sign of emotion. All his friends esteemed him highly on that account.

Gold and silver were scattered over the table, and the animated air of the players indicated that the game was beginning to be warm.

Balivan himself was filling the glasses with punch, and Dupétrain sat in front of the manikin dressed as a woman, which he seemed to be scrutinizing with care.

"Ah! here's Tobie! *Vive Tobie!*" cried the artist, as Pigeonnier entered the room. And, despite their absorbing interest in the game, the card players joined in the cry:

"Here's Tobie! Here's that Don Juan of a Tobie!"

The young man with white eyebrows was the only one who said nothing; he contented himself with saluting the new-comer, as one salutes a person with whom he is but slightly acquainted.

"Yes, messieurs, it's I," said Pigeonnier, wiping his forehead. "You are well started already, I see. I speak for a place."

"You can come in with Balivan," said Célestin. "There are six of us now; two will go out on the quarter-hour."

"And Monsieur Dupétrain?"

"Who ever heard of Dupétrain playing cards? Upon my soul, I believe he's trying to magnetize my manikin!"

"Well, Tobie," said Albert, "what news of our fair one? Are you content? Did she accept the substitution with a good grace?"

"I am perfectly content!" Pigeonnier replied, trying to assume a triumphant swagger. "She didn't seem at all angry over the adventure; she treated me very kindly."

"Good—I understand. So everything went as you wished, eh?"

"In other words, it is impossible for me to be happier than I have been."

"What did I tell you?"

"You're not attending to your game, Albert," said Célestin.

"Yes, I am. I have opened."

"I take all bets."

"Done!"

"You're stuck! I have *misty*."[C]

"What infernal luck! That makes four hundred francs I've lost already!—I say, Balivan, give me some punch, to drown my loss."

"Give me a cigar, Balivan."

"Balivan, you promised me your Moorish pipe; you are going to give it to me, aren't you?"

"Pass me your tobacco pouch, will you?"

"One moment, messieurs, I can't do everything; I'm going to call my lady's-maid, on condition that you treat her with respect.—Hallo, there, Crevette!"

"Is Crevette your servant's name?" inquired Tobie, helping himself to punch.

"Yes, she's a Burgundian; she had a name that I didn't fancy—it was Cateau![D] You understand that, when I had a lady of fashion here, I couldn't say: 'Cateau, come and take off madame's shawl. Cateau, go and call a cab.' To talk constantly of Cateau before my models, too, was imprudent. So I asked my Burgundian for her family name, and she's a Crevette."

The Burgundian answered her master's summons. She was a robust young woman, with plump red cheeks, and enormous hands and arms of the hue of boiled lobster. She laughed readily enough at the somewhat décolleté jests which the young men addressed to her; but when their words were reinforced by gestures, the Burgundian made free use of her hands, and the lightest tap dealt by her was equivalent to a hard blow with the fist.

"Bring us something to drink, Crevette."

"Punch?" said the Burgundian.

"Beer for me, my chubby wench!—Isn't she fresh, though! and solid!"

"Come, come! down with your paws! I won't have you touching me!"

"Oh! what a calf she must have!—Crevette, show me your leg, just up to the garter, and I'll give you half of my winnings."

"No, I won't show you anything."

"Parbleu! that's a magnificent offer of his, to give you half of his winnings! he's lost ten napoleons already!"

Young Tobie, who had swallowed three glasses of punch in succession in order to attain the level of the rest of the company, softly approached the servant and seized her leg while her back was turned; but the Burgundian, without putting down her tray, instantly brought her elbow back against his nose, crying:

"Let that teach you to pinch me! I'm going to bed—I won't come into your studio again, monsieur; your friends are too enterprising."

Crevette vanished; Tobie put his hand to his nose and seated himself in a corner, muttering:

"I won't fool with her any more; there's no feeling in my nose."

"Poor Tobie! but he can't seem to get enough. He comes here fresh from a delicious tête-à-tête with a charming woman, and he must needs begin at once on a servant! What an omnibus seducer!"

"What would he do, I wonder," said Balivan, "if he should see my little neighbor overhead?"

"You have a pretty neighbor, have you?" queried Albert.

"Charming! Seventeen years old at most, I judge; a fascinating figure! and a saucy, mischievous face—with innocence, grace, and modesty in her glance. Seriously, she's one of the prettiest grisettes I ever saw."

"Send for her!" cried the young men in chorus.

"Make her come down, Balivan."

"Shall I go up and fetch her?" asked Tobie, taking his hand from his nose, which was badly swollen by the blow he had received.

"I will magnetize her; she will enjoy that," said Dupétrain.

"No, messieurs," said Balivan, "there's no way of inducing her to come here. Parbleu! if it could be done, I'd ask nothing better. I have offered again and again to paint her portrait and give it to her—to paint her in any costume she chose."

"Even as Eve, if she wanted you to, eh?"

"All my offers have been declined. She's a virtuous young woman, it would seem. She lives with her aunt, and never goes out except to her work; she's a dressmaker."

"Ha! ha!" laughed Célestin; "she's a dressmaker, and you haven't triumphed over her, my dear fellow! Others may succeed better; and if I should take a hand——"

"Oh! you are such a superb creature, it's quite possible. Still, I doubt it."

"What do you want to bet?"

"Come, attend to your game, messieurs, for God's sake!" said Mouillot. "Sapristi! I have *misty*, and not one of you stands!"

"Monsieur had *brelan*, and he passed!" cried Tobie. "What a blunder!"

"Not at all. Do you think we're playing *brelan*?"

"You're not playing *brelan?* Why, aren't you playing bouillotte?"

"Yes, but the *brelan*[E] is never played in bouillotte, nowadays. Where have you been, young Pigeonnier?"

"What do you play, then?"

"*Misty.*"

"What's *misty*?"

"The knave of clubs with two cards of the same color and same size; for instance, two red nines, or two black aces."

"Very well. And the *brelan* doesn't count, you say?"

"Not unless *misty* isn't out; in that case, it's good."

"And the *brelan carré*?"

"Oh! that's always good, and it beats *misty*."

"The devil! I'm rather mixed up with all this; I'm afraid I shall make mistakes."

"Oh, no! you'll get hold of it in a minute."

Monsieur Dupétrain walked up to Tobie, who was standing by the card table, and said:

"While you're not playing, I can tell you the anecdote about magnetism that you were so curious to hear. After you left the dinner table, I didn't choose to tell it; I preferred to wait for you.—A young married woman, whose husband

had just started on a journey——"

"Excuse me," said Tobie, "but I am studying *misty;* I don't quite understand this new way of playing bouillotte, and I shall be very glad not to make any mistakes. Besides, the quarter has struck, messieurs. Who goes out?"

"Mouillot and Célestin.—Come, messieurs, give up your seats."

"We'll just finish the *volante*, then we'll go."

"The *volante*?" exclaimed Tobie; "what in the deuce is that?"

"Each person puts in a chip when everyone passes, and you keep putting in one as long as they pass."

"The devil! that may mount up pretty high, messieurs! why, you are playing an infernal game!"

"Does it frighten you, Monsieur Tobie?"

"I don't say that. What's the stake?"

"Five francs."

The stout youth felt in his pocket, where he found only enough for one stake and half of another. However, he assumed a self-assured air as he took the seat vacated by Célestin, while the artist replaced the jovial Mouillot.

"Célestin has made his little pile!" laughed Albert.

"I? oh, no! I have made myself good, that's all!—Come, Balivan, to return to your pretty neighbor,—do you want to bet my portrait that I don't succeed in seducing her?"

"Yes. But let us understand each other: if I lose, I'll paint your portrait for nothing."

"Just so."

"But if I win?"

"Then I'll pay you for the portrait."

"Indeed! what a generous youth! Where do I gain anything in that, I wonder?"

"Messieurs," said Mouillot, "I'll bet something much more agreeable for the company. I'll bet that I get the little neighbor to come down here."

"Ah! that's something like."

"You said that she lived overhead, Balivan?"

"Yes."

"Very good! just give me a hammer; I'll demolish the ceiling, and then the fascinating grisette will fall through."

"Ha! ha! a famous method!"

Young Tobie, who had already lost his stake, and had taken money from the pool to make up the second one, was no longer in the mood for laughing.

"I say, messieurs," he cried, "just because you're not playing now, you prevent other people from playing. Leave us in peace, will you? I have lost a pile of money already. I keep making mistakes; I have *misty*, and don't see it."

"Bah! a pile of money! he's lost his stake once."

"Besides, my dear fellow, a man can't expect luck in everything. You have just come from a tête-à-tête in which a pretty woman has crowned you with myrtle! you can afford to lose your money."

Tobie bit his lips in vexation and made no reply.

"And then, too, he pinched Crevette's leg!" laughed Mouillot.

"And he has a swollen nose," added Célestin. "The fellow is lucky on all sides.—Some punch, messieurs?"

"With pleasure. I bet twenty francs."

"I take it," said Tobie.

"And I. Show down."

The hands were placed on the table. Monsieur Varinet, who had followed Tobie, had *misty*; but the stout youth, who had three aces, pounced on the money, thinking that he had won. His white-eyebrowed antagonist checked him with the utmost coolness, saying:

"What are you doing? don't you see that I have *misty*?"

"And don't you see that I have three aces?"

"Your three aces amount to nothing, as we're not playing the *brelan*."

"Oh! mon Dieu! I had quite forgotten that; I never thought of it! It's a mistake, messieurs; the hand ought to be thrown out."

"Not at all," said Albert; "you must pay attention; besides, you might have won with your three aces, if you hadn't run against a *misty*. Come, pay up, my dear fellow. Parbleu! you're not so badly off! you're less than thirty francs to the bad."

"Thirty francs fifty, and now I've lost my stake again! This is very fine!"

"Ingrate! after being so lucky in love, not to be willing to be unlucky at play."

"I don't see the necessity of losing all the time."

"Think of Madame Plays, and complain if you dare!"

Young Tobie made a wry face every time Madame Plays was mentioned, and he looked furtively at Albert, muttering between his teeth. After feeling in all his pockets, he feigned an air of astonishment, saying:

"Well, well! I haven't any more money."

"You must have discovered that before," suggested Balivan, "as you have already taken some from the pool."

"Ah! yes, of course.—Will you lend me three or four napoleons, Albert?"

"I would with the greatest pleasure," Albert replied; "but I am out more than five hundred francs myself, and I have had to borrow. Put up a fetich, that's the simplest way—put a sou, a key, anything you please, in front of you, and call it worth any amount you choose."

"True, you are right; I'll put up a fetich."

Tobie felt in his pocket; he produced one of the olives he had stored there at dinner, and placed it in front of him,

saying:

"That stands for five hundred francs!"

The painter roared with laughter.

"Rather high-priced olives!" he said.

"I'm not surprised that he filled his pockets with them; he must have taken at least ten thousand francs' worth," cried Mouillot. "Come, who wants some punch? I'll fill the glasses. By the way, I don't see our magnetizer. Where's Dupétrain? Has he gone?"

"Probably," said Balivan. "He never plays, and, seeing that there was no hope of telling us his story, perhaps he has gone home to bed, to try to put someone to sleep."

"What's your pretty neighbor's name?" inquired Célestin, stretching himself out on a couch.

"My neighbor? Wait a minute—I go the limit."

"I take it," said Tobie, rolling his eyes about in a high state of excitement. "I take all bets."

"All right."

Tobie showed a *misty*; but Balivan had a *brelan carré*.

"You told me just now that *brelans* didn't count!" cried the little fellow.

"True, except *brelans carrés*; they always beat everything."

"Well, then, I don't understand anything at all about it; it's enough to drive a man mad! I don't know what I am playing."

"Come, pay me. You're very lucky, for I bet almost nothing—only twenty-one francs."

"A man can ruin himself with such luck. Here, change this for me; it stands for five hundred francs."

Tobie offered his olive; but Balivan shook his head.

"I haven't enough money to change it for you, you can see that for yourself. You owe me twenty-one francs."

A few moments later, Tobie lost fifteen francs to Monsieur Varinet, who had a heap of gold and silver in front of him. He offered him his fetich, saying:

"Oblige me by giving me the change for this; it will make it easier for me to pay."

Monsieur Varinet took the olive and placed it in front of him, and handed four hundred francs in gold and eighty-five in silver to Tobie, who seemed to take great pleasure in receiving the change for his olive, and, while pretending to arrange it in piles, seized the opportunity to slip several gold pieces into his pocket.

"You owe me twenty-one francs," said Balivan.

"Oh, yes! How the five hundred francs melts away! It will soon be gone."

"Oh! you have a good margin!"

"Isn't it time for us to give up our seats?"

"We don't go out next; it's Monsieur Varinet's turn and Albert's."

"Oh! I thought it was ours."

"Of course not, as we have just come in."

Tobie seemed very anxious now to leave the table; but he was obliged to remain, while Célestin and Mouillot took the places occupied by Albert and Varinet. The latter carefully bestowed the olive in his fob.

"I must make sure not to lose that," he said; "it's as good as a banknote. If I should take it into my head to eat it, it would be rather expensive."

"I've lost six hundred francs," said Albert; "but I don't care a damn; for I trust that the proverb will come true in my case as in Tobie's, and then I shall be lucky in love to-morrow! Ah! how I wish it were to-morrow! and it's only half-past twelve."

"Half-past twelve!" cried Tobie. "Mon Dieu! I said nothing to my concierge, and I'm horribly afraid I shan't be able to get in."

"You can pass the night here."

"Sleep away from home! No, indeed! Besides, I have an appointment at my rooms early to-morrow; and when I don't get a few hours' sleep, I'm always sick a week."

"What in the devil's the use of such a man as that!" said Mouillot; "for my part, I always sit up as long as anyone wants, I drink as much as anyone, and I make love as much as anyone; and I'm always well!"

Albert was walking about the studio; he paused in front of the different portraits of women, and said:

"What lucky dogs these painters are! When they have a pretty woman for a model, they have a right to look at her as often and as long as they please; to order her to smile; and to put her in whatever position they like best!"

"It's a very voluptuous profession!" said Tobie, glancing constantly at Balivan's watch, which had been placed on the table in order to regulate the coming-in and going-out of the different players.

"Well, messieurs, it seems to me your game is rather slow," said Varinet, walking up to the table.

"Parbleu! Tobie keeps passing with superb hands," cried Balivan. "It would seem that he doesn't want to resort to another olive."

"I am waiting for a lucky streak. Ah! now it's time for us to go out."

Pigeonnier hastily left his seat, and Balivan was obliged to do the same, but he did it unwillingly.

"We had at least half a minute more to stay," he said. "Tobie left too soon."

"Quarter to one!" cried the stout youth, with a glance at the clock. "Mon Dieu! Madame Pluchonneau, my concierge, is very hard of hearing."

Balivan seized Tobie's arm as he was edging toward the door while making a pretence of examining the pictures, and led him back to the punch table.

"Come and have a drink," he said.

"But I've drunk a great deal already."

"All the more reason. Will you smoke?"

"Yes, with pleasure, if you'll get me one of your foreign pipes."

"They're right here; I don't need to leave the studio; wait a moment, and I'll fill one for you."

Tobie, who had hoped that the painter would leave him, and had proposed to seize the opportunity to steal away unperceived, was obliged to remain; and he wandered about the studio with a very preoccupied air.

"There, smoke that, and tell me what you think of it," said the painter, offering the young man a narghile of enormous length. "That was Ali Pacha's pipe."

"The devil! suppose my smoking it should make me a savage beast like him! Never mind, I'll take the risk. But how am I to light it? it isn't at all easy, the bowl's so far away."

"You put a candle on the floor, and then hold the pipe to it."

"All right."

Tobie took one of the candles from the card table, and put it on the floor.

"I beg pardon, messieurs," he said; "but I want it to light Ali Pacha's pipe."

He had no sooner put the bowl of the pipe, the stem of which he held in his mouth, to the flame of the candle, than there was a loud report, like a pistol-shot, the pipe bowl burst, the candle was tipped over, a dense smoke filled the studio, fragments of pipe flew in all directions, and Tobie narrowly missed swallowing a piece of the stem, which stuck in his throat an instant after the report.

He fell backward to the floor. Everybody was dismayed for a moment, but, after the first fright, roars of laughter arose on all sides, except from the direction of Tobie, who was still gagged, as it were, by the fragment of pipe stem.

"What infernal kind of tobacco is that?" cried Mouillot.

"Balivan must have had a fit of abstraction," said Albert.

The artist put his hand to his head, and looked in the drawer from which he had taken what he supposed to be tobacco.

"Great God!" he exclaimed. "I see what the trouble is. My infernal pupils insisted on making cartridges this morning for a rifle I wanted to try; one of those that load at the breech. I didn't notice that I was taking powder instead of tobacco. Poor Tobie! I am terribly distressed. Well, well! what in the devil's the matter with him?"

Tobie could not speak, but he pointed to his mouth, which was wide open, and made up a pitiful face. They went hastily to his assistance, and with a small pair of pincers removed the piece of stem which had stuck between his tongue and his windpipe, like the sound-post of a violin.

"*Sacrédié!*" ejaculated Tobie, as soon as he could speak; "what an outrage! to give me a pipe filled with powder! That's a mighty poor joke, messieurs! it might have killed me! I think very highly of Ali Pacha's narghile!"

Balivan had much difficulty in pacifying the little man, and making him understand that when he filled the pipe he was thinking of something else, which prevented his noticing what he filled it with. Tobie was beginning to recover from his fright, and the game of bouillotte was in progress once more, when shrill cries were heard in the direction of the kitchen, and Balivan recognized his maid-servant's voice.

"Has Crevette also been trying to smoke one of Ali Pacha's pipes?" said Mouillot.

"Let us go and see what the trouble is!"

"Let us hasten to succor the Burgundian!"

All the young men hurried after Balivan, Tobie alone excepted; he took advantage of the confusion to leave the house, overjoyed to carry away the change for his olive.

Meanwhile, the painter had reached the kitchen, where he found no one; thence he passed into a small, dark room, where his servant slept, and there he discovered Mademoiselle Crevette, with no other clothing than the one garment which Englishwomen blush to name, holding the magnetizer Dupétrain down on the floor, and pounding him vigorously with her fist, shouting the while:

"Ah! you villain! just look at this joker! My faith! that was a fine idea of his! to come into my room while I was asleep, to do—I don't know what! Luckily, I was only asleep with one eye, and I stopped him just when he'd made up his mind I was too warm, I suppose, for he was pulling off my bedclothes."

They succeeded, not without difficulty, in rescuing Dupétrain from the Burgundian, who would have liked to go on beating him; but when she realized that she was standing before all those young men in her chemise, she suddenly jumped back toward her bed; being, however, a little heavy for gymnastic exercises, she fell sidewise on the mattress, thus exposing the roundest part of her person to the assembled company.

"Bravo! magnificent!" they exclaimed, clapping their hands. "Come, Crevette, just one more jump! you do it so well! What a full moon! We shall have a fine day to-morrow!"

The Burgundian was furious; she seized her pitcher and held it up in the air.

"If you don't clear out of my room, I'll throw it at your heads!"

Balivan, who knew that she was quite capable of doing what she threatened, succeeded in pushing them all out of the room, and they returned to the studio.

"Aha! Monsieur Dupétrain," said Mouillot, "you are a sad rake, it seems."

"That's a very neat trick," said the painter; "we thought you had gone home, and you had stolen into my servant's room!"

"He wanted to magnetize her, no doubt."

"Messieurs," said Dupétrain, decidedly embarrassed, "I swear to you that this is nothing of any consequence, and that the Burgundian rustic misapprehended my intentions. For what did I propose to do? simply make an experiment in magnetism on that dull, brutish temperament. I said to myself: 'If I can succeed in putting that countrywoman into a trance, what an extraordinary proof it will be of the power of my art!'"

"Yes; and he took off Crevette's bedclothes, so that he could see that dull temperament."

"Messieurs, to put myself in communication with a subject, it is necessary——"

"Enough! we don't want to hear any more. To the card table!"

"Why! someone is missing," said Mouillot.

"That's so. Tobie isn't here. Can he have gone away? It isn't possible."

They searched the studio, thinking that he had hidden, to play a trick on them; but they found that he had really gone.

"Oh! he'd been itching to go for a long while," said Balivan.

"Yes, ever since he changed his fetich."

"That's a very convenient dodge," observed Mouillot; "he had at least four hundred and fifty francs left of the change for his olive, and he's gone off with it.—Varinet, you have a fetich of very doubtful value."

Varinet calmly wrapped the olive in a piece of paper and put it back in his pocket.

"Do you think that that young man is capable of leaving this pledge in my hands?" he said. "I believe that he will come to my house to redeem it."

"Oh! he'll redeem it," said Albert; "I have no doubt of that."

But Célestin shook his head.

"Perhaps he will," he murmured; "but he's quite capable of forgetting his debt, and I fancy you'll have to remind him of it. Don't lose your fetich."

"For my part," said Mouillot, "I wouldn't give three francs for that olive."

The young men resumed their game, after saying good-night to Dupétrain, whom Balivan escorted to the landing, to make sure that he did not mistake his road and return to make another attempt to put his servant in a trance.

For an hour longer, the game was very brisk. At the end of that time, Albert, who had lost twelve hundred francs, threw himself on the couch, saying:

"I've had enough, messieurs; I am going to sleep here till daylight."

The other four young men continued the game for some time. At last, Célestin, who had won largely and had no desire to lose what he had won, pretended that he too was sleepy, and lay down on the divan. Mouillot, Balivan, and Varinet played on for a considerable time, until Balivan, having lost heavily, left the table, saying:

"I am going to bed."

"Now it's between us," said Mouillot to the young man with white eyebrows; "a *brûlot*."

"What! can two play bouillotte?"

"Oh, yes! and it's very interesting. It's for the one whose turn it is to bet, to speak; if he sees nothing in his hand, he puts in a chip, and the other does the same. It's a game you can play a long while without saying a word, as you pass very often."

Varinet consented to play; but Mouillot, who was decidedly lucky at two-handed bouillotte, and who played a very shrewd game, soon won all his opponent's money; Varinet had nothing left but the olive, and he proposed to stake that; but Mouillot, who was not anxious to win it, preferred to follow the example of the others and take a little nap. He lay down beside Célestin on the divan.

The young man with white eyebrows reclined in an easy-chair, and soon everybody was asleep in the artist's studio, where the most absolute quiet had succeeded the noisy outbursts of merriment engendered by the fumes of the punch.

X

THE LOFT

After the scene in the wine shop, the habitués had retired one after another, Paul among the first; but before he went away, he had glanced at Sans-Cravate with an expression which bore not the slightest trace of ill humor for the latter's threats; on the contrary, it seemed to suggest the hope that a hand would be offered as a sign of reconciliation. Sans-Cravate apparently hesitated for a moment; but Jean Ficelle whispered in his ear, and he turned away without a word to the young messenger.

Paul slept very little that night; because he was thinking, not of what had happened at the wine shop, but of what he had to do the next morning. The thought that he was going to see Elina, that he was going to pass some time with her, filled his heart with the keenest joy in anticipation. The girl's face was constantly before his eyes; to think about a woman whom one loves is much better than sleeping; waking dreams are often very sweet; for one shapes them according to his own pleasure; while those which come to us during our sleep are not always rose-colored.

The clock had just struck half-past five, when Paul pulled the copper bell knob of the house in which Elina lived with her aunt. Nobody answered the bell, and the young man was obliged to ring twice more; for the concierges of the Chaussée d'Antin do not rise so early as their brethren of the Marais. The door was opened at last by an old fellow, who passed his head, swathed in several cotton nightcaps, through a little, round window, and asked in a wrathful tone:

"Who is it who has the effrontery to ring my bell at this time of day? Who do you want to see? No one's up?"

"Excuse me, monsieur," said Paul; "I am going up to Mademoiselle Elina's, to help her move; and she must be up, for she herself asked me to come at half-past five."

"Bah! this is interesting!" snarled the concierge. "Some of 'em are up at daybreak, others don't go to bed at all, but pass the night playing cards and raising the devil! It was outrageous, the way they acted last night; the noise they made in that dauber's studio. I wonder when they'll turn that fellow out of the house."

Paul did not stay to listen to the concierge's reflections; he had already started upstairs, and he soon reached the door of Madame Vardeine's apartment. He coughed softly, and the door was opened at once, for Elina was already up and waiting for him; perhaps, indeed, she had slept no more than he.

If, gentle reader, you are surprised that a young and pretty dressmaker should have a tender feeling for a mere messenger, you must remember that in Paul's manners and language there was none of the coarseness generally characteristic of those of his calling; that he had received a good education, through the kindness of a generous

benefactor; that he had performed the duties of clerk for a considerable time; and, lastly, that, although circumstances had forced him to resort to the *crochets* of a messenger, he had not chosen to adopt the habits of his confrères: that he did not frequent wine shops, to which his visit of the previous evening was his first, and that his language was still as refined and agreeable as his voice.

"Here I am, mademoiselle," said Paul, saluting the young woman awkwardly enough; for nothing makes a man so awkward as a first love, especially a man who does not make a business of seduction. It is not so with women: love almost always makes them more charming and attractive; by augmenting their desire to please, it heightens the charms they already possess and sometimes gives them others which had not previously been detected in them. "I have come too early, perhaps; did I wake you?"

"Oh, no! Monsieur Paul," the girl replied, with a pleasant smile. "I have been awake a long time, and was waiting for you. Come in, but don't make any noise, for my aunt is still asleep, and I should be very glad if she could find everything done when she wakes."

The messenger followed Elina into the apartment, and she showed him the little room which she occupied.

"That's all the furniture I have," she said; "a cot-bed, a walnut wardrobe, this little desk, and a chair; but I'm afraid it's too much for a loft. However, I should like to get it all in, if I could; for the wardrobe was my mother's and the little desk my father's, and with those two pieces it seems to me as if I wasn't quite an orphan—as if papa and mamma were still here looking out for me. I think one is so fortunate to have something that used to belong to one's parents. Why, I wouldn't sell those two things for all the gold in the world! And yet, they're old and out of fashion; my aunt said once that the wardrobe wasn't good for anything but firewood. Oh! I was terribly angry that day! and my aunt has never said that again. Burn this wardrobe, in which my mother kept her dresses and all her clothes, and this desk that my father wrote on every day—never! never! And even if I should ever be rich, I should think just as much of them, and I would never part with them."

Tears stood in Elina's eyes when she finished. Paul looked at her with emotion, lovingly; she seemed to him prettier than ever, for laudable sentiments have a way of embellishing those who are inspired by them, whereas evil sentiments change and distort the prettiest face. Women do not regard their own interests when they are angry, sulky, or jealous.

"You are quite right, mademoiselle," said Paul, with a sigh; "you must be very happy to have something that comes from your parents."

"Have you lost yours, Monsieur Paul?"

"Yes, mademoiselle."

"A long while ago?"

"Yes."

"Didn't they leave you anything that had belonged to them?"

"No, mademoiselle—nothing."

"Mon Dieu! what an extraordinary resemblance there is between us! Both orphans; both hardly knew our parents—we are in the same situation."

"Oh! no, mademoiselle; you are much more fortunate!"

"Yes, of course; because I have this wardrobe and this little desk."

Paul made no reply, but turned his head away and wiped his eyes.

"What a stupid creature I am!" cried Elina; "to talk of things that make you sad! Come, let us go to work; we have none too much time. I have the key of our new lodgings; it's the door on the opposite side of the landing; I'll go and open it."

While the girl went to open the door, Paul took down the bed, being careful to make as little noise as possible; then he began to move the furniture into the new lodgings.

Elina pointed out a little loft, which was reached from a small, square room.

"That's my bedroom," she said. "It seems that I shan't have any too much light up there. However, my aunt says that one doesn't need to see in order to go to bed."

"Your aunt is far from kind to you, mademoiselle; and yet she cannot have any fault to find with you."

"Oh! Monsieur Paul, aunts don't think as one's—friends do. They always find some reason for scolding. Wait; there's a ladder to climb up to my new room; let me fix it firmly."

"Let me do that, mademoiselle."

The young man put the ladder in place and went up into the loft.

"Do you think it will hold all my furniture?" Elina called to him.

"Why, it's not so very small. But if you set up your bed, mademoiselle, there won't be room for your wardrobe and desk."

"In that case, we won't set it up; I don't care anything about it—it's my aunt's. I'd much rather sleep on the floor, and keep my father's and mother's furniture."

"But you won't be comfortable if you sleep on the floor."

"I shall be all right. I am not hard to suit, and I am perfectly content if my wardrobe and desk can be got in."

Paul did as she desired; he placed on the floor, in one corner of the loft, the two mattresses that were on her bed; then he went back and brought the walnut wardrobe and the little desk, and succeeded in finding room for them in the young girl's new apartment; she, meanwhile, remained at the foot of the ladder, clapping her hands and jumping for joy when she found that the loft would hold the two objects to which she was so much attached.

"They are all right," said Paul; "but, mademoiselle, there's no room for anything else, not even a chair."

"Oh! I don't care. I don't need any chair up there; I can sit on my bed. I must come up and see how you have arranged it."

And the pretty creature ran nimbly up the ladder into the loft, forgetting that Paul was still there. It is very imprudent for a young lady to be in a loft with a young man. It is much more dangerous when the young man is good-looking, and one is already inclined to like him.

But Elina did not think of all that. Luckily for her, Paul was honorable and shy. But the most virtuous heart may prove recreant when it is very much in love. Paul's beat violently when the girl climbed the ladder and entered that poor chamber, where it was not possible to stand upright. He had squatted in a corner, in order not to take up too much room, and he dared not stir.

"Oh! how nicely it's arranged!" exclaimed Elina, looking about; "there's room for everything; I shall have everything right at hand. Oh! how pleased I am!"

And the girl, forgetting that the place was very low, raised her head to thank Paul; but she struck the ceiling, then stumbled, and fell on the mattress with a little shriek.

Instantly Paul was on his knees by her side; he examined her head anxiously, saying:

"Mon Dieu! you must have hurt yourself terribly. I ought to have warned you. I will go and get some water, some liniment."

But Elina was smiling again, and she detained the young man.

"It is nothing," she said. "It made me dizzy, that's all; and that has gone now. I shall get out of it with a bump on my forehead. Dear me! I must accustom myself to my loft."

"Do let me fetch you something, mademoiselle."

"Why, no, I don't need anything, I tell you. Give me your hand."

She took Paul's hand and put it to her forehead.

"Can you feel anything?"

"Yes, mademoiselle; there'll be a swelling there."

"The girls will all laugh at me. I've heard that by pressing hard on the place you can prevent a swelling. Will you press on it, Monsieur Paul?"

"I am afraid of hurting you."

"No, no. Please press; don't be afraid."

The young man trembled in every limb as he pressed his hand against Elina's smooth, white forehead; her glossy fair hair was disarranged, and several curls fluttered about Paul's hand, increasing his emotion to such an extent that his hand suddenly slipped and rested on the girl's heart instead of on her forehead. Elina made no objection; she had forgotten all about the blow she had dealt herself. The heart almost always acts as a *derivative*, to use a medical term: when it is well occupied, one is conscious of no pain elsewhere.

Paul no longer knew what he was doing.

"Forgive me for loving you, mademoiselle," he faltered, in a trembling voice; "I know that it is very presumptuous of me; I am not worthy of you, for I am only a poor messenger; but my love is stronger than my reason, it will last all my life. This confession has escaped me in spite of myself. Pray don't be angry; I will never mention it again!"

Elina did not seem at all offended; her cheeks were crimson, and she kept her eyes on the floor, as she faltered in her turn:

"I am not angry. It isn't a crime to love a person. Mon Dieu! Monsieur Paul, even before you told me—I don't know why, but I had thought—I had guessed that you loved me, and—and—it made me happy. I don't forbid you to mention it to me—far from it!"

"Ah! mademoiselle, how good you are! and how happy I should be, if—if——"

He dared not say: "If you loved me, too." But his eyes finished the sentence. Elina, who understood him as well as if he had said the words, replied artlessly:

"I thought that you had guessed, too."

Paul put her hands to his lips, and covered them with kisses.

"Ah! I am permitted to know the most perfect happiness!" he cried; "I envy no man on earth. To be loved by you—I dare not believe it! The thought will increase my courage tenfold. I will work harder than ever, so that I can save money; and if I could offer you a comfortable existence; if I could save enough to have a little home of our own; if—— But, no, it is impossible; I can never hope for anything of the kind."

Paul's face became sad once more, and he looked away from Elina. But she took his hand and pressed it softly, saying:

"Well, well! why are you so sad, all of a sudden? I feel so happy! Do you think that I am ambitious, pray, and that I won't be content with whatever you can offer me? It is very bad of you to think that."

"No, mademoiselle; it isn't money that I am thinking of. I am very sure that you are like me, and that you don't care about that. But it is—it is—— Oh! mademoiselle, I will tell you everything, for I do not want to deceive you; and no matter what it costs me to make the confession, you shall know what I am; then you will see that I am not worthy of your love."

"Mon Dieu! what do you mean? You frighten me! Have you done anything wrong?"

"No, it's not that. But you said just now that our positions were the same, because we are both orphans. That is not true, mademoiselle; you have lost your parents, but you did know them; you know who they were, you remember your father's kisses. But I have no idea who my parents are. They may be living, but I do not know whether they are or not. They cast me out, spurned me from their arms. In a word, I am a wretched foundling."

"A foundling?"

"Yes, mademoiselle; I was left at the door where all the poor children are left whose parents cannot or, in some cases, do not choose to bring them up. There was a paper on me, on which was written: *Paul de Saint-Cloud.* Saint-Cloud is probably where I was born. And on my forearm there was a little cross—which I still have, for it doesn't wear out;—was that mark placed there so that I might be found and identified some day? I hoped so for a long time. But now I have ceased to hope, for I am more than twenty-three years old, and I have never heard of my parents. During all the time I passed with Monsieur Desroches,—an excellent man, who took me from the charitable asylum when I was ten years old, and treated me like his own son,—he did all that he could to obtain some information which would help me to find my parents; but it all came to nothing; and when my benefactor saw me weeping with grief, because I could not embrace my father or mother, he would kiss me affectionately, and say: 'Don't grieve so,

my boy; birth is a game of chance; those who come into the world with a name and rank and wealth all ready for them, often do not take the trouble to cultivate talents and estimable qualities, because they deem themselves sufficiently well equipped as they are; but he who begins his life without any of those advantages is compelled to behave well in order to obtain what he lacks. According to that, my boy, the advantage would seem to be with him who comes into the world without anything.' With such arguments, Monsieur Desroches comforted me and gave me courage. But I am a poor foundling none the less, with no name, no family, to offer you. That is what I felt bound to tell you, mademoiselle; for it is wrong to deceive anyone. That is what makes me think that I shall never be considered worthy to be your husband."

Elina had listened to the young messenger's story with the most profound interest; her eyes were filled with tears when he finished, and she held out her hand, saying with the impulsive frankness that comes from the heart:

"Take my hand; I give it to you, and what you have told me will not prevent me from loving you; far from it; and since my parents are dead, it seems to me that I have the right to select a husband for myself."

Beside himself with joy, Paul seized the hand she offered him, and covered it with kisses, repeating the most fervent oaths.

"Just see how things change their aspect!" cried the girl, in her ingenuous delight; "this loft, which seemed such a dismal place to me at first, seems very attractive now, and I am sure that I shall like it very much; for I shall always remember that it was here that you first told me that you loved me."

Paul was about to reply with renewed protestations, when they heard a great burst of laughter close at hand. They stepped to the entrance to the loft, and saw three young men in the small room below that opened on the landing, standing at the foot of the ladder, clapping their hands, shouting *bravo*, and laughing uproariously.

The new-comers were Albert, Célestin, and Mouillot, whom we left asleep in Balivan's studio, and who, when they woke about six in the morning, began by laughing at the idea of their being in that place. Then they started to return to their respective abodes; but when they were on the landing, Célestin remembered the pretty neighbor.

"By the way," he said, "what about the little neighbor overhead! Parbleu! she must be at home still, and I won't go away without a look at her."

"Nor I, either," added tall Mouillot. "I want to decide whether she's as good-looking as Balivan claims.—Au revoir, Albert! Go on, if you're in a hurry."

"No; I still have some time to spare, and I also am curious to see the neighbor. I will go with you, messieurs."

"But how shall we get her to open the door?"

"That's a simple matter. We will knock, stamp heavily on the floor, and say in a deep voice: 'The water carrier, mamzelle.'—The water carriers always come early, and people open their doors for them, even when they're only half dressed. She'll open for us."

And the young men went upstairs, leaving Varinet still asleep, with his olive in his pocket.

When they reached the upper landing, they were surprised to find two open doors.

"It seems that we shall not have to play water carrier," they said. "Can it be that the pretty neighbor sleeps with her door open? That would indicate the confidence of innocence—or just the opposite. Which door shall we go in?"

"Let chance decide."

Chance led them into the small room below the loft. There their attention was attracted by the fervent protestations of love repeated by Paul and Elina, who did not hear them enter the room; for lovers, when they are swearing to adore each other, never hear anything else.

Thereupon the young men made their comments aloud.

"I should say that we had found a nest!" said Mouillot.

"Love in a loft! a genre picture," added Albert.

"And to think that Balivan extolled his neighbor's virtue!" observed Célestin. "I thought our artist was more sharp-witted than that; but it seems that he doesn't know all the colors yet."

The outburst of laughter followed, and warned the lovers at last that there was somebody close at hand.

Elina blushed to the whites of her eyes when she saw the young men; Paul quivered with wrath, and would have rushed down the ladder, but Célestin had just taken it away.

"Things seem to be progressing up there," said Mouillot; "we're beginning our day well."

"On my word, she is charming!" said Albert; "Balivan didn't deceive us."

"True, so far as her face goes."

"Why have you come here, messieurs? what do you want?" demanded Paul; "why do you presume to take away the ladder? Put it back at once!"

"Aha! the lover is losing his temper!" said Mouillot. "But, just consider—suppose we were evil-minded? We have you both in a cage up there—suppose we should go and tell the young lady's parents; what would you say?"

"That there is no harm, messieurs, in going into a loft when one is moving furniture there; and that is why I am here now with mademoiselle."

"Ah! not bad! not bad! and it was part of the moving to kiss her, I suppose; and to swear eternal love, young Lothario?"

"I kissed mademoiselle's hand only, monsieur. As to what I said to her, that doesn't concern you; you had no right to listen."

"Hoity-toity! then you should lock the doors, imprudent children that you are!"

"Why, God bless me! the lover is one of our messengers, Sans-Cravate's mate!"

"Yes, that is so! it was he who did Tobie's errands yesterday. Ah! young dressmaker! is it possible? you listen to a messenger? Why, you degrade yourself, girl; your trade entitles you to look higher—especially with such lovely eyes!"

"Treat mademoiselle with respect, messieurs!" exclaimed Paul; "or I'll make you repent your insolence!"

"Do you, knave," retorted Célestin, "begin by holding your tongue; if not, you'll be whipped for your impertinence."

"We shall not put back the ladder except on several conditions," said Albert; "first, that the little dressmaker allow

us to kiss her."

"I," said Mouillot, "demand that she measure me for a pair of drawers."

Elina made no reply; in her distress, she had taken refuge in the farthest corner of the loft, where she tried to avoid the glances of the young men. But Paul could not control his wrath; he jumped down into the room below, at the risk of injuring himself, rushed at Célestin, snatched the ladder from him with a powerful hand, and placed it against the entrance to the loft.

"Now, let anyone dare to take it away, and he will have to settle with me!"

The messenger had acted so rapidly and energetically that the young men were speechless for a moment. Then Célestin walked toward Paul, saying:

"Leave this room instantly! Gentlemen like us do not care to soil our hands with a fellow of your stamp; but if I had a cane, I'd break it over your shoulders."

Paul took his stand in front of Célestin and looked him straight in the eye, as he rejoined:

"Men like me, messengers though we are, are far above men of your stamp, who know no better than to insult an honest girl. If you do deem yourself my superior in the street, because I stand there to do your errands, here, you are far below the poor man of the people; for he bears himself with honor, while your conduct is that of a scoundrel."

"Ah! this is too much!—Well, messieurs, won't you help me to thrash this wretch?"

Albert hesitated; one would have said that Paul's resolute bearing had made an impression on him, and that in his heart he felt that the young man was in the right. But Mouillot did not choose to disregard Célestin's appeal; he ran to the ladder, and Célestin tried to drag Paul from his position by pulling his arm; but the messenger pushed him away so violently that he stumbled over his friend Mouillot. However, they were preparing to renew their attack, when they heard a succession of piercing shrieks; and little Elina, seeing that Paul was going to fight, added her voice to the tumult, calling for help.

"Robbers! robbers!" a voice cried from the next apartment.

"Mon Dieu! it's my aunt who is being robbed!" said Elina. "Do go and see, Monsieur Paul!"

Paul was unwilling to move from the foot of the ladder and leave Elina exposed to the enterprises of the young men. But the appearance of an old woman, clad in nothing but a chemise and a camisole, with an old handkerchief, twisted into the shape of a turban, on her head, changed the whole aspect of affairs; it was Elina's aunt, who, regardless of the incompleteness of her costume, ran wildly about the room, shrieking:

"Robbers! there's a thief in my room! I saw him standing by my bed when I woke up! Arrest him, messieurs, I beg you! he's there still. I put myself under your protection."

And Madame Vardeine would have rushed into the arms of the young men; but they were cruel enough to shrink from the embraces of that lady in chemise and camisole, who at that moment concealed none of her charms.

Meanwhile, attracted by the shrieks of the old woman and the girl, the concierge had arrived upon the scene, carrying his broom in one hand and a newspaper in the other. He thrust his broom into the chamber first, as if he intended to remove the cobwebs; then entered himself, saying in a hoarse voice:

"Is anybody being killed here? What's all this row about? It's hardly daylight, and you're fighting already! I give you notice that I am going to tell the landlord, so that he'll turn you all out of doors."

The concierge's head, upon which he wore three or four woollen and cotton caps, one above another, and Madame Vardeine's, with her turban awry, were so comical to look at, that Mouillot and Albert roared with laughter. To add to the confusion, Varinet also appeared in the doorway.

"What are you all doing here?" he inquired.

At sight of the young man with the white eyebrows, Madame Vardeine gave a jump which shook her whole frame in a distressing way.

"There's my robber!" she cried; "that's the man I saw by my bed when I woke up; I know him by his eyebrows!"

"Mon Dieu, madame!" rejoined Varinet, calmly; "I beg that you will excuse me, but I was looking for these gentlemen; I heard them laughing, from the floor below; so I came up, found a door open, and entered your apartment with no idea where I was going."

Madame Vardeine did not seem convinced, and the concierge still held his broom in the air as if he proposed to sweep everybody out of the room. But the arrival of Balivan restored peace. The painter rescued his friends, guaranteeing that there were no thieves among them, and they decided at last to go away with him; but before taking their leave, each of them cast a parting glance at the loft, where Elina crouched, trembling from head to foot.

"She is charming," said Albert.

"I shall see her again," said Mouillot.

"Yes, yes," added Célestin; "and everyone will receive what he deserves for his conduct this morning."

Paul made no reply, but the glance with which he met Célestin's seemed to defy him, and to show how little heed he paid to his threats.

XI

IN THE MAGISTRATE'S OFFICE

It was eight o'clock in the morning; Sans-Cravate was in his usual place, not lying on his *crochets* this time, but seated on the end of them, with his elbows resting on his knees, and his head in his hands, looking about from time to time with a dissatisfied air. His eyes often sought out Paul's place, which was empty; then he clenched his fists, muttered some words between his teeth, and stamped on the ground impatiently.

Jean Ficelle was pacing back and forth, within a space of about twenty yards; constantly passing in front of his comrade, to whom he spoke now and then, while he took huge bites from an enormous piece of bread and from a bologna sausage, alternately.

"Well, Sans-Cravate, you don't have anything to say this morning. Did our little spree last night tie up your tongue? You ain't sick, are you?"

"No, no! I've forgotten all about it; I'm all right."

"*Pardié*, you wasn't drunk, anyway! anybody who says you was drunk lies."

"I think myself that I had a little too much."

"Not a bit of it; you think that because you got into a dispute, and that heated you up. You could have drunk a lot more. Do you know, I'm very sorry you couldn't settle your bet with Père Cagnoux; that would have staggered the old boy. It was that snivelling Paul that spoiled it all. Hm! he was rather inclined to crawl. Refuse to fight! that's just what he did! I call him a poor cuss for friends to be seen with. Look you, a comparison: he's like a slater that's afraid to go up on the roof and is only willing to slate the ground floor."

"But he was willing to fight with the rest of you."

"Oh! yes! for what? mere brag! humbug! he knew well enough that challenging everybody was just the same as challenging nobody. You're the one that he insulted—and, whatever way you look at it, you're the one he owed reparation to. To refuse to drink with friends, and break their glasses! Thanks! that's too damned unceremonious!"

"Oh! now that my head's clear, that isn't what I bear him a grudge for. You see yourself that he was quite right to despise that Laboussole, as he's a thief; and I blush now to think that I drank with such a cur!"

"No, no, not at all! you're all wrong! You think Laboussole's a thief, just because they arrested him as a thief!—why, that's one of the law's spiteful tricks. A man may be involved in a bad piece of business and not be a thief, for all that. I'm sure that Laboussole will come out as white as snow. Come and have a glass of beer. It's my treat."

"No, thanks; I ain't thirsty."

"Oh! you ain't hungry or thirsty to-day! Well, just as you please. But you see the little sneak don't dare to come here this morning; that proves that he has a feeling that he's in the wrong."

"That's true; it's almost nine o'clock, and Paul is almost always the first one here; he don't seem to come."

Jean Ficelle continued to walk back and forth; then stopped again in front of Sans-Cravate, saying with a mocking expression:

"*Dame!* perhaps his time was so well occupied last night that he's resting this morning—that's what's the matter!"

Sans-Cravate sprang to his feet.

"What do you mean by that?" he cried, with a savage gesture.

"I mean—I mean——Faith! you know well enough what I mean; and I'll bet I know who he's with now."

"With Bastringuette, you mean, don't you?"

"*Dame!* it seems to me that she didn't hesitate to show you that she preferred that popinjay to you. Women must have mighty little taste; such a fine fellow as you are! Why, you'd make three of Paul!"

"Oh! I'm not jealous of his good fortune," rejoined Sans-Cravate, struggling to appear calm; "let him go with Bastringuette, if he chooses! But last night I saw that he didn't go with her when we left the wine shop; he went away alone—and she—she waited to see if I was following her; then she went off alone, too."

"Bah! humbug! they met afterward. If we knew where Paul lived, we could go and see if he was at home. Do you know where he lives, Sans-Cravate?"

"No, I don't; he told me he lived Faubourg Montmartre way; but that's all."

"The devil! in a faubourg! it would be a nice job to find him! There's some mystery about that fellow; he's a queer fish."

"What difference does it make whether he's at home, or at her room? I don't care a hang! I'm done with Bastringuette."

"Never mind," muttered Jean Ficelle, biting into his bread; "if a mate of mine took my mistress from under my nose, it wouldn't make any difference if I didn't love her—that wouldn't be the end of it."

"And do you suppose that I won't have my revenge?" shouted Sans-Cravate, giving free vent to his anger, and clenching his fists with a threatening air.

"Good!" said Jean Ficelle, patting the other's shoulder hypocritically; "that's more like you. You're still a man. I says to myself: 'It's mighty strange that a brick like Sans-Cravate stands being put upon without doing anything'; but I see that you have a plan; bravo! you're a man!"

At that moment, a short, thin individual, dressed in black, but not well dressed, stopped in front of the two messengers, and said to them:

"You two are the men I want; you're Sans-Cravate, aren't you; and you, Jean Ficelle?"

They assented, and the man in black continued:

"Then you'll be kind enough to come and see monsieur le commissaire."

Jean Ficelle was visibly disturbed by the mention of the magistrate, while Sans-Cravate asked:

"What the devil should we go to see monsieur le commissaire for? I've never been there, and I've no business to settle with him."

"Weren't you at the Petit Bacchus wine shop last night, when a certain Laboussole was arrested there? weren't you drinking with him?"

"Yes, but we didn't know him," Jean Ficelle made haste to reply.

"You can tell monsieur le commissaire what you know about him; he wants to question you. That's all I know; don't fail to come this morning."

"We will come, monsieur."

The little man went away. Jean Ficelle had become thoughtful, and Sans-Cravate knitted his brows, muttering:

"To have to go before the magistrate! Not three days ago, I was congratulating myself on never having had anything to do with him. I've had quarrels enough; I've often fought, but I've always fought fair. No man I ever whipped could complain of being tricked, and there was no need of going before a magistrate to settle our quarrels. And to-day—just because I drank with that Laboussole, a friend of yours,—and now you say that you don't know him,

and again that he ain't a thief. Tell me the truth, do you know him, or not?"

"Good God! as if I was called on to compromise myself before the magistrate to help someone else!"

"But if that someone is your friend, if he's arrested unjustly, you'd be a coward if you didn't try to defend him."

"Parbleu! Laboussole's a fox; he will get out of it without any help. Come, Sans-Cravate, don't be ugly; after all, the most respectable people go before the magistrate; you see, we're only summoned as witnesses."

"*Sacrédié!* what do you expect to be summoned for? Let's go right away; I long to have it over with."

"All right, let's go."

"But I don't know where the magistrate lives; do you, Jean Ficelle?"

"Yes, it ain't very far from here; come, I'll show you the way."

"And Paul hasn't come yet; but perhaps we shall find him at the magistrate's, too."

The two messengers soon reached their destination.

There are four police magistrates for each arrondissement of Paris, which makes forty-eight for the whole city. That is none too large a number for such a huge, densely populated, turbulent city, where so many things happen every day.

A lantern suspended over the door indicates the magistrate's residence; his office is rarely a particularly attractive apartment; but there is no occasion for him to go to much expense for the benefit of the society he ordinarily receives there, and cleansing would be a useless luxury. Those who come thither are not even accustomed to wipe their feet on the mat—when there is one.

You enter the office, where the magistrate's clerk and secretary are usually to be found, although sometimes the latter official has his desk in another room. Then comes the magistrate's private office, to which everybody is not admitted.

Just as Sans-Cravate and Jean Ficelle arrived, a corporal and two soldiers brought in two women and a boy, the latter holding in his arms a small black dog, evidently a very young puppy.

One of the women was about fifty years of age; she was so enormous that she seemed not to be a human being at all, but a shapeless mass, on top of which was a red, purple, scarlet face surmounted by a dirty bonnet with flying strings; she was a wine shop keeper.

The other woman was younger; she was thin and pale, and had not a pleasant face; but, at all events, she resembled a woman; she was dressed very modestly, and wore a cap and an apron.

The boy, who was about fourteen, could boast already of an enormous head and two puffy cheeks which concealed his nose; he resembled the bulky wine shop keeper, if anything could have resembled her. He was dressed in a blouse, with a small cap on his head; he wore shoes, but no stockings.

The party entered the magistrate's office, yelling, whining, and hurling insults at one another; and the corporal was compelled at times to exert his authority, to keep the two women from fighting.

A considerable crowd, entertained by the quarrel between the two, followed them to the magistrate's door, but were not allowed to go farther.

The magistrate left his private office, where he did not hear trivial matters, and, first of all, asked the corporal what the two women had done.

A corporal of the line is not always a born orator; this one put his hand to his shako, and answered:

"Faith!—the thing—well, you see, I don't know anything about it, but these two women made such a noise in the street—and then they hit each other—and there was this dog here—this little pup no bigger than my hand—then someone came after us to put a stop to it—and, *sapredié!* how they gave it each other on the way! but as for telling you which is in the right, monsieur le commissaire, I'll never try."

Having presented his report, the corporal stepped back. Thereupon the magistrate addressed the two women.

"Well, which of you is the complainant?"

They both spoke at once, and the boy chimed in as well.

"She's the one that's in the wrong, monsieur le commissaire."

"That ain't true, for she says I stole her dog."

"Of course, when I saw you."

"You lie!"

"And she kicked me in the fat of my leg, above the garter."

"And she pinched me so she tore my dress, and you can see the marks of her nails."

"Shut up, you saucy hussy! you ought to tell him that you're the cause——"

"Yes, monsieur le commissaire; she's the cause of it. I've never been here before—this is the first time, I can tell you that!"

The boy, who had the Limousin accent, and talked as if his mouth were full of paste, tried to put in a word:

"First—sure as I stand here—for I was carrying my—my basket, and I saw her!"

To add to the confusion, the dog began to yelp.

"Very good," said the magistrate, with a smile, for he saw that the affair was of no consequence. "I judge that a dog is the subject of your dispute. Well, we will follow Solomon's example, cut him in two, and give half to each of you."

"That's right!" cried the bulky mass, trying to laugh, until her enormous paunch seemed on the point of bursting. "There's no way but cutting him in two."

"The deuce! I should say that you are not the real mother."

"Oh! monsieur le commissaire, I was joking when I said that; but he's my dog. I've got witnesses, too."

"Oh, yes!" cried the thin woman; "and the very first man that came into your shop, when you said to him: 'Ain't that my dog?' answered: 'I never saw him.'"

"She lies! she lies! it is my dog. Everybody knows him; and then, he was with François, my son here;—come, François, make your deposition."

François opened his mouth and moved his lips a long while before he could find a word to say, his excitement had such a powerful effect on his mental faculties; at last, he muttered in a thick voice:

"First—sure as I stand here—as I was going along with my basket, I thought the dog was behind me—and she grabbed him, and run off with him!"

"That ain't true; he's lying, monsieur le commissaire. The dog was ahead of him—a long way ahead of him—when I saw the little creature, and I said: 'He hasn't got any master,' and I picked him up. If he was his, why didn't he say: 'That's my dog.' But he let me pick him up, and it wasn't till madame overtook him that he began to run after me and yell: 'Stop thief!'—What is there to prove that the dog belongs to them and not to me?"

The magistrate, having weighed these depositions in his mind, said to the boy in a grave tone:

"Put the dog on the floor, and let both of these ladies call him; I will give him to the one he follows."

François placed the little creature on the floor. The two women began to call him, lavishing the most affectionate words on him. The dog did not stir, and the affair became complicated. The two women recommenced their billingsgate, the boy stuttered, the soldiers laughed, and the dog howled. Suddenly the thin woman began to take off her dress to show the marks of the pinching she had received; but the corpulent woman, divining her purpose, instantly raised her skirt, and, fearlessly exhibiting her leg above the garter, cried triumphantly:

"Look, monsieur le commissaire, look! it's blue, it's all blue, and it'll be all black to-morrow!"

It was blue, in fact; to be sure, the rest of the leg seemed to be about the same color; but the magistrate, who did not care to see any more, said to the other woman:

"That seems to be authentic; if you can't show as much, it's of no use for you to unbutton your dress."

The thin woman decided not to disrobe, but began to weep, mumbling:

"Let her keep the dog, for all I care! Mon Dieu! let her keep him! I don't want him! But she's a saucy slut, all the same; a person ain't to be called a thief because she picks up a dog in the street that has no owner!"

The cause was decided, and the magistrate rendered judgment. He awarded the dog to the stout woman, who took him in her arms and waddled triumphantly away with François, followed by her antagonist, muttering:

"Never mind! you shall pay me for this, dearer than you think!"

Sans-Cravate and Jean Ficelle stepped forward, but the magistrate motioned to them to sit down and wait, for he had many other cases to hear. In the office of a Parisian police magistrate the stage is seldom unoccupied.

Other soldiers, with a short, thickset woman at their head, who seemed disposed to command them, although they also had a corporal with them, brought in a small boy of ten or twelve years, wretchedly clad, or, to speak more accurately, hardly clad at all. Ragged trousers revealed his bare legs, and a linen jacket, devoid of buttons, made no pretence of concealing a torn shirt, black with dirt, and a body blacker still. The little wretch, who, despite his miserable aspect, was stout and strong, had a mean face, and a hangdog glance, which seemed never to have looked at the sky.

This young thief, for the boy had previously been convicted of larceny, was now under arrest charged with stealing a loaf of bread; the thickset woman had the loaf under her arm; she explained to the magistrate that she was a fruit seller and dealt also in soldiers' bread, which she kept at the door of her shop; that the boy crept up to a table on which the bread was, and that another urchin, probably in league with the thief, ran against her and fell almost between her legs; while she helped him get up, his comrade seized a loaf and ran away with it. But she saw him in time; she ran after the little villain and caught him with the stolen loaf still in his possession; so that he could not deny his crime.

"Why did you steal this loaf?" the magistrate sternly asked the little thief, who had listened to the fruit seller's declaration as if it did not concern him, drumming on the clerk's desk with his fingers. He swayed from right to left, just like a bear, stuck out his lips, hung his head lower than ever, and at last mumbled something which could not be taken for words.

"Why did you steal this bread?" repeated the magistrate, more severely than before. "Come, answer; and speak up so that you can be heard."

Thereupon a low, drawling voice replied:

"'Cos I was hungry! I ain't had nothing to eat for two days."

"That is not true; you haven't the face of one who is starving; at all events, if you were hungry, you should have gone to a baker's shop and asked for bread; you wouldn't have been refused. But we know your ways; you stole this loaf of bread to sell again, and get three or four sous to gamble with on the boulevard or at the barrier; isn't that the truth?"

The little fellow again began to sway back and forth. He made a grimace which seemed to be intended for a smile, and said nothing.

"Are your parents living?" continued the magistrate.

"I dunno."

"What! you don't know whether you have a father and mother?"

"I ain't got no father, I don't think."

"And your mother?"

"She sells fried potatoes."

"Isn't she able to pay for your apprenticeship to some trade?"

"I don't want to work."

"You prefer to steal! you hope to be imprisoned with other little rascals of your sort, with whom you will become hopelessly bad. Where does your mother live?"

The little vagabond made no reply. The magistrate repeated his question.

"I won't tell you; I don't want her to claim me; I won't go back to her!"

"Then you will be taken to the préfecture, and from there to a house where you'll have to work."

Nothing that the magistrate could say seemed to move the young thief in the slightest degree; but when the secretary took his pen to write the report for the préfecture, the little rascal began to laugh, and muttered:

"*V'là le griffon qui prend une voltigeante pour broder sur du mince.*"[F]

The soldiers led the offender away, and the fruit seller went off with her bread. This scene depressed Sans-Cravate; he glanced at his comrade, who seemed utterly unmoved by what he had seen and heard.

A well-dressed man, and of gentlemanly aspect, came forward and informed the magistrate that at No. 19 in the next street, on the third floor, at the rear of the courtyard, a gambling hell was being carried on clandestinely, under cover of a so-called reading-room. The gamblers were admitted by a secret door, and opening out of the reading-room was another room, in which roulette and *trente-et-un* were played. The magistrate was invited to visit the place, with his inspectors, about ten o'clock at night, when he would be sure to find the games in full operation; his informant would come to fetch him and act as his guide; he had succeeded in obtaining admission as a gambler.

This well-dressed, well-mannered man was simply a spy.

Next came a rather attractive young girl, of modest aspect, who was very near weeping as she asked the magistrate why he had summoned her to his office.

"Because you persist in keeping flower pots on your window ledge, mademoiselle, despite the municipal ordinance; and because, very lately, you spattered water on a lady who was passing. I shall be obliged to fine you."

"Mon Dieu! monsieur le commissaire, it's very strange that I could have spattered anybody, watering a small pot of pansies; for I'm always very careful when I water my flowers. Probably some neighbor below me threw the water out into the street, then the lady looked up and saw a flower pot at my window, and so thought it came from there."

"Still, mademoiselle, your flower pots may cause a serious accident."

"Oh! monsieur le commissaire, just a little pot of pansies!"

"If it should fall on anybody's head, mademoiselle, a pot of pansies might do as much damage as one of poppies. If you are so fond of flowers, why don't you put your pansies on something inside your room? You would enjoy them just as much—yes, more; and there would be no danger to your health, for the pansy has no odor."

The girl lowered her eyes, as she replied:

"That wouldn't be the same thing; if it was inside my room, he wouldn't see it!"

"*He* wouldn't see it? Ah! I understand: that pot of pansies is a signal to your lover, is it?"

"Yes, monsieur," faltered the girl, with a smile; "when it's on the ledge, he may come up; and if I happen to have company, I take it away, and he don't come up."

"Very good; he is able to come up very often, I judge, as the pot of pansies seems to be always in evidence; and thus the most innocent of flowers is made to serve the intrigues of lovers!"

"Oh! monsieur, my lover will marry me; I am perfectly sure of it."

"I trust so, mademoiselle; but you must put a wooden bar across your window, so that passers-by will not be in danger; only on that condition can I sanction the flower pot which you use to telegraph to your lover."

"What, monsieur! if I put a wooden rail, a bar, across, you will allow me to keep flowers at my window?"

"Yes; if you do that, you may keep as many there as you choose."

The girl fairly jumped for joy.

"Oh! what fun! I will put a rosebush and carnations with my pansies!"

"Mon Dieu! mademoiselle! will each of the three be a signal to a lover?"

"I'll put up a bar right away; and I'll keep three flower pots there, monsieur le commissaire; three flower pots!"

The girl left the office in a very joyous frame of mind. After her, came a woman who charged her husband with striking her with a skimmer; then a husband who wanted a separation from his wife, because she gave him nothing but onion soup for dinner every day; then a tenant who complained of his concierge, because he made him pass the night in the street, on the ground that it was after midnight when he came home; then a peddler whose tray had been upset; a milkwoman whose donkey had been wounded by a cabriolet; a cab that refused to move; a shop which did not close at midnight; a man who had tried to drown himself; a girl who was found dying of suffocation. Sometimes this sort of thing goes on from morning till night; and it not infrequently happens that the magistrate is roused from his sleep. A man needs to be made of iron to fill that post in Paris.

At length, having dismissed the last of the crowd that besieged him, the magistrate motioned to the messengers to follow him into his private office. Having closed his door, to ensure them against interruption, he seated himself at his desk, and addressed Sans-Cravate first.

"Are you the man called Sans-Cravate?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"This is the first time that you have been summoned to my office?"

"That is true, monsieur le commissaire."

"But you have the reputation, in the quarter, of being a noisy, quarrelsome fellow, and of drinking rather hard, too."

"Faith! monsieur le commissaire, it's possible that I like to enjoy myself, that I'm a little hot-headed, that I fight sometimes! It's in my blood, and I can't make myself over. But all that don't prevent a man from being honest, and I defy anyone to say that Sans-Cravate ever did him an injury."

"I know that you are an honest man, that your head alone is a little unruly; and because I am convinced of that, I wanted to speak to you privately, to give you some good advice. This is the first time you have been to my office, and I like to think that, if you follow my advice, it will be the last."

Jean Ficelle turned his head away, and muttered:

"On my word! a moral lecture! I should think we was at *Quart-d'Œil's* school!"

But Sans-Cravate listened humbly enough to the magistrate, who continued:

"The quickest, the most impulsive people are usually the easiest to lead. Beware of evil associates, Sans-Cravate, that's all; the man who obeys the first suggestions of his anger generally has a weak will; and there are rascals, who, by flattering your passions, sometimes lead you into bad ways."—As he said this, the magistrate glanced at Jean Ficelle, who affected to whistle through his teeth.—"Sans-Cravate, you were at the same table, last night, in a wine shop, with one Laboussole; where did you make that man's acquaintance?"

"Faith! monsieur le commissaire, I know him only by having met him at the Petit Bacchus, and, as Jean Ficelle called him his friend, I invited him to have a drink with us."

"I!" cried Jean Ficelle; "I didn't know him any more'n you did; just from meeting him at the wine shop. I called him *old fellow;* that's a term men often use to each other when they're drinking together; but I don't know him."

"You lie!" said the magistrate, gazing sternly at the messenger; "you do know that man; you know that he ran a game of chance, a *biribi*, under Pont d'Austerlitz; and you are suspected of having been his confederate."

"I, monsieur le commissaire! on my word! what a slander!"

"If I were certain of it, you would have ceased to be a messenger before this; for you would be likely to betray the confidence of the public.—As for you, Sans-Cravate, you see how dangerous it is to form intimacies with people you don't know. This Laboussole, in addition to the punishment he has earned for conducting games of chance, is also involved in a serious case of larceny; if you were often seen with such men, your reputation for honesty would suffer. That is what I wanted to say to you. We have too many rascals in Paris now, and it is almost always by frequenting their society that others are ruined. As you know nothing more about Laboussole, you may go."

"But, monsieur le commissaire," said Jean Ficelle, in a fawning tone, "we wasn't the only ones with Laboussole in the wine shop; our mate was there, too—Paul, a messenger who has a stand where we do; why don't you examine him too?"

"If we do not summon that young man before us, it is presumably because we do not deem it necessary. Our purpose in summoning Sans-Cravate was principally to give him some good advice, and to urge him to distrust evil acquaintances. As for your young comrade, such advice to him is unnecessary. He is neither a drinking man, nor a quarrelsome man, nor a frequenter of wine shops; the best thing you could do would be to take him for a model. You may go now."

The two messengers left the magistrate's office. Sans-Cravate was pensive; he seemed to be reflecting upon what had been said to him; but his comrade, who feared the result of his reflections, exclaimed:

"Who ever heard of a magistrate having the cheek to give advice! For God's sake, ain't we old enough to know how to behave? what's all this talk about liberty, anyway? He'd better attend to making cabs move on, and leave us alone!"

"He seems to have a high opinion of Paul," said Sans-Cravate.

Jean Ficelle pursed up his lips, cast a sidelong glance at his companion, and rejoined:

"Do you know, that gives me a curious idea?"

"What is it?"

"That Paul may be a spy; and that it was him who had Laboussole arrested last night."

"Shut up, Jean Ficelle! don't insult our mate. It's an infernal shame for you to say that!"

"I may not be wrong; ain't there something queer in the way Paul acts? Didn't Laboussole say he'd met him all dressed up—like a regular swell?"

"You dare to tell me what Laboussole said—a thief!"

"What does that prove? A man may steal, and still have good eyes; indeed, he's all the more likely to; and then, one day, in the Marais, I thought myself that I recognized Paul in a man dressed like a rich bourgeois; I'm sure now that I wasn't mistaken. If he disguises himself like that, he must have more trades than one. He's a sham messenger, and I go back to my idea: he's a spy!"

"Once more, Jean Ficelle, I forbid you to say such things!"

"But you can't keep me from thinking 'em; ideas are free, like opinions;—a man can't be prevented from having his own opinions and ideas!"

Sans-Cravate made no further reply. They arrived at their stand, but Paul was not there.

Jean Ficelle cast a bantering glance at his comrade, saying:

"He seems to be having a famous spree to-day, does the magistrate's pet!"

Again Sans-Cravate made no reply; but he clenched his fists, and it was evident that he had difficulty in restraining the feelings which agitated him.

More than an hour had passed, when Bastringuette appeared on the boulevard. She had no tray, and was dressed in her best clothes: cap with broad ribbons, merino shawl, and black silk apron. She glanced at the messengers out of the corner of her eye as she passed. Sans-Cravate quickly turned his head and walked away. But Jean Ficelle ran after the flower girl and accosted her:

"Ah! bless my soul! how natty we are! Where can we be going in such a rig? to a wedding, at the very least! it can't be less than that."

"*Dame!* perhaps that's what it is," retorted Bastringuette, assuming a very sportive air. "Perhaps I'm going to be married myself, nobody knows! Husbands are always on hand!"

She walked on without another word. Jean Ficelle returned to Sans-Cravate, glanced at him, and said nothing.

But Sans-Cravate could not contain himself; a moment later, he cried:

"What did she say? Where's she going? Why don't you speak?"

"She seemed to be as gay as a lark. She said that perhaps she was going to be married. You understand the riddle? She'll be married in the thirteenth arrondissement."[G]

Sans-Cravate hesitated a moment; then, having made up his mind what to do, he said:

"I mean to find out where she's going—to follow her. Are you coming with me?"

"To be sure! As if I would desert a friend! Besides, I don't feel like working to-day. Forward, guide left, march!"

The two messengers followed the boulevard in the direction taken by Bastringuette; they walked very fast, one looking to the right, the other to the left, but they did not see the person they desired to follow.

"Where the devil can she have gone?" said Sans-Cravate.

"It's very strange," rejoined Jean Ficelle, "unless she turned off the boulevard. Here we are at Porte Saint-Denis."

"Let's go on," said Sans-Cravate. "Bastringuette has a cousin who lives Rue Barbette way; perhaps she's gone to

see her."

"In the Marais; ah! she has a cousin who lives in the Marais? How that fits in!"

"What's that? what do you mean?"

"Oh! nothing."

"I don't like hints, Jean Ficelle; speak out, sacrebleu!"

"Well, I mean that the Marais is where Paul's always seen when he's disguised as a swell; and Bastringuette comes along, dressed in tiptop style, and goes in that direction. *Dame!* if a fellow had an evil tongue, he might say that your mistress and our so-called comrade made assignations there—perhaps at the cousin's, who knows? There's such things as obliging cousins."

Sans-Cravate did not say a word, but he strode along the boulevards at such a pace that his companion was breathless with trying to keep up with him. Jean Ficelle suggested a brief halt, but, instead of complying, Sans-Cravate began to run.

"I think I see her over yonder," he shouted; "she turned into Rue du Temple; I must overtake her."

"Thunder and guns!" muttered Jean Ficelle, as he followed on; "my liver'll bust by the time we catch her."

XII

FATHER AND SON

In a very handsome house on Rue Caumartin, the windows of an apartment on the second floor were still brightly lighted, although it was after three o'clock in the morning.

In that fashionable quarter, it was a fair presumption that anybody who was still out of bed at that hour would be indulging in the pleasures of card playing, music, or dancing; that an evening party had been prolonged until that hour, and that the master or mistress of the house took pride in having the dawn find their guests still under their roof.

But such a presumption would have been false in this instance. In a luxurious salon, where several candles were still burning, a man sat, alone, on the corner of a couch, his head bent forward; and, to judge by the expression of his features, by the melancholy look in his eyes, he had not passed the night in merrymaking.

He was a man of some forty-six years, of medium height and distinguished bearing. His grave, dignified face had been very handsome. His great blue eyes were still instinct with charm when he smiled; but that happened very rarely. His habitual pallor, the numerous lines on his forehead, were eloquent of sorrow, ennui, and heartache—of all those sentiments which bring premature old age to those who have come into the world with a sensitive soul, and of which selfish egotists have no knowledge; wherefore, they are able to retain their youth, freshness, and health much longer than the others. Heaven has done everything for the selfish man!

The man who sat there so late at night, alone, was Monsieur Vermoncey, Albert's father.

His eyes turned frequently toward a clock on the mantel. After every glance, he listened, as if hoping to hear the rumbling of a carriage or the sound of footsteps in the street, then threw his head back, saying to himself:

"He is enjoying himself, no doubt, with his friends—or his mistress. But he is using up his life too fast, he is ruining his health. Mon Dieu! and I have no one left but him—no one else! all my other children have followed their mother to the grave. If I should lose Albert, what would become of me? what can a man do on earth, when he has no one left to love?"

Monsieur Vermoncey seemed utterly overwhelmed; profound grief was depicted in his eyes, which he kept on the floor for a long while, as if melancholy memories of the past were blended with his present anxieties. He sighed at intervals, as he murmured:

"My wife, whom I loved so passionately! my children, whom I idolized! Ah! how men change! when I was Albert's age, how far I was from thinking that the most delicious joys are those that one knows in his own family, with his wife and children! But at twenty-two the heart is not as yet open to all sentiments; at that age, a man does not know what he wants, or whom he loves! He treats lightly the most serious things, and repents afterward—sometimes, when it is too late."

He rose and walked about the room a few times, then continued:

"I am foolish to be anxious. Albert is enjoying himself, that's all. I ought to have gone to bed long ago; but it is useless for me to try to sleep, when I know that he has not come in. His conduct for some time past has been very reprehensible. He spends his money foolishly, he makes undesirable acquaintances; but his heart is sound at bottom; he will become reasonable in time; I must not forget that I was young once."

As he made this reflection, Monsieur Vermoncey fixed his eyes on the floor again, his brow became clouded, and he put his hand to it several times as if he sought to brush away some painful memory.

Meanwhile, the sun had risen: he heard the rumbling of the milkwomen's carts, the heavy tread of the peasants returning from selling their vegetables at the market, the song of the early workman going to his work, and the dialogues between the concierges as they swept their doorsteps.

Monsieur Vermoncey rang; in a few seconds a servant appeared, whose red face, half-closed eyes, and sluggish gait proved that he had not followed his master's example, and that he had with difficulty roused himself from sleep.

"Has my son come in, Florent?" inquired Monsieur Vermoncey, as if anxious to be convinced that he had not listened intently all night.

The servant replied, rubbing his eyes:

"I think not, monsieur; but I will go to his room and see; sometimes he doesn't wake me when he comes in."

"Ah, no! he has not come in!" said Monsieur Vermoncey to himself, nervously pacing the floor. "And it's after five o'clock. He doesn't usually pass the whole night away from home, without telling me. Probably some card party which lasted till morning.—Yes, I know that I am foolish to worry, but I cannot help it. A man endangers his life so

recklessly sometimes! Intrigues with women are often dangerous! All husbands are not disposed to allow themselves to be betrayed, and say nothing. But it seems that the more obstacles there are to making a woman's acquaintance, the more determined we are to possess her."

"Monsieur Albert has not come home since yesterday," the servant reported.

"Very well, Florent. I am going to my room; but come and tell me as soon as my son comes in."

Monsieur Vermoncey went to his bedroom, where there were portraits of his wife, of Albert, and of the three children he had lost. He stood a long while in front of the picture of his wife. She had died when she was still young and lovely, and she was so represented in the portrait. It would be a consolation to those who die when they are still in life's summertime to know that when we think of them we shall always recall them as being young and fair; and regret that they could not have enjoyed a long life, in which we fancy them growing old in years, perhaps, but never in appearance.

After gazing long at the features of his beloved and regretted wife, he turned his eyes sadly upon the portraits of his children. His eyes filled with tears as he looked at those he had lost; then he glanced at the portrait of Albert, which had been painted more recently, and was a perfect likeness; it seemed that he hoped to derive consolation and courage from the features of his only remaining child; but in a moment his eyes began to wander about the room, as if in search of still another portrait. At last he threw himself into a chair, and, resting his head on his hand, abandoned himself anew to his reflections.

It was seven o'clock in the morning when Albert returned to his father's house. It will be remembered that, after passing the night in the artist's studio, the young men had gone upstairs to see the pretty neighbor, whom they had surprised in the loft. So Albert had but just left his friends, when Florent hurried to Monsieur Vermoncey's room to tell him that his son had come home.

The father's downcast features were instantly lighted up with an expression of joy and happiness; his son's long absence had really disturbed him, but a single word put all his fears to flight. He rose hurriedly, intending to go at once to Albert, then checked himself, thinking that his son would be angry if he knew that he had not gone to bed. But the longing to embrace him carried the day, and he went to his son's room.

Albert's apartment was on the same floor as his father's; only the width of the hall separated them. The young man had just taken off his coat, waistcoat, and cravat, and was putting on a robe de chambre, when his father appeared.

"What! up already?" cried Albert.

Monsieur Vermoncey's only reply was to go to his son and embrace him; he, meanwhile, scrutinized his father closely, then said:

"I'll wager that you haven't been in bed; yes, I can tell by the tired look of your eyes; you have had no sleep, probably because I did not come home; you are quite capable of sitting up all night for me! Allow me to tell you that that is utterly absurd. Am I still a child? Am I not at liberty to stay at a house where I am enjoying myself, if I have an opportunity, or to play a game of cards with my friends? In a word, father, may I not venture to pass a night away from home, without your sitting up for me, like a schoolboy who is thought to be lost? I tell you again that it is very annoying to me!"

"I have not reproached you," said Monsieur Vermoncey, fixing his eyes upon Albert.

"No, you don't reproach me, but that makes no difference. Do you think that I can take any pleasure at a party that happens to last far into the night, if I know that you are sitting up for me, that you are anxious about me? Nothing of this sort would have happened if I had carried out my first idea. I wanted to live somewhere else; then you wouldn't know at what time I came home. I know very well that you don't interfere with my doing whatever I choose; but a man is always more at liberty living by himself, and it would be much better."

Monsieur Vermoncey replied, with a melancholy air, but with dignity:

"After all the misfortunes that have crushed me to the earth, I thought that I might venture to ask you to comply with my wishes in some slight measure. Having lost your mother, your brothers, and your sister, and having nothing but your presence to assist me to endure my grief, I thought that you would not seek to deprive me of it, but that you would feel how essential it was for me to be able to rest my eyes on one of my children, the only one heaven has deigned to leave me. In spite of that, I did not curtail your liberty at all, I claimed no right to pry into your acts—although, perhaps, a father is entitled to know what his son is doing. But as it seems that I have asked too much, that, in asking you to live in the same house with me, I demand too great a sacrifice, go, my son, leave this apartment; I will not seek to detain you, but I shall not cease, on that account, to love you as dearly as ever."

While his father was speaking, Albert's expression changed; it was easy to read in his eyes that his father's reproaches had reached his heart. Monsieur Vermoncey had hardly finished, when his son threw himself into his arms.

"I am wrong, father, I am wrong!" he cried; "I am a heedless fool! I don't know what I am saying! I say things that grieve you, who have always been so kind and generous and indulgent to me! Please forgive me! Forget all that I have said, and let there be no more question between us of living apart. I know that I should never be so happy anywhere else as with you. All these friends of mine—my companions in pleasure—I go with them because I have a good time with them; but I promise you that I appreciate them at their real value. Come, embrace me. You are not angry with me any longer, are you?"

Monsieur Vermoncey replied by pressing his son to his heart. A loving word from one we love suffices to make us forget a thousand causes of complaint that have long been gathering. Moreover, indulgence is always to be preferred to severity, so long as the faults committed are not of those which should cause us to blush.

"No, my dear boy, I am not angry now," said Albert's father at last. "I am well aware that at your age it is natural to seek amusement, and I do not blame you for it. My affection takes alarm too easily, I agree; but what can you expect? I have had so much unhappiness! my heart has been so cruelly torn! Such wounds never heal entirely; they leave us in a constant state of anxiety concerning the little happiness heaven has left us. Let us say no more about it. If you are happy, that is all I want; especially if you deal frankly with your father, if you look upon him as the best of your friends—I do not mean of those friends whom you mentioned just now. By the way, among others, there is a Monsieur Célestin Valnoir, or *de* Valnoir, who is almost always with you. I don't like that young man; if he were simply a little wild—a high liver—that would be nothing; but I do not think that he's sincere."

"Faith! father, you may very well be right about it; however, I am inclined to call Célestin selfish rather than insincere. He's a delightful fellow in company, provided that you don't ask him to do anything for you! Moreover, he has the art of making himself useful, indispensable, in fact. He can order a dinner perfectly, he plays all kinds of games, and he talks on all subjects with a cool self-possession which dazzles and fascinates one. He finds a way to make one do whatever he wants."

"Take care, my boy; you are naturally trustful and obliging. I know that you are constantly in this Célestin's company. I have told you many times that you should be more particular in the choice of your friends than of your mistresses. You seem to have been spending your money freely of late; but it is what came to you from your mother, and you are entitled to spend it as you choose. Come, confess that the funds are rather low just now."

Albert smiled and lowered his eyes.

"In truth, father—as you are so good at guessing, I will not try to hide it from you any longer. I have been foolish—very foolish. I have let myself go without reflection. I have been very unlucky at cards. Oh! I know that I am very foolish to play; it would be much better never to touch a card. I will reform. I won't play any more."

"So that now you haven't any money?"

"I haven't a sou! but I have no lack of resources, of acquaintances."

"That's it; you will apply to usurers, who will consummate your ruin, instead of coming frankly to your father."

"Because you have done so much for me already; I shrank from abusing your indulgence."

"Nonsense! so long as you love me, I never shall regret what I do for you. Besides, will not my fortune be yours some day? for you know that I shall never marry again. My only reason for not turning it all over to you now is that, as I am more prudent than you, I prefer to keep it for you until a time when you yourself will be less thoughtless. Now, I look upon myself as your steward, I am managing your property."

"Oh! father, what do you mean? Are you not at liberty to dispose of your fortune?"

"For whose benefit would you have me dispose of it, if not for my son's? But the steward may presume, now and then, to preach a little; then he will have to turn to and make up the deficit. Here, my boy, take this wallet; you will find ten thousand francs in it; that will save you the trouble of applying to your companions in pleasure, who would refuse you, or to usurers, who, having to wait until my death for their money, would charge you a hundred per cent interest."

Albert was keenly touched by his father's kindness; he pushed away the hand that held the wallet, saying:

"You are too good, father; really, you are too good to me! But I will not take this money, I ought not to take it. You make so many sacrifices for me, and I am unworthy of them! I spend money so foolishly! No, it's too much; I will not accept it."

"I insist upon your taking it. I insist, do you hear? Am I not your father? do you refuse to obey me? If you do, then I shall be seriously angry."

Albert took the wallet, saying, as he embraced his father:

"Upon my word, you spoil me, as you did when I was a child."

"What would you have? it is my method. I have always thought that parents had better success by taking that course. I have an idea that, if I give you money to satisfy your whims, that very fact will lead you to spend it less heedlessly."

"Yes, you are right; I will make myself worthy of your indulgence."

"Enjoy yourself, be happy, and love me; that is all that I ask of you; and don't place too much dependence on your friend Célestin, who does not inspire me with confidence."

"I will follow your advice, father, I promise you."

"And I, for my part, promise to be more reasonable. I will not sit up for you any more; I will go to bed—do you understand? I will go to bed. But, I beg you, think of your health, and avoid dangerous intrigues, which sometimes lead to deplorable results. I will leave you now and get some sleep. It is understood that you are to come home when you please; hereafter, I will go to bed."

Monsieur Vermoncey left the room, and Albert threw himself on his couch.

"My father is the best of men," he thought; "but, after all, to do what he has done was perhaps the only way to make me behave myself. Yes, this kindness, which nothing wearies, and which leads him, instead of heaping reproaches on me, to pay the price of my follies again—this touching kindness makes me realize all the wickedness of my conduct much more keenly than sermons and harsh treatment would do. I have squandered all my mother's property in such a short time! I absolutely must reform, for I do not propose that my father shall straiten himself for me; and that is what will happen if I continue to lead the life I have been leading. For I know him; he could never bear to see me in embarrassed circumstances; he would subject himself to them, to extricate me. So it is definitely decided, I am to turn virtuous. First of all, I will not play cards any more; then, I will not associate with Célestin quite so much; the more I think of it, the more I am inclined to believe that my father is not very far out of the way in his opinion of him. I have noticed several things—at all events, I will be on my guard. Now, I will think of nothing but my good fortune for to-day. Madame Baldimer has consented to receive me. Strange woman! I am dead in love with her. But is it really love that I feel for her? Let us see: if, instead of resisting me as she has done ever since I began to be attentive to her, she had yielded to me after a feeble resistance, would not my love have died out long ago? I don't know what to answer. It seems to me that it would not—and yet—on reflection—— But what's the use? Let us try at first to triumph. In this affair, at all events, my fortune is in no danger. Madame Baldimer is rich—that is to say, she seems to be. She is a widow, consequently her own mistress—no husband to deceive, or to stand in fear of. I am sure that my father himself would approve of this liaison."

Having passed some time in such reflections as these, Albert fell asleep on his couch. When he woke, it was nearly noon, and his appointment was for one o'clock. He dressed in haste, but with great care, because he desired to maintain his reputation as one of the leading dandies of the capital; then, when his costume was complete, he sallied forth, took a cab, and was driven to Madame Baldimer's house on Rue Neuve-Vivienne.

XIII

MADAME BALDIMER.—A FAN

Let us now make the acquaintance of this lady, with whom Albert was so madly in love, and with whom his friend Célestin maintained a correspondence of which he knew nothing.

Madame Baldimer was twenty-eight years of age. Although she was very beautiful, she appeared fully as old as that, because her features, faultless and regular as they were, were somewhat pronounced and stern; because there was in her expression a touch of masculinity, of intelligence superior to vulgar weaknesses, and the signs of a firm and resolute will.

Tall, with a superb figure, of lithe and graceful carriage—which is rare in very tall women;—great black eyes full of fire, hair as black as jet, a shapely mouth with perfect teeth, sometimes ironical in expression, sometimes scornful, and sometimes fascinating beyond words; a white skin slightly lacking in lustre, a beautiful arm, a lovely hand, but a very long, very broad, and very flat foot,—such was Madame Baldimer. She always wore extremely long dresses, in order to hide that portion of her person which did not harmonize with the beauty of her face and her body.

Madame Baldimer lived on Rue Neuve-Vivienne, in a suite of rooms worthy of a *petite-maîtresse* upon whom fortune has lavished its favors. There she had assembled everything that could gratify the taste of the most exacting of women: furniture of priceless woods, bronzes, pictures, porcelain, statuettes, knickknacks, curiosities—nothing had been overlooked; Madame Baldimer's rooms contained all that the world could provide in the way of dainty, graceful, and sumptuous objects. It was a delicious haven of repose, where the feet rested on naught but soft carpets, where one breathed an atmosphere heavy with perfumes and flowers, where, in a word, it seemed that the aim had been to assemble whatever was best adapted to seduce the mind, the eye, and the senses.

It was not the first time that young Vermoncey had called upon Madame Baldimer; after meeting her in society, fascinated by her beauty, he had insistently craved the favor of being permitted to pay his court to her; and that favor had been granted with a readiness that led him to hope for the speedy triumph of his passion. But he had been disappointed; the lovely widow, who had appeared to be flattered at first by the effect her charms produced upon Albert, had received coldly enough the burning declaration which the young man was not slow in addressing to her; without absolutely spurning him, she had given him but little hope. Sometimes stern, sometimes merry, scornful or melancholy, Madame Baldimer's conduct toward Albert was that of a coquette who seeks to amuse herself at the expense of the man she has subjugated, or who does not feel sufficiently assured of her conquest, and, before surrendering, desires, by all possible means, to inflame and strengthen the sentiment she has inspired.

Discouraged, and at times disgusted by the non-success of his sighs, Albert swore to think no more of the fair American, which was the name by which Madame Baldimer was commonly designated in society. In his endeavor to forget her, he ceased to go where he was likely to meet her, in society or at her favorite places of amusement. But just as his resolution was beginning to bear fruit, and his common sense to triumph over his passion, he was sure to meet Madame Baldimer somewhere, at the theatre perhaps, at a concert, or wherever he happened to walk. It seemed that some evil genius kept her informed of his most trivial acts, and sent her upon his traces, in order to make him forget his resolution. The lovely creature exerted every means of seduction in her power to bring back to her feet the man who was struggling to free himself from her empire; and when he saw Madame Baldimer again, Albert speedily forgot her coquetry, and returned to her side more in love than ever, and always flattering himself that he was to be more fortunate in his suit.

But for some time past, Albert's vexation at his failure to triumph over the fair American had been intensified by the torments of jealousy; for he was not the only man whom Madame Baldimer's charms had fascinated; and as she was a flirt, she welcomed the homage of several other young men with as much favor as his. Latterly, a wealthy foreigner, a Swede, had joined the ranks of her adorers; this gentleman, one Count Dahlborne, was exceedingly ugly; he was very tall and stiff, with large, glassy eyes, and a red beard and moustache which made his aspect almost repulsive, and were ill adapted to attract a *petite-maîtresse*; and yet, whether from eccentricity or caprice, Madame Baldimer had seemed for some little time to take more pleasure in the Swedish count's society than in that of any other aspirant to her favor.

Albert, angry beyond measure, had sworn once more to cease to think of that woman who made a plaything of his love; and affairs were at that stage when, on the preceding evening, he and his friends had spied the fair American in a little *citadine*, driving along the boulevard. We have seen what followed. Unable to control the passion which dominated him, Albert wrote to Madame Baldimer, imploring her to accord him a tête-à-tête, and swearing that she would never see him again if she refused. The reply was laconic, but favorable. "Come at one o'clock to-morrow," said the note which he had received from the lovely widow, and which had made him so happy.

Let us accompany him now to the lady's abode, where he arrived at the hour mentioned in the note.

A maid ushered the young man into a small salon furnished with all the dainty coquetry of a boudoir. Enveloped in an ample blouse of white muslin, gathered about her waist by a gold cord, Madame Baldimer sat, or rather half reclined, on a divan. Her beautiful black hair was her only head-dress, but the novel and original fashion in which it was arranged, and the elegant simplicity of her dress, which heightened her charms—everything combined to impart to her person something which would have vanquished the most insensible of men, and Albert was very far from that.

At sight of the person she expected, and of whose passionate admiration of her beauty she was well aware, Madame Baldimer's eyes gleamed, and her face lighted up with a peculiar expression. Was it pleasure, love, or simple coquetry? One must needs have been a talented physiognomist to divine what was taking place in that woman's heart.

Albert bowed gracefully, and, at a sign from her, took his seat by her side.

"I trust that I shall hear no further complaints from you," said Madame Baldimer, with a smile; "I have given you this rendezvous—the tête-à-tête for which you asked me. Do you know that that is a very great favor?"

"Do you imagine, madame, that I am not profoundly conscious of its value; do you already repent of having afforded me so very great a pleasure?"

"I never repent of what I have done, for I always reflect before acting; and I realize all the consequences of what I

accord, of what I promise."

"Then you give me leave to love you and to tell you so, to hope that you will share my sentiments? for all that is the natural consequence of this priceless interview which you have deigned to grant me."

"Oh! gently, gently, Monsieur Albert; you go too fast. Love me, if you will; I do not forbid you—far from it; but I must be absolutely certain of your love, I must be convinced that it is too great to recoil before any obstacle—any sacrifice—before I make up my mind to yield to it."

"Oh! madame, are you not certain of the power of your charms, of the boundless influence you exert over me? What proof must you have, in order to believe in my love? Speak, command!—I am prepared to obey."

Madame Baldimer gazed earnestly at Albert, but in that searching gaze there was no trace of tenderness, nothing to indicate that it came from the heart. The young man was almost frightened by the persistent stare of those two great black eyes; he would have preferred a little confusion and embarrassment, some slight emotion, a sigh—in a word, some one of those things which indicate that the moment of avowal, of surrender, is at hand; and Madame Baldimer's expression conveyed no such indication.

"You have loved very often, have you not?" murmured the lovely widow at last.

"So I thought until I knew you, but I feel now that I never really loved before I saw you."

"Oh, yes! a man always says that to the last woman to whom he pays court. But I have been told that you have been guilty of a great many follies for your mistresses."

"Follies do not necessarily denote love."

"Sometimes they do. And suppose I wanted you to do something of the sort for me——"

"Why, I should be only too happy, if it were a means of making myself agreeable to you."

"Ah! you do not know me, you see. I am very peculiar. I want the man who loves me to gratify all my tastes, all my whims; to divine them himself; I do not understand the love that hesitates before a desire of the loved one. If I had been a man, I would have thrown myself into the water, into the flames, to prove my love for a woman! I would have defied all dangers, challenged all my rivals—in short, I would have turned the world upside down, aye, and committed crimes, if she had asked me to."

Albert, who was at a loss to understand the purport of her remarks, looked at her with a smile, saying:

"Have you some little crime you would like me to commit? or would you like me to jump into the water?"

Madame Baldimer pressed her lips together impatiently, as she replied:

"Mon Dieu! monsieur, what will you say next? I should be very sorry, indeed, if the slightest accident should happen to you on my account. Really, I don't know why I said that. I don't always consider what I say."

"But you consider what is said to you, surely?" rejoined Albert, taking her hand.

She smiled, and seemed to reflect for a moment.

"Where do you live now?" she asked. "Is it true that you have moved?"

"No, madame; I am still in the same house."

"And you live with your father, I believe?"

"On the same landing."

"For a young man who likes to do foolish things, it must be a little burdensome sometimes to have such a neighbor."

"Oh! no, madame; I am my own master; I do what I choose; my father does not interfere with me in any way; he is so kind to me!"

"Ah! he loves you very dearly, does he?"

"Yes, I cannot doubt it. And it is quite natural, as I am the only one left of a numerous family."

"What! has he no other child?"

"I had two brothers and a sister—and I alone am left."

Madame Baldimer let her head fall upon her breast, and seemed lost in thought.

"But we are talking of very serious subjects," said Albert, after a pause; "whereas I had no purpose to speak of anything but my love. Tell me, do you not love me a little?"

Madame Baldimer made no reply, but she allowed her hand to be pressed, heaved a sigh, and turned her eyes away. The young man was overjoyed; he thought that his love was beginning to touch the heart that he burned to subjugate, and he was about to put to his lips the hand that he held in his, when Madame Baldimer rose abruptly and began to pace the floor.

"Did you see Madame Plays at Count Dahlborne's last reception?" she asked, in a very vivacious tone. "She wore the sweetest cashmere; it fairly turned my head; so much so, that I dreamed of it, and I think of it all the time. There's one just like it at Delille's. They are the handsomest shawls there are in Paris to-day. I was tempted for a moment to buy it; but it costs too much; and one would be very foolish to yield to all one's fancies."

Albert was utterly disconcerted. At the very moment when he thought that she was about to respond to his loving protestations, she began to talk about cashmeres! That abrupt sally so bewildered him that he gazed at Madame Baldimer in blank amazement, and did not know what to reply.

She returned to her seat on the divan, and continued in a most amiable tone:

"Pardon me; here I am talking about clothes, now; I am very frivolous, am I not?"

"You are charming always—if only you would be a little more sentimental! When I speak of my love, you change the subject."

"Why, no—for that Madame Plays has been your mistress, has she not?"

"No, I give you my word of honor."

"Come, come, don't lie about it! As if one could not detect such things at once, however little one knows the world! Besides, Madame Plays made no secret of it—quite the contrary; that husband of hers is so obliging!"

"For heaven's sake, let us drop Madame Plays! I did not ask for a tête-à-tête with you, to talk about her!"

"I fancy not. But her shawl is so pretty—and I thought that someone said that you gave it to her."

"No, indeed! that is not true!"

"You won't admit it, of course—such a beautiful present! Were you so very much in love with that woman?"

"Once more, madame, I assure you that you are mistaken."

"Very well—it is possible; I am willing to believe you. But, oh! what a stunning shawl that is!"

Albert said nothing more. A thousand thoughts passed through his mind, and his brow began to darken. Madame Baldimer, noticing it, became more vivacious, more amiable, more tender, than ever; one would have said that she feared that the passion she had aroused might disappear, and that she was exerting herself to the utmost to prevent Albert's love from escaping her. He was altogether bewildered by the cajoleries which she lavished upon him; his hope that his flame was at last shared awoke to new life; indeed, Madame Baldimer's conduct fully justified that hope.

But at that moment the maid appeared in the doorway.

"Monsieur le Comte Dahlborne wishes to know if he may pay his respects to madame?" she said.

"Why, of course; show him in," replied Madame Baldimer, with an air of satisfaction; while Albert, whose features contracted when he heard the count's name, exclaimed angrily:

"What! you propose to receive that foreigner? And I hoped that I was to enjoy a tête-à-tête with you!"

"Have we not time enough to see each other again? The count was told that I was in; to refuse to receive him would be discourteous."

"Ah! madame, if you had taken any pleasure in hearing me speak of my love——"

"I do—but the world insists upon the observance of certain proprieties which we cannot disregard. Besides, this foreigner is so gallant——"

"Too gallant with you, in my opinion, and his frequent visits——"

"Hush, here he is!"

Count Dahlborne entered the salon, with the stiff, formal, pretentious air which he always maintained. He had several decorations in his buttonhole, and all the manners of a person of good breeding; but his long, surly face, even when he tried to be affable, seemed destined to put pleasure and love to flight. However, Madame Baldimer greeted him with a charming smile; he kissed her hand, bowed solemnly to Albert, and seated himself in an armchair, like a wooden man moved by springs.

"It is very good of you, monsieur le comte, to think of coming to see me," said the pretty widow, mincingly.

The Swede bowed, and replied with the utmost seriousness:

"Oh! I think of it all the time."

"You gentlemen who are in diplomacy, in politics, have very little time to give to the ladies; so that they should be highly flattered when it occurs to you to give a thought to them."

"Oh! I give many thoughts to them."

Albert could hardly restrain a smile at the Swede's phlegm and his laconic utterances, and he did not say a word, being curious to see if his conversation would continue in the same tone. But Madame Baldimer was too shrewd not to try to make the count talk more freely. She addressed him again.

"How did you like the last opéra-comique? We met there the night before last, you know."

"I don't remember it at all," replied Monsieur Dahlborne, after apparently trying to recall the incident.

"I should judge, then, that you didn't enjoy it very much."

The Swede made no reply, but felt in his coat pocket and produced a superb fan of some rare and valuable wood, beautifully carved, and enriched with inlaid work. He presented it to Madame Baldimer, saying:

"I broke yours at the theatre; will you allow me to replace it?"

The fair American took the fan and gazed at it with an enraptured expression.

"Oh! really, Monsieur Dahlborne," she cried, "this is too beautiful. I don't know whether I ought to accept it; it is simply magnificent! What workmanship! what exquisite finish! it is perfectly lovely! I cannot take it in exchange for the one I had."

"Then I will break this one too, if you give it back to me."

"Really, such gallantry—it puts all our Parisian gentlemen to the blush.—Look, Monsieur Vermoncey, isn't this a wonderfully lovely fan?"

Albert, whose face had worn a pronounced frown ever since the count presented the fan, barely glanced at it as he replied:

"I know very little about that sort of thing."

"It is impossible to imagine anything in better taste! Well, Monsieur Dahlborne, I will keep it; for it would really be too bad for you to break it."

"In that case, I am very glad that I broke the other," said the Swede, with a bow.

Albert found it difficult to restrain his vexation and anger; he could not keep his feet still, and seemed to be boiling on his chair. The pretty widow, who seemed to take great delight in the young man's jealousy and wrath, and who acted as if she desired to add to his misery, handed the fan to him again, saying:

"Pray look at it, monsieur, and admit that you have never seen anything so pretty and so refined."

This time the young man took the fan in his hands, held it up in the air, opened it as if to examine it more closely, then let it fall on the corner of his chair, whence it dropped to the floor. The dainty thing was too frail, too delicate, to resist that twofold fall, and it broke in several pieces.

Madame Baldimer gave a little shriek, which did not, however, indicate intense regret; indeed, it was possible that she expected that event and had looked forward to it. Count Dahlborne contented himself with picking up the pieces of the fan, which he coolly placed in his pocket.

"There are others," he said; "prettier ones than that, perhaps; I shall have the pleasure of bringing you one."

Albert's irritation increased apace; he flattered himself that by breaking the fan he would vex Madame Baldimer and anger the Swede—in short, he hoped for a scene, a quarrel; but the foreigner's imperturbable tranquillity

disappointed his hope; he saw that his awkwardness—or malice, as they chose to take it—was thrown away.

Madame Baldimer addressed no reproach to him; she simply said:

"We all have our unlucky days."

Then she resumed her conversation with the count, who continued to answer as laconically as before; in fact, she carried on the conversation practically alone, with an occasional ironical smile at her young adorer.

Albert paid no heed to what was being said, and he answered incoherently such remarks as were addressed to him; but he was determined not to abandon the field to the Swede, and not to go away so long as that gentleman stayed. For his part, the noble foreigner seemed not at all disposed to take his leave, although he did not appear to be enjoying himself overmuch.

Madame Baldimer probably divined the secret thoughts of her two suitors; and after entertaining them, as we have described, for some time, she herself rose and said:

"Excuse me for leaving you, messieurs; but I am going into the country for a few days, and I must make my toilet; you understand that, for a lady, that is too important a matter not to require a great deal of time."

The visitors understood that they must go. Both rose, and both took leave of the young woman. The Swede kissed her hand with much gravity; Albert contented himself with pressing it hard, saying under his breath:

"I hope to see you immediately after your return to Paris."

"I count upon it," replied Madame Baldimer, aloud. "I will write you as soon as I return."

The two rivals went downstairs together; on reaching the street, they saluted without a word.

Albert stood and looked after the count as he walked away, and was strongly tempted to go up to Madame Baldimer again; but he changed his mind and went home.

"To go back now," he said to himself, "would be a mistake. What should I say? I broke that fan; she saw that I did it in anger, and she didn't reprove me. But I must make that up to her. I have deprived her of one present, so I owe her another. That cashmere she spoke about is very expensive, I suppose, but no matter! It shall not be said that a Swede was more gallant than I. And yet—I don't know—but it seems to me that that woman doesn't love me;—and I thought that her acquaintance would cost me nothing! Ah! I hoped that she would be more amiable and less coquettish. I should do very well to forget Madame Baldimer—I know that. Why am I so bent upon triumphing over her? Oh! vanity, vanity!"

XIV

THE MARAIS.—A MYSTERY

Sans-Cravate had quickened his pace in order to reach Rue du Temple, into which he thought that he had seen Bastringuette turn. When he walked at his ordinary gait, he moved almost as rapidly as a cab; so that, as may be imagined, his double-quick step was likely to tire anybody who attempted to keep up with him.

Jean Ficelle was compelled to run, in order not to lose sight of his comrade. From time to time, he called out to him:

"Stop a minute, won't you! I can't keep up with you; do you want to see my spleen swell up like a balloon? *Sacrédié!* you ought to be a runner; I believe you could beat the horses on the Champ de Mars!"

Sans-Cravate reached Rue de la Corderie without catching another glimpse of the woman he had thought was Bastringuette. There he halted at last.

"It's mighty lucky," panted Jean Ficelle. "I was just going to give out; on my word, I was blowing like a cab horse!"

"I don't see that woman," said Sans-Cravate; "it's very strange! Where the devil has she gone to?"

"Was it really Bastringuette that you saw turn into this street? You ain't sure of it, are you?"

"No."

"What are we going to do now?"

"As long as we're in the Marais, let's go to Rue Barbette, where my traitor's cousin lives."

"All right, let's inspect the Marais, I'm willing; perhaps we may meet somebody else. But we don't need to run any more, that don't help us any. Let's walk along quiet now, arm in arm."

"Did I run just now?"

"Oh, no! of course not! not any faster than a steam engine. I'm willing to go with you and help you in your search; for I'm your friend—and when anyone insults you, d'ye see, it makes me madder than if it was me. Bless my soul! a friend's a friend—that's enough for me. But that's no reason for your breaking my wind. Besides, you know, you can find things out much better by going slow than by running like a bullet. Look you, I'll give you a comparison. Have you ever been on the railroad?"

"Yes; I went to Saint-Germain once, with Bastringuette."

"Well, what did you see, what did you notice on the way?"

"How do you suppose a man can notice anything when he's going like the wind?"

"Exactly—that's what I'm coming at. That's like you—just now. How do you expect to see anything or find out anything in the street, when you're running like a horse with the bit between his teeth?"

"I believe you're right; give me your arm, and we'll go slowly about our search in the Marais."

The Marais is the oldest quarter of Paris, next to the Cité; despite the numerous changes, enlargements, and improvements which have been made in the capital, the Marais has retained its primitive aspect more nearly than any other quarter. There we can still find a large number of the old houses and mansions occupied by our ancestors. It is not surprising, therefore, that, as we stroll through that quarter, our imagination carries us back several centuries, and our memory recalls all those deeds of the olden time with which our childhood was entertained.

For instance, if you have studied or read our history ever so little, you cannot pass through Rue des Tournelles

without recalling the fact that one of the king's palaces once stood on that street; that Henri II caused lists to be constructed, reaching from the Bastille to the Palais des Tournelles, for the tourney in which he received his death wound; that it was in front of the Bastille that the celebrated duel took place in the year 1578, between Quélus, Livarot, and Maugiron on the one side, and Ribérac, Schomberg, and D'Entragues on the other. They fought at five o'clock in the morning; Maugiron and Schomberg, who were less than twenty years old, were killed on the spot; Ribérac and Quélus died of their wounds shortly after. At that time, the rage for duelling was carried to such a pitch that it not infrequently happened that a father acted as his son's second. Still, those were the days which are called, by common consent, the *good old time*.

If you walk through Rue Sainte-Avoye, you look for the Hôtel de Mesmes, where lived Anne de Montmorency, Constable of France, an illustrious old man, who was mortally wounded, at the age of seventy-four, at the battle of Saint-Denis, after unhorsing by a blow with the hilt of his sword (the blade had been broken during the battle) the man who summoned him to surrender.

Rue Barbette recalls Isabel of Bavaria, that queen whom France holds in no very kindly remembrance. She had a house there, which she called her *petit séjour*. It was thither that she generally retired during the paroxysms of the malady of her husband, Charles VI; a custom which does not speak highly for her wifely affection; a good bourgeoise would have stayed with her husband, to take care of him and nurse him. But she was a queen—and this happened in the good old time.

Pass through Rue Culture-Sainte-Catherine, and you will be conscious of a thrill of terror as you recall the murderous attack upon the Connétable de Clisson by Pierre de Craon. For it was on the corner of that street that the latter lay in hiding on the night of June 13, 1391. He was at the head of a number of cutthroats, lying in wait for him whose death he had sworn to compass. Although he had no other weapon than a small knife, the constable used it with such wonderful address and vigor that he did not die of his wounds.

If you visit Rue des Lions, your eyes will seek the buildings in which the king's lions were confined, and your memory will at once recall the adventure of the Chevalier de Lorges. While François I was amusing himself by watching his lions at play, a lady dropped her glove in the arena, and said to De Lorges:

"If you would have me believe in your love, go fetch my glove."

The chevalier went down into the arena, picked up the glove from the midst of the lions, returned to his place, threw the glove in the lady's face, and never spoke to her again. That, too, happened in the good old time. To-day, our ladies do not exact such proofs of affection; with us, gallantry is less savage, and we might even apply to it what someone has said of music: *Emollit mores, nec sinit esse feros*.

Close at hand is Rue des Nonaindières, formerly Rue des Nonains d'Hière, because the abbey of the village of Hière still owned several estates on that street. That was the abbey where the use of eggs was not permitted until the fourteenth century; before that time, they were considered too great a delicacy for nuns.

Then there is Rue Saint-Paul, which cannot fail to remind you of the famous mansion erected by Charles V. With its gardens, it occupied all the space between Rue Saint-Antoine and the river, from the city moat to the church of the parish of Saint-Paul. In those days, the houses in which kings dwelt were always flanked by huge towers, and the gardens planted with fruit trees and vines. Rue Beautrellis and Rue de la Cerisaye took their names respectively from a beautiful trellis and from a plantation of cherry trees, both of which were within the confines of the gardens of the Hôtel Saint-Paul. We have become more luxurious than our kings of the olden time, for now no petty banker will have anything but ornamental trees and shrubs in his park; he would blush to have you find a plum tree or an apricot tree there.

On Rue des Trois Pavillons, one's thoughts inevitably turn to the fair Diane de Poitiers, whom Henri II made Duchesse de Valentinois. That street once bore her name, because she lived there; I cannot tell you why they rechristened it, but, for my part, I prefer the name of a pretty woman to Trois Pavillons.

Lastly, there is the Vieille Rue du Temple. Your heart contracts as you recall the assassination of the Duc d'Orléans on that street, one evening in the month of November, 1407, near a small house called the Image de Notre-Dame.

But we have dwelt long enough on the memories evoked by that ancient quarter. Although the Marais has retained down to the present day, in some of its streets, a part of its primitive aspect, it has undergone numerous changes; new, broad, and airy streets and elegant, even coquettish, houses have risen on the sites of the gloomy Gothic structures of our ancestors. As for the people of that quarter, they bear no resemblance whatever to the Parisians who lived in the Marais at the time of which we have been evoking the memory. Morals, customs, manners, everything is changed, and we may well congratulate our contemporaries that it is so; for, as we have seen, duels, murders, and ambuscades are the subjects of most of the legends that have come down to us. We may be less chivalrous, but, while we are no less brave, we are more light-hearted, more amiable, and much less treacherous than our forbears of the good old time.

To-day, the people of the Marais dress almost as well as those of the Chaussée d'Antin; there are no districts in Paris now that are behind the times in respect to fashions, but everybody cannot or does not choose to follow them. A dandy of Rue Saint-Louis may make as fine a show as he of Boulevard des Italiens, especially as there is nothing to prevent their having the same tailor.

We ought to say, however, that there is something more of the patriarchal rigidity of manners to be observed in the Marais than in other quarters of the capital. The people there close their shops a little earlier, and do not sit up quite so late as in the centre of the city; the young women are more submissive in their demeanor toward their parents, the young men do not as yet venture to appear in a salon when they exhale an odor of pipe or cigar. But these shades of difference are very slight, and, doubtless, will very soon blend with the general color.

The two messengers walked arm in arm. Sans-Cravate seemed deep in thought; he did not speak, but looked carefully on all sides, scrutinizing everybody who passed; he even tried to look into the shops; in every woman that he saw he fancied that he recognized Bastringuette, whom he had ceased to love, as he believed, but of whom he constantly thought. That is a very poor way of ceasing to love a person.

Jean Ficelle whistled and sang and smoked, and tried to enliven his comrade. But he barely replied, and often without rhyme or reason, which proved that he was not listening. Jean Ficelle tried frequently to stop him. When they passed a wine shop, he would say:

"Shan't we go in and take a glass? the glass of friendship! no one refuses that."

But Sans-Cravate refused; he walked on, saying:

"Later—in a minute—I don't want to drink now."

"You're getting to be a devilish queer kind of a friend," growled Jean Ficelle; "you make me travel all over Paris dry—do you want me to catch the pip, like a turkey?"

At last they reached Rue Barbette, and Sans-Cravate pointed out to his comrade a small fruit shop at some little distance.

"That's where Bastringuette's cousin lives."

"That one-eyed fruit stall?"

"To be sure, as she keeps it."

"Well, let's go in and see if your girl's there."

"I wouldn't like to have her think I'm watching her. Do you go by alone, and look in; the shop is very small, and you can easily see all the people that are in it; I'll wait here for you."

"All right. I'll be skirmisher."

He left Sans-Cravate standing at the entrance of a passageway, and walked toward the fruit stall at a mincing gait. He passed the shop twice, looking in both times, then returned to Sans-Cravate.

"There's no more Bastringuette than there is crabs in the fruit store," he said. "Your doll ain't there."

"Perhaps you didn't look closely."

"Oh! yes, I did; it ain't hard to do. There's nobody there except the proprietor, and an old woman who wants carrots, I fancy, for she was hauling 'em all over."

"I want to see for myself."

And Sans-Cravate walked toward the fruit stall, in his turn. Jean Ficelle followed him, still whistling. When they had passed the shop, Sans-Cravate stopped, and muttered with a distressed expression:

"She ain't there!"

"Pardieu! I knew it. I've got eyes like a falcon, I have. But I don't see what made you think Bastringuette was there. Your wench wouldn't have rigged herself out in her prettiest togs to go to a paltry shop where they sell burned onions and old Brie cheese. When a woman dresses up, it means that she's going to meet a man she wants to catch; you don't need to be a chemist to see that."

"Yes, yes, you are right."

"Oh! I know the world, my boy. Sometimes I don't say nothing, but I think a lot. But what's to hinder your going into the shop and asking if Bastringuette's been there to-day?"

"No; she'd find out that I'd been looking for her; she'd think that I care what she does. I won't do it."

"It seems to me, she wouldn't be far out of the way if she thought that."

"I tell you, I don't love her any more—I hate her; but I'd like to catch her with the other one, just so's to say: 'You're a pair of curs, and I despise you!'—and that's all. I tell you, Jean Ficelle, no woman will ever be anything to me after this; they're too treacherous; I won't have any more mistresses, I swear!"

"Don't swear—that's nonsense! Look you, I'll give you another comparison: when a woman has a pretty cat, she always says when she's patting him and kissing him: 'If I lose this one, I swear I'll never have another.'—But what happens? her cat dies or gets lost, and in a little while she's sure to get another one, and says just the same about him that she did about the first one. Now, you see, women say just the same thing about their lovers that they do about their cats. 'If this one leaves me, I'll never have another.'—And when their lover leaves 'em, they always take another, just as they do a cat. Well! when a man says: 'I won't have any more mistresses, because mine has played tricks on me,' it's just the same story."

"But I have some character, some strength of will!" cried Sans-Cravate; "and to prove that I don't mean to think of Bastringuette any more, I'm going to drink and gamble and enjoy myself—go on a spree with my friends."

"Well, well! good enough! that's what I call talking! Come along, I'll take you to the rendezvous of the *Francs-Lapins*. You'll find some friends there you can depend on. Have you got any cash?"

"Yes, I still have six or seven francs left of what Monsieur Albert gave me last night."

"We must spend 'em! Anyway, we can't do any more work to-day; it's too late, and you need amusement, and so do I. Forward—and as we go along, I'll teach you a drinking song that goes to the tune of *Partant pour la Syrie*, with an accompaniment of tongs beating a kettle; it has a fine effect at dessert."

Sans-Cravate took his companion's arm. It was evident that he was doing his utmost to overcome his chagrin and to appear hilarious. Jean Ficelle, who believed himself to be an excellent singer, had already begun the song with which he proposed to entertain his friend, when, as they turned out of Rue Barbette into Vieille Rue du Temple, a young man, who wore a round hat, and whose dress, while not fashionable, was that of a respectable bourgeois, walked rapidly by them. He seemed much preoccupied, and did not notice the two messengers. But they looked at him and recognized him, and Jean Ficelle triumphantly exclaimed:

"Well! what did I tell you? Was I mistaken? You've seen him yourself. That was Paul, dressed like a swell."

"Yes, it was him, that's sure! I can't get over it!"

"And do you see how proud he is when he's dressed up like that? he passed close to us, and pretended not to know us. What does it all mean? is that a messenger's dress? Anyone would swear he was a drummer. You see yourself that there's something crooked, some mystery."

Sans-Cravate was not listening, for he had run after Paul; although the younger man walked very rapidly, Sans-Cravate soon overtook and passed him; then, planting himself in front of him, he barred his passage, saying in a bantering tone which ill concealed his anger:

"Where are you going so fast? *Bigre!* seems to me, you're dressed mighty fine for a messenger who stands on the street corner to do errands."

Paul was thunderstruck when he recognized Sans-Cravate; but he strove to overcome his annoyance, and replied:

"I am not doing errands to-day, and when a man isn't working he is free to dress as he pleases."

"That may be! but, still, nobody ever meets us in such a rig, not even on Sunday."

"No," said Jean Ficelle, who had overtaken his two confrères, and joined in the conversation with a bantering leer; "no! we ain't so stylish as that! Gad! what a swell! Paul must have some other trade that pays better than ours, to wear such togs! And think how stingy he is with us, never willing to treat his friends to a glass!"

"I do what I choose! I am not accountable to anyone for my actions," retorted Paul, with an angry glance at Jean Ficelle; "I don't play the spy on other people, and I care mighty little what is thought of me by people who had better learn to behave themselves, first of all!"

With that, Paul hurried away, while the two messengers looked at each other with a disappointed expression.

"What an insolent brat he is, the little foundling!" cried Jean Ficelle; "don't that deserve a hiding—when a puppy without any father or mother puts on airs like that? He insulted you again."

"Me?" said Sans-Cravate, in surprise; "how did he insult me, I'd like to know?"

"Didn't you hear what he said: 'There are people who had better learn how to behave themselves before they spy on other people?'—He looked at you when he said that."

"I thought you was the one he was looking at."

"Oh, no! He spotted you."

"Well, one thing's certain, and that is that Paul isn't with Bastringuette, and that I was wrong to think they were together."

Sans-Cravate seemed less distressed; it was evident that his jealousy had partly disappeared. But Jean Ficelle rejoined, with a shrug:

"They ain't together now—that's true. But what is there to prove that they didn't separate just now? Perhaps Bastringuette ain't so far away. I have my ideas. See, I'll give you a comparison: it's like the way a cat insists on staying in a garret because he smells mice there; it's no use to try to drive him out——"

"*Sacrédié!* Jean Ficelle, you tire me with your comparisons! Come, let's go and see the *Francs-Lapins*; we are going to spree it a bit, you know. I'm all ready."

Instead of complying, Jean Ficelle pointed to a house with a passage, on the left, and said:

"That's where our fine gentleman came from; and perhaps we might be able to find out where he'd been."

"You think Paul came out of that house, you say?" said Sans-Cravate, walking in that direction.

"Yes, yes, I'm sure of it. I was looking straight ahead, and there was no one coming. And all of a sudden someone came out of that passage, and it was him."

Sans-Cravate stopped in front of the house, and finally decided to enter the passageway, which was rather dark, with no sign of a concierge's quarters. Jean Ficelle followed his comrade, and, after examining the passage for a moment, they walked toward a dark, winding staircase at the rear.

"Shall we go up?" said Jean Ficelle.

"Where shall we go? Who shall we ask for?"

"*Dame!* I don't know. But we can act as if we'd made a mistake. We'll ask for a midwife for a woman who's in a great hurry for one. How's that for a game! Or we can ask if Monsieur Paul, ex-messenger, lives in the house."

"No, no!" cried Sans-Cravate, going back into the street. "After all, Paul was right when he said we ought not to play the spy on him, that he's free to do what he pleases. I have a feeling that it's a mean business to try to find out people's secrets. I don't like the job at all. Let's go."

Jean Ficelle said no more, but followed his comrade, in evident ill humor, turning his head every minute to look at the house they had just left. Suddenly he seized Sans-Cravate, who was a little ahead of him, by the arm, and exclaimed in a shrill voice:

"Look! there you have Paul's secret—coming out of that passageway. Ah! I'd have bet my life on it!"

Sans-Cravate turned, and saw Bastringuette come out of the house they had just left and turn into Rue Barbette. The tall girl walked quite slowly, and stopped for a moment to take out her handkerchief and wipe her eyes, as if she had been crying; then she walked on.

Sans-Cravate had ample time to examine her; there was no doubt that it was she. He even recognized the silk handkerchief she took from her pocket, for it was a present he had given her. He could not take his eyes from his mistress; his face flushed, and his whole frame shook convulsively.

"It's her," he muttered; "in the same house with him. There's no mystery now—they were together, that's clear as day, the traitors! and, of course, to-day ain't the first time they've met there!"

He started to run after Bastringuette, who had not seen him; and Jean Ficelle, who hoped there would be a scene, rubbed his hands and smiled to himself. But his hope was soon crushed; Sans-Cravate stopped, making a mighty effort to restrain his passion, and retraced his steps.

"No," he said, "I won't go after her; for I might forget myself. When I'm angry, I don't know what I'm doing, and I might do some harm. No; let's go in the other direction!"

"Pardieu! suppose you did give her a beating—a jade that deceived you—I don't see where there'd be any great harm done! Why shouldn't you take that little satisfaction?"

But Sans-Cravate was not listening; he had walked away, and was already at some distance. Jean Ficelle finally decided to follow him, saying to himself:

"Never mind; he's out for good with his wench, and I'm quite sure the young fellow will get what he deserves, when there's a good chance. Then Sans-Cravate will consent to come and play a little game with his friends, and I'll fleece him at *table-basse* or *biribi*."

XV

THE DRESSMAKERS

Imagine eight young women assembled in a large room, called an *atelier*[H] probably because it contains no furniture except a very broad and long table and some chairs.

On the table, which might be considered a counter as well, were scattered different fabrics—silk, linen, cotton, and muslin; there was a great number of small pieces, cut in different shapes; there were dresses just begun, others almost finished, others still in the piece; and there were ribbons, fringes, lace, and a multitude of the odds and ends used by dressmakers, who have the art of imparting grace and value to all such things; we men do very wrong to laugh at them, for they take so much pains with their work solely to please us; and if women were not coquettish, we should be the ones most taken in.

The eight girls were seated around the *travail*—that is the name now given to the large cutting table; it used to be called *établi*, but that word is now used only by working people; and you must remember that a dressmaker is not a workgirl, but an artist in dresses.

The young women were from fifteen to twenty-eight years of age, the average being about twenty-two. Some were very pretty, some exceedingly ugly, and some had faces of the type which does not attract attention, but which often pleases because it possesses what is commonly called *la beauté du diable*—that is to say, youth. If the devil always retains that element of beauty, he is a very fortunate fellow; and we know a great number of ladies, once beautiful, who would be well content to-day with the *beauté du diable*.

They were all sewing more or less busily, which fact did not prevent their talking. Some had their faces bent over their work, and took little part in the conversation; but there were several who talked constantly, who were unwilling to keep silent even when one of the others tried to tell something, and who, by talking very loudly, succeeded in making themselves heard above all the rest. At times, this produced a din of voices by no means pleasant to the ear; indeed, it was not unworthy of the name of *charivari*.

Young Elina was one of the eight; she was incontestably one of the prettiest of them, also one of those who spoke least; she was superior to her companions in every respect.

One of the others, whose ugliness was most noticeable, and whose duty it seemed to be to overlook the work, doubtless because she had no love affairs to distract her thoughts, was also one of those whose mouths were almost never closed. But a tall damsel of twenty-four, whose face was not without charm and intelligence, but who was open to the reproach of being somewhat too free in her speech and manner and expression, ran a close second to the forewoman. A stenographer would have had much difficulty in following those two when they were in a talking mood, so to speak; and they almost always were.

Now, let us listen to the conversation, and try, amid all that chaos, to discover its subject and purport.

"What have you done with the gray silk, Mademoiselle Laura?"

"It's under your nose, you big goose; your nose is so long, you could touch it with it."

Mademoiselle Laura was the tall young woman we have mentioned; as she worked and talked, she kept her hips in motion as if she were dancing the *cachucha*. The forewoman's name was Mademoiselle Frotard, and she who had asked for the silk was a stout girl whose intelligence seemed to have been entirely absorbed by her corpulence; her name was Julienne, but her companions took the liberty of calling her Julie, Jules, and sometimes *Potage*. She had an excellent disposition and never lost her temper.

"Who's got the pink satin?"

"That will be a handsome dress—satin and velvet. Is it for a duchess?"

"Oh, no! it's for an actress at the Opéra-Comique; they dress ever so much better than the great ladies."

"Speaking of the Opéra-Comique, they say that there's boxes there with salons; is that so, Mamzelle Laura?"

"Well, rather, nephew."

"Come, come, mesdemoiselles, we must work and not idle so; here's a wedding dress that must be done to-morrow; Madame Dumanchon has promised it."

"It seems to me, we work well enough, mademoiselle; we don't take our eyes off our work. What more do you expect us to do? We haven't got twenty fingers!"

"That's all right, Mademoiselle Augustine; do you think I don't see you laughing and looking at Euphémie, who can't do anything but laugh? Humph! how stupid it is to laugh all the time, at the least thing—and often without knowing why!"

"I never laugh without knowing what I'm laughing at, mademoiselle! You're mistaken; I know very well what I'm laughing at."

"Well, tell us what it was that amused you so just now."

"Just now? why, I looked up and saw Jujules gaping and trying to sneeze at the same time; and she made up such an absurd face! Ha! ha! ha! she looked exactly like the milkwoman's donkey at the corner of the street."

"I, look like a donkey!"

"Hush, Potage, you haven't got the floor! I belch it from you, as an ancient orator said."

"Oh! Mademoiselle Laura, for heaven's sake, be a little more decent in your language; you often say things that ought not be said in a workroom of young ladies; Madame Dumanchon don't like it, and she holds me responsible."

"What's that? what are you singing to us? You accuse me of being indecent just because I say: 'I belch it from you'! That's a little rough, on my word! if you read the least bit of history, you'd know that anecdote, which isn't the least bit immoral, Mademoiselle Frotard; and for all you're so squeamish to-day, I've heard you sometimes fire words at us—I don't know where you picked 'em up, but they were a little tough."

"I, fire words at you!—Oh! if I went to the Bal Saint-Georges, like you, I might learn some very pretty things; but I defy anyone to say they ever saw me in such places."

"It's just as well you don't go; what would you do there? you probably wouldn't be invited to dance! and that would make you sick. By the way, let me tell you that the Bal Saint-Georges is a very nice place; the company there's a very good sort, and I pride myself on being one of the most regular attendants at these Ball-Clubs, as the wrinkled old *gentlemen* call 'em, who go there to dance the *anglaise* and other national jigs."

"Where's the piece of velvet I just put down here? Have any of you taken it, mesdemoiselles?"

"You've got it in your dress."

"So I have; great heaven! what was I thinking about?"

"Ha! ha! she sticks things in her bosom and then goes looking for 'em! She'll end by looking for her nose."

"And she won't find it; she's flat-nosed."

"Ha! ha! ha!"

"Good! there goes Euphémie again!"

"Bless my soul! how can I help laughing, when you say such silly things?"

"Look at Elina—she don't laugh, and she don't keep her tongue clacking; so she gets ahead with her skirt."

"Oh! Elina's preoccupied; she's been very pensive for some time; that's why she don't talk."

"I didn't suppose I was forbidden to think," rejoined little Elina gravely, and without raising her eyes.

"Of course not; thoughts are free, and they use their freedom! they're very lucky, our thoughts are; they can travel, they can run about the fields and go into whatever company they choose; while we have to sit here, planted on our chairs, and sew all day long! God! what fun! When shall I have a million a year, so that I can coddle myself and sleep and eat méringues all day? Oh! méringues—they're a high-toned delicacy, I tell you!"

"What are they made of?" asked stout Julienne, looking at Laura, who replied with the utmost seriousness:

"Preserved snails. The next time you go into a confectioner's, ask him for a snail méringue, and see how good it is!"

"Come, come, mesdemoiselles, we mustn't talk so much. Madame will soon be back, and this ball dress don't get on at all; and, you know, we still have two wedding dresses to finish this week."

"Two wedding dresses! Everybody seems to be getting married! I don't know why nobody marries me;—and you, Julienne, wouldn't you like to get married?"

"Me? oh, no, mademoiselle! on the contrary, I'd hate it."

"You would? Why, pray?"

"Because my cousin told me that when you're married you can't sleep alone any more; and I like to kick my legs about in bed, and I know it would bother me to have someone with me."

"Oh! what a simpleton you are, big Julienne! you sleep with your husband, and that don't prevent your kicking your legs about—not by any means!"

"How do you know that, Mamzelle Laura? Are you married?"

Mademoiselle Laura contented herself with an impatient gesture, muttering:

"Do let me finish; you disturb me when I am trying to make Turkish points. Oh! what a sigh Elina just gave! Haven't you finished moving, young dreamer?"

"Yes, mademoiselle; it was all done this morning."

"Ah! that's why you came later than usual?"

"I spoke to Mademoiselle Frotard about it."

"Who moved you? Was it Sans-Cravate, the Lovelace of the cooks of the neighborhood?"

"No, mademoiselle."

"Then it must have been his mate—Jean Ficelle. He's a very clever youth. I sent him once to carry a letter to someone, on important business, and I saw that he was full of intelligence.—Pass me the Scotch thread, Sophie."

"Oh! mesdemoiselles, you know very well that Elina has a messenger she always patronizes—one Paul, who puts on airs when we pass, which I consider altogether too cheeky; I propose to tell that young man of the people what I think of him some fine day!"

"Isn't a messenger as good as other men?" muttered little Elina, angrily. "Why hasn't he the right to look at us?"

"As good as other men! a messenger!" cried a young woman with an affected manner, a mocking smile, and a shrill voice; "fellows who live on street corners or in wine shops! Great God! if one of them should presume to stare at me very long, I'd soon show him his place."

"What nonsense!" said stout Julienne; "they're always in their place!"

"You see, I haven't any low tastes. I wouldn't go out with a man who didn't have gloves and trouser-straps!"

"Oho! she reminds me of that tall Hélène who used to work here, and had the brass to say to us: 'I don't go with any men but those that have red morocco boot tops; I don't have anything to say to a man who has black leather ones, because they don't go with patent-leather boots.'"

"I didn't know that honest men were canaille," retorted Elina, flushing with anger; "I thought no one was ever called by that name but villains and rascals."

"Hallo! here's Elina showing fight!" cried Laura; "*dame!* you attacked her on a sensitive spot. Bah! I've broken my needle; that's the fifth one to-day. That makes Euphémie laugh. It's very funny, ain't it?"

"Ha! ha! ha! five needles [*aiguilles*]! I thought she said five eels [*anguilles*]!"

"Oh! my dear, eels don't break; you can do whatever you please with eels—even to making a *matelote*."

"I know a song about 'em," said Julienne, "where it's said that eels are like young girls."

"The deuce! Potage has made me prick myself," rejoined Mademoiselle Laura; "she refers to something they sing at the Opéra-Comique:

"'Eels and young girls alike,
All's fish that comes to my net.'

There you have it; I heard it in *Mazaniello;* and that's a mighty fine opera, I tell you! I saw it at a theatre in the suburbs, where they had three supers to represent the Neapolitan populace in revolt; one of the three was a little old man of fifty or sixty, with a red cap, who kept running into the wings to turn up a lamp that threatened to go out, and finally took the lamp down altogether and held it in his hands during the grand final chorus, of which the words were:

"'Death, death to the tyrants!'

I believe. And when he was singing, as he was anxious to put spirit into it, he waved the lamp as if he was threatening the audience, so it seemed as if he intended to kill the tyrants with lamp oil. At last, right in the middle of the chorus, one of the three musicians who composed the orchestra stood up and shouted, as mad as you please: '*Sacrédié!* Monsieur Fiston, don't hold your arm out so far; you're throwing oil on me! My coat's all spotted! Is it the fashion now to sing in opera with a lamp in your hand?'—Mon Dieu! I never laughed so much in all my life!"

"What a lucky creature that Laura is! she goes to the theatre very often."

"Oh! I used to go much oftener. I had an acquaintance who stuffed me with tickets and all sorts of delicacies."

"A gentleman?"

"To be sure—and a very pretty fellow he was. I never saw a man wear his cravat so jauntily; he used to tie it in the most enticing rosette——"

"Mademoiselle Laura, you're beginning to say improper things again!"

"Pshaw! Mademoiselle Frotard, is there any law against my knowing a good-looking man? I believe I have a right to have known more than one; I'm twenty-four; I don't make any secret of my age, and I don't play the prude. I certainly don't claim to be a perfect innocent——"

"I'd like to see those boxes with salons; I shan't be happy till I've been in one."

"You must get your lover to take you, some day when he's in funds."

"My lover's never in funds; I don't know what he does with his money; he wouldn't treat me to a glass of cider! He pretends that he puts every sou in the savings bank against the time we get married."

"Believe that and drink water, my poor Sophie!—Pins, please."

"The large scissors."

"Here they are."

"However, he took me to the theatre once, because somebody'd given him the tickets. That day, I remember, we dined in my room, on very little, and I was very hungry at the theatre; it was a theatre on the boulevard, and the play was a long melodrama. At half-past eleven we still had four acts to see. But in the play, where the scene was a farmhouse, and peasants coming home from work, all of a sudden they brought on a big wooden bowl and went to eating cabbage soup. It was real cabbage soup, I can tell you, and it was smoking hot and smelt awful good. Imagine the effect it produced on us, hungry as we were!—'I've a good mind to apply at once to be admitted to the chorus,' I says to Oscar; but he had already got up and opened the door of the box, where we were all alone, and called the opener; when she came, I heard him say: 'Madame, my wife's in a situation where it ain't safe to refuse her anything—a situation in which women are subject to the strangest whims and the most extraordinary desires; you understand what I mean—she's enceinte. Well, after a dinner fit for the angels, at Véry's, here she is acting like a madwoman because she smells the cabbage soup they're eating on the stage. She wants some of it, says she must have it, and threatens me with a plate of soup as offspring if I don't satisfy her craving. Isn't there some way of doing it, madame? there's no sacrifice I'm not capable of making to prevent my wife's giving me a cabbage for a son.'—The opener, hoping to be handsomely paid, replied: 'Never fear, monsieur; I'll just go down and tell 'em at the office, and they'll send word on to the stage; your wife shall have some cabbage soup, I promise you.'—'A thousand thanks, madame,' says Oscar. 'Please go and ask for a lot of it at once, for in her present condition, when we dine at a restaurant, my wife always eats soup enough for four, and it doesn't do her a bit of harm.'—The box opener went off, and Oscar came back to his seat. You can judge whether I wanted to laugh. 'Keep quiet,' says my lover, 'and try to look as if you were in the condition I said you were; we are going to sup at the expense of the management; it won't hurt them, and it will give us great pleasure.'—And, sure enough, in a few minutes the opener came into the box with a pretty little soup tureen, a deep plate, and a spoon, which she offered me with a most amiable smile.—'Madame shall have all she wants,' she says; 'they've filled the tureen, so that madame can satisfy her craving.'—'You are a thousand times too good,' says Oscar; 'but I hope that you will be satisfied with me, too.'—With that, the woman bows to the ground, and goes off, shutting the door behind her. No sooner were we alone, than Oscar filled the plate for me, but kept the spoon and began to gulp down all that was left in the tureen; as there was only one spoon, I had to wait till he'd finished before I could eat my plateful; but the soup was fine, I assure you. When we had finished, Oscar called the box opener again, and gave her the tureen and plate and spoon.—'Would you believe that my wife would eat it all!' he says. 'It's incredible what feats a woman in her condition will perform!'—The opener said that she was delighted that I had satisfied my craving, and off she went again with the things we had given back to her. As soon as she was out of sight, my lover says to me: 'Put on your hat and shawl, and be all ready to go.'—Then he looked out in the corridor, but was flabbergasted to see our box opener sitting there in her chair; she had given the things to a lemonade boy to carry back to the stage. Oscar swore between his teeth, but as he was one of the kind that's never embarrassed, he says: 'Wait till the end of the next act.'—The act ended very soon; then he motioned to me to get up, I took his arm, and we went out of the box. I leaned on him as if it was very hard for me to walk. As we passed the opener, Oscar says to her: 'What do you suppose it is now, madame? this wife of mine insists on having an ice. Gad! what strange ideas Nature has!'—'But, monsieur, you could just as well have had it brought to your box.'—'True, but I think it won't do my wife any harm to have a breath of air. Keep our seats for us, madame; is it a long intermission?'—'Not very, monsieur.'—'Come, then, my dear love; let's make haste, for I'm very much interested in the play, and I don't want to lose a scene. Be sure and keep our box for us, madame.'—With that, Oscar pulled me along, and we left the theatre, with not the slightest desire to return. The box opener didn't even get the price of the cricket she had pushed under my feet. And that's the only time my lover ever treated me."

Mademoiselle Sophie's anecdote greatly amused the young dressmaking apprentices. Mademoiselle Euphémie could not control her outbursts of laughter, and the corpulent Julienne cried:

"But it would have been much more convenient for eating, if they'd had a box with a salon. There must be plates and glasses in those boxes."

"They even have a kitchen at one side," said tall Laura, "with everything you need to roast a joint."

"Oh! what fun it must be to see a play and turn the spit at the same time!"

"Mon Dieu! how you do chatter to-day, mesdemoiselles! If this nonsense goes on, we shan't be able to deliver our orders."

"Talking don't prevent sewing, mademoiselle."

"We haven't any reason to be dismal," said the girl with the affected manners.—"By the way, mesdemoiselles, I saw our old comrade Léonie yesterday. She had the arm of a man who didn't have any style at all—and who was dressed like a messenger!"

"Ah! some women have such vile taste!"

"They stoop so low!"

"There are some who wouldn't blush to love a bootblack."

"A messenger and a bootblack are the same thing."

"Do you think so, Euphémie?"

"To be sure; when you want to have your shoes polished, you go up to a messenger and put your foot on his *crochets*, and he's obliged to polish 'em right away."

"Indeed! but what if he don't have any polish?"

"That don't make any difference. Besides, those fellows always do have; they lend their things to each other."

"I must treat myself to a shine, then. Two sous is enough to pay, and I'll have my shoes shined by young Paul, the messenger who plays the swell."

Little Elina said nothing, but held her head still lower over her work; for her eyes were full of tears, she was choking with vexation and anger, and she did not want them to see her weep.

Luckily, Madame Dumanchon's arrival put an end to this conversation. When their mistress was present, the girls dared not talk or laugh or sing; they had to content themselves with looking at one another from time to time, and making signs or wry faces.

Elina left the workroom with a heavy heart and eyes still red with weeping.

"Mon Dieu! how spiteful those girls are!" she said to herself. "But what would they say if they knew that poor Paul, whom they sneer at so, is also a foundling? But all that doesn't prevent my loving him, for I'm sure that he's honest and good, and that he loves me. Oh! his voice rang so true when he told me. And it seems to me that, for all his humble condition, he has better manners and expresses himself better than any of the men who come to speak to the girls sometimes."

To help her to forget the chagrin she had felt in the workroom, she hurried across the street to say good-night to Paul before returning to her aunt's. But her hope was disappointed: Paul was not in his place, and, having looked about to see if she could discover him anywhere, Elina sadly went home, flattering herself that she would have better luck the next day.

The next day came; Elina, who had slept very little and dreamed a great deal,—which seems, at first glance, a difficult feat, yet happens not infrequently,—descended from her loft, dressed with care, looked at herself in her mirror oftener than usual, to make sure that her hair was becomingly arranged, and left the house, saying in reply to her aunt, who asked her where she was going so early, that there was a press of work, and that Madame Dumanchon had urged them to come in good season.

"There ought not to be many people in the street as yet," thought Elina, as she went downstairs; "and we shall have time to talk a little. I am sure he's as anxious for a little talk as I am."

She walked rapidly from her home to the dressmaker's, and when she reached the corner of the boulevard glanced toward Paul's usual stand; but he was not there, and there were no *crochets* or jacket to indicate that he had been there.

"It seems that he is less eager to see me than I am to see him," murmured Elina, with a sigh. "But he may have business this morning, some errand a long way off—so that it isn't his fault that he isn't here. Oh, yes! that must be it, for it isn't possible that he doesn't want to see me this morning."

Reflecting that it was still very early to go to her work, the girl walked some distance along the boulevard, then returned to the corner of Rue du Helder. Paul had not arrived, but his two comrades, Sans-Cravate and Jean Ficelle, were in their places.

Elina hesitated, walked away a few steps, then returned to the boulevard, saying to herself:

"But I haven't bought anything yet for my breakfast and dinner; still, I must live to-day, so I will go and buy something; meanwhile, he will come; as his comrades have arrived, he must be here soon."

She walked along the boulevard, going from one shop to another, hesitating between the pastry-cook and the grocer, between a loaf of bread and some *galette*, between honey and jam, in order to spend more time about it and to give Paul an opportunity to arrive. But she had to make up her mind at last. She returned to Rue du Helder with a portion of *galette*, which she had no desire to taste; but Paul was not in his place. She must needs resign herself to the necessity of going to her work without speaking to Paul, without even catching a glimpse of him.

All day long, her feet itched; she tried to invent pretexts for going out, she offered to do all the errands; but her zeal was unrewarded, she was not sent out; and the more eagerness she manifested, the more determined Mademoiselle Frotard seemed to be that she should not go. So that she was compelled to wait until evening.

As soon as the hour for ceasing work had come, she went away among the first; and when she reached the street, she gazed anxiously about. But her heart fell, her hope vanished; Paul was not there.

To be unable to see the person whom one loves best, to have no idea where he is, or what is the cause of his absence—is not that enough to make one exceedingly unhappy, and have we not all had that experience? Profound discouragement and gloom seize upon our hearts at such times, and it seems to us that all is lost, that our happy days have vanished, never to return.

In this frame of mind, Elina returned to her aunt's; she could find no hope elsewhere than in her little loft, because there everything spoke to her of Paul, because it was there that he had first told her that he loved her.

The next day, Elina rose as early, dressed even more quickly, and hastily left the house. She was no more fortunate than on the preceding day: the young messenger was not in his place; she loitered about and waited, to no purpose; nor did she see him that evening, when she left her work.

A week passed thus, a week which seemed endless to Elina, who was utterly unable to understand Paul's disappearance, and did not know what to think; but her heart was oppressed by anxiety and the keenest sorrow. At

last, on the ninth day, when she arrived at Rue du Helder in the morning and looked in vain for Paul, the girl could no longer endure the tortures she was suffering, and accosted Sans-Cravate and Jean Ficelle, who were seated side by side.

"I wanted to speak to your comrade—Monsieur Paul," she said, in a trembling voice; "doesn't he stand here any more?"

"You can see for yourself," replied Sans-Cravate, with his usual gruffness, intensified by the anger he felt whenever he heard Paul's name.

Elina was going away, afraid to ask any further questions, when Jean Ficelle said to her, in a wheedling tone:

"If mademoiselle wanted someone to do an errand or carry a letter, or anything else, I am at her service, and I can do what's wanted as well as the one she asks for."

"I thank you," replied Elina, "but I didn't ask for Monsieur Paul, to do an errand; that is to say, it was about something I asked him to do; he was to bring me an answer—and I haven't seen him for a week."

"Sure enough, mamzelle; he hasn't been in his place for as long as that."

"And you don't know what keeps him away? Perhaps he is sick?"

Jean Ficelle replied, with a cunning smile:

"Oh, no! that ain't the reason he ain't here."

"It isn't? Why, do you know what the reason is?"

"*Dame!* we have our suspicions. In the first place, perhaps he ain't a messenger any longer; he had more than one trade."

"More than one trade? What do you mean?"

"Oh! there's something mysterious about it; he's a man of mystery, is your Monsieur Paul."

"I don't understand."

"The fellow didn't tell everything he did, you see; and then, there may be another reason. As the young joker has stolen Sans-Cravate's mistress, he's afraid of getting a licking, and dursn't come and stand beside him—see?"

"And he does well," muttered Sans-Cravate, clenching his fists; "for a man can't always control himself; and, *sacrédié!* he'd better look out! I've got a score to settle with him, all the more because he was my friend; and when you hate your friends, you hate 'em worse than you do anybody else."

Elina had turned very pale; she gazed at the two messengers in turn, but could not speak, for what she had heard seemed to have deprived her of strength and voice alike; not until several minutes had elapsed did she succeed in faltering:

"What! Monsieur Paul—has stolen—the mistress of—of—— Oh, no! no! that is impossible!"

"Impossible!" sneered Jean Ficelle. "Ah! my pretty creature, you don't know men yet, and you don't know what they're capable of. But we're sure of what we say; we caught the thief in the market, as the saying is. Look you, I'll give you a comparison——"

"No, monsieur, no! I don't care what you say!" replied the girl, paying no heed to Jean Ficelle's comparison; "I am perfectly sure that that isn't true!"

With that, Elina turned away, putting her handkerchief to her eyes to wipe away her tears; for she was profoundly afflicted, although she refused to believe that Paul was guilty.

Sans-Cravate looked after her with interest as she walked away.

"Poor girl!" he said; "she don't believe he's unfaithful; she still has confidence in him, she refuses to abandon it; that's a fine thing, I tell you."

And a gleam of serenity appeared on the messenger's brow as he asked himself if he were not doing wrong not to imitate the girl. But Jean Ficelle exclaimed:

"*Ouiche!* she has confidence in him, you say? Not much! It was self-esteem made her say that, but she ran off crying like a baby."

Sans-Cravate resumed his preoccupied air, and Jean Ficelle began to whistle.

XVI

THE HUNT FOR TOBIE

Albert desired to see the beautiful cashmere shawl belonging to Madame Plays, the mate to which Madame Baldimer was so desirous to own. But in order to see the shawl, it was necessary to see her who wore it, and the young man was not certain whether it would be well for him to call on Madame Plays; after the slightly unceremonious way in which he had ceased his relations with her, sending Tobie as his substitute, he had reason to fear that he might not be warmly welcomed; indeed, he was not at all certain that his messenger had been well received, for when Pigeonnier returned from his interview, Albert was losing money at bouillotte, and was somewhat heated by the punch, so that he had paid no attention to the little fellow's answers on the subject of his rendezvous.

Albert concluded that the best way to find out whether Tobie had fully taken his place in the heart of the superb Plays was to go and ask him. But to do that it was necessary to know his address. Tobie had said several times that he lived on Rue de la Ferme-des-Mathurins; but that is a long street, and Albert felt no inclination to enter every house and ask for Monsieur Pigeonnier.

He was musing upon this subject on the day following his visit to Madame Baldimer, as he sauntered along the Boulevard des Italiens, as usual, with a cigar in his mouth, when he spied his friend Célestin, who at once came to meet him and held out his hand.

"Good-morning! how are you?"

"Very well."

"And the love affairs?"

"Oh! not in bad shape."

"I'll bet that you have seen Madame Baldimer again."

"You would not lose. I saw her at her house yesterday; she had given me a rendezvous. My affair is progressing, and on her return from the country, where she has gone for a few days, I hope that your friend will have nothing more to wish for."

"Good! I congratulate you."

There was a touch of irony in Monsieur Célestin's felicitations of his friend. Albert paid little attention to it, because he was accustomed to Célestin's manner, which always suggested that he was laughing at the person to whom he was speaking. That is a very clever way of concealing one's lack of merit—to pose as a scoffer or a *blagueur*, which are much the same thing.

"I am very glad to see you; perhaps you can help me to find the person I want to see."

"If you are looking for a faithful woman, I should find it very hard to direct you to one; for I don't know any."

"No, not that; I simply want to know Tobie Pigeonnier's address."

"The deuce! that's almost as hard to find as the other. In the first place, is it quite certain that little Tobie has any address? I believe he contents himself with perching, like the birds; he lights now here, now there."

"Let's not joke; he told us that he lived on Rue de la Ferme-des-Mathurins."

"True; but at what number?"

"Ah! that I don't know."

"It's very easy to say: 'I live on Rue de la Ferme-des-Mathurins, or Rue de la Paix, or Rue de Rivoli,'—when you confine yourself to that;—in that way, you can live in the most fashionable quarters of Paris. For my own part, I believe little Tobie has a nest in some closet on Rue du Pont-aux-Biches or Place du Chevalier-du-Guet. His hasty departure from our little party at Balivan's the night before last—after putting up a fetich for five hundred francs, that poor Varinet gave him change for—— Do you know, that looks rather shady to me. If he had lost the five hundred francs, it would be all right; you would say that it probably wasn't convenient for him to pay; but he lost only about fifty."

"Didn't he go to pay Varinet the next day?"

"I don't know, but I'll bet he didn't; however, we can soon find out, for there are Varinet and Balivan now, drinking chocolate at Tortoni's."

Albert and Célestin entered the café and accosted their friends, just as Balivan was dipping his cigar in the chocolate, thinking that it was a roll.

"Ah! here you are, you rakes!" cried Balivan; "have you been passing a night at the card table? What scandalous conduct! you are to blame for my not being able to do a stroke of work yesterday."

"But you are working hard to-day, Balivan. Upon my word, you are eating a fine cigar with your chocolate, instead of a roll!"

"Mon Dieu! so I am. Why do they make cigars of this shape? I took it for a *gaufre*,[I] and I adore *gaufres* in chocolate."

"We came to ask you about young Tobie, messieurs.—Have you seen him since night before last, Monsieur Varinet?"

"Who in the devil is Monsieur Tobie?" queried the white-eyebrowed young man, in amazement.

"The individual of the fetich—the olive."

"Oh, yes! the man who put up an olive at five hundred francs."

"The same. Has he been to you to pay his debt and redeem his pledge?"

"No; and to prove it, I'll show you that I still have it in my purse."

Monsieur Varinet drew his purse and showed them the olive among some gold pieces; it had dried and had shrunk considerably.

"If you keep the thing much longer," said Balivan, "you'll have nothing left but the stone."

"Do you know Tobie's address, messieurs?" asked Albert.

"No," replied the painter; "if I knew it, I should have gone there before this to remind him of his fetich, which he has not redeemed. As it was at my rooms that he contracted that debt to Monsieur Varinet, whom he had never seen but once before, I consider it infernally ill-bred in him not to have paid up at once."

"Oh! I am not at all alarmed," said Varinet, calmly.

"But I must see this little Tobie," said Albert; "and I will not fail to remind him of his debt; for it would be exceedingly unpleasant for us to have Monsieur Varinet fall a victim to his confidence in a person whom he had reason to look upon as a friend of ours."

"What's all this? what friends are you talking about?" said the jovial Mouillot, as he joined the four young men and shook hands with them. "I have just seen Dupétrain talking with a lady on Rue de Richelieu, messieurs; he had her backed up against a porte cochère, and, in my opinion, he was trying to magnetize her on the carriage stone."

"Ah! it's Mouillot!"

"How much did you win at bouillotte the night before last, Mouillot?"

"Six hundred and twenty francs; that's all."

"What a lucky dog he is! he always wins."

"Do you know Tobie's address, Mouillot?"

"Tobie's address? how should I know it? he never asks one to come and see him. When he invites his friends to breakfast, the mice will dance the cancan! By the way, has he redeemed his fetich?"

"No; Varinet hasn't seen him."

"Poor Varinet! that olive must be a little stale."

"So you don't know Monsieur Pigeonnier's address?"

"Not I."

"The first time that I had the honor of seeing the gentleman," said Varinet, swallowing a glass of water, "he told me that he was a commission merchant. If that is so, his name and address ought to be in the directory."

The other young men laughed heartily at Varinet's suggestion.

"Ha! ha! commission merchant!"

"That kind is never in the directory!"

"I'm not sure even that he's an unlicensed broker."[J]

"It's so easy in Paris to pretend to be what you are not!"

"There are many people who go so far as to assume names that don't belong to them."

"And who often succeed in making dupes, under the shelter of an honorable name."

"What is there that is never stolen in Paris?"

Meanwhile, Monsieur Varinet, desiring to satisfy his mind on the subject, sent the waiter for a business directory; they consulted the bulky volume, but they sought in vain the name of Tobie Pigeonnier, and the tall young man with white eyebrows began to frown as he looked at his olive.

"Listen, messieurs," said Albert; "we must not allow Monsieur Varinet to fall a victim to his confidence in a person to whom he was introduced by us. I don't say that Tobie intends to deny his debt, nor do I think so; but, lest he forget it, I make this proposition—that we beat up Monsieur Pigeonnier, we four, who know the city pretty well. I will take the Chaussée d'Antin, the Faubourg Saint-Honoré, and the Champs-Élysées."

"I, the Marais and the Palais-Royal quarter," said Balivan.

"I will look out for the Faubourg Saint-Germain and the boulevards," said Célestin.

"And I," cried Mouillot, "I go everywhere, in all directions, and I will take care of the rest. The first one who sees Tobie must capture him and take him to Varinet's house, or bring him here: this will be our general rendezvous. We will come here every morning to report the result of our search."

"Agreed; we will go Tobie-hunting."

"Tobie-hunting it is! Tally-ho!"

"But one suggestion, messieurs," said Mouillot; "I don't see why this hunt should interfere with our hunting grisettes also. How about your little neighbor, Balivan? She is really charming, do you know? What are you doing with her?"

"Oh! I assure you, messieurs, that young woman is very virtuous, and I don't advise you to think about her—it will be time thrown away."

"Virtuous!" repeated Célestin, with a shrug; "I thought you knew more than that about the sex, my dear artist! We found your little virtue in a dark loft, with a young rascal, who was holding her very tight—and for whom I have a rod in pickle; but he wasn't in his usual place this morning."

"Nonsense," said Albert; "you don't propose to fight with a messenger, I trust! and, after all, if he is her lover, he was quite right to defend the girl."

"Oho! here's Albert taking up the cudgels for the dressmaker! it's highly edifying.—I propose a wager, Mouillot: fifteen napoleons that I triumph first over that timid virtue."

"Done! I take the bet.—Are you in it, Albert?"

"No."

"Albert is too busily occupied elsewhere," said Célestin, in a mocking tone; "and, besides that, don't you see that he has set himself up as the defender of grisettes?"

"Messieurs," interposed Balivan, "I assure you that neither one of you will win. My neighbor won't listen to you."

"You'll see whether she will or not, artist. I will be persistent, I tell you; not so much on account of the girl, as to be revenged on that cur who played the insolent with us. He does our errands, and he dares to talk back to us! upon my word, it is sickening!"

The young men had left the café and were about to separate, when Bastringuette passed them on the boulevard, with her flowers.

"There's Bastringuette!" exclaimed Albert; "parbleu! she is always out of doors—she must help us in our hunt for Tobie."

"True, she can act as beater," said Mouillot.

The young men walked toward the flower girl, and halted in front of her. Bastringuette looked up at them.

"Mon Dieu!" she ejaculated; "what a bunch of customers to fall on me all at once! What luck for me! for I haven't sold anything to-day. Buy my flowers, messieurs; I have something to put in your buttonholes."

"Bastringuette," said Albert, "do you remember the young man who was with us the day before yesterday on the boulevard? the one who thrust his nose into all your bouquets to smell them better?"

"You mean a fat little fellow with a face that looked like a painting, and a small glass in one eye?"

"That's the man, you know him."

"Well, we are hunting him."

"Is he a stag?"

"Yes; we are even afraid that he's a kite!"[K]

"A kite! and you want to hitch something to his tail, so that he'll go up straighter."

"Ha! ha! ha! On the contrary, we're running after him to prevent his flying at all. If you see him, tell him a lady wants to see him at Tortoni's."

"No, no, messieurs; Tobie wouldn't believe that; he knows that ladies don't often go to Tortoni's, and that they wouldn't give him a rendezvous there; the best way would be to have Bastringuette tell our man that a lady, who wishes to see him alone, will expect him, at nine in the evening, at the—the—Pâté des Italiens.—You might even give him a handsome bouquet, and tell him that the lady sent it to him. And when you have done it, just tell one of the waiters in the café, and he will inform us; we all go there every day."

"Bravo!" said Mouillot; "that's an excellent scheme; if our flower girl here sees Tobie and tells him that, he will surely fall into the trap, and we'll nab our man at the Pâté des Italiens."

"Well, Bastringuette, will you do what we want?"

"Why not?—that is, if I see the man."

"Oh! you will surely see him! But what's the trouble, Bastringuette? you don't seem in as good spirits as usual to-day; has there been any difficulty in our love affairs?"

The tall girl replaced her tray on her hip, with a sigh, and answered:

"My love affairs! Oh! they're all done with; they've gone to bed."

"What do you mean? Has Sans-Cravate been unfaithful to you?"

"Just the opposite; I tried to be to him."

"Bravo! good enough! that's frank, at all events! Agree, messieurs, that very few women who act like Bastringuette would answer as she did."

"Oh! bless my soul! I don't take four roads to get to a place. I don't know how to hide my passions. I didn't want to deceive Sans-Cravate, so I told him that I didn't love him any more."

"And he tried to force you to stay with him—to love him?"

"Not much! as if a man could force a woman to do such things when it don't suit her! You're pretty countrified still, if you think that. A woman ain't to be forced—I don't care how many keys and picklocks you have. When she don't choose to—good-day!"

"Well, then, why are you so dismal? is your new love affair going wrong already?"

"I tell you that I haven't got any love affair—that I don't propose to have any more!"

"But you say you tried to be unfaithful to Sans-Cravate?"

"That's all right! that's my business, my secret; it don't concern you! Are you my fathers and mothers, to cross-examine me like this?"

"Ha! ha! beware, messieurs, our ally is on the point of losing her temper."

"Here, Bastringuette," said Albert, tossing a five-franc piece on the girl's tray; "this is for keeping a sharp lookout for Tobie, and we promise you twice as much more if you send him to the rendezvous as we have agreed."

"All right, I'll try to earn it. Adieu, my little loves!"

Bastringuette walked away; and the young men separated, promising to meet in front of Tortoni's at the same hour the next day.

Albert did not fail to be at the rendezvous at the appointed time, and found Mouillot there.

"Célestin and Balivan will be here directly," said the latter; "there's nothing new; Bastringuette hasn't left any word at the café. Have you had any better luck?"

"No, I haven't succeeded in discovering the slightest trace of the quarry."

"Perhaps we shall be more fortunate to-morrow."

The next day brought no different result. On the fourth day, Balivan came running into Tortoni's just after his friends.

"I've seen him," he cried, "on Rue de Bondy, near Porte Saint-Martin. I recognized him perfectly, and I am certain he saw me, too, for he turned purple and looked the other way."

"Well! you ran after him——"

"What did he say to you?"

"Did you take him to Varinet's?"

"Has he redeemed his olive?"

"Mon Dieu! my friends, I don't know how it happened; but I noticed at that moment that my cigar was out, and I stepped into a tobacco shop close by to get a light; it took only a minute, but when I returned to the street I looked in every direction—all in vain; I couldn't find Tobie again!"

"The devil take you!"

"Oh! that's just like Balivan! He catches sight of the man we've been hunting for four days, and, instead of grabbing him, he goes into a shop to light his cigar!"

"You ought to take yourself for your model! you'll never find such another."

"Faith! messieurs, I think perhaps you'd have done the same, if you had been in my place. An excellent pure Havana cigar! A fellow can't afford to let it get cold; it's like coffee, it must be taken hot. However, we're sure now that Tobie's in Paris, that's something."

"Why, who ever doubted it? But you won't be the one to make him pay Varinet."

The young men separated, a little discouraged. Two days later, Albert had made no further progress, and he knew that Madame Baldimer might return from the country at any moment. Being determined, however, to purchase the shawl she had praised so extravagantly, before she should return, Albert decided to call upon Madame Plays and brave her indignation.

Having made up his mind, he bent his steps toward her abode; but he took care to purchase a lovely bouquet en route; we must always be gallant, especially with a woman who has had a weakness for us.

It was two o'clock in the afternoon; that was the time of day when the superb Herminie held court in her boudoir and gave audience to those favored mortals who were privileged to enter that mysterious sanctuary.

Albert, who could fairly say: "Having been brought up in the harem, I know all its nooks and corners," passed the concierge, with his head in the air, walked directly to a small private staircase, went up to the first floor, stopped in front of a door, and knocked almost like a Freemason.

In a few seconds the door opened, and a lady's-maid, whose face was exceedingly ugly, but much more intellectual than her mistress's, uttered a cry of surprise when she saw Albert.

"Oh! monsieur," she said, "it's a long while since we've seen you here!"

"That is true, Lisa; I have been unable to come these last few days. But tell me, is your mistress visible? May I pay

my respects to her?"

The lady's-maid smiled faintly, as she replied:

"It is impossible, monsieur. Madame has the vapors; she cannot receive you."

"She can't receive me—me?"

"You, monsieur."

"But she never used to have the vapors for me."

"*Dame!* monsieur, she has them now."

"Very well; I understand, Lisa; this means that your mistress doesn't choose to receive me, and so she has given these orders."

The maid dared not admit that that was the truth; but she smiled, and put her finger to her lips. Albert was too well-bred to disregard such an order; he too laughed as his eye met the lady's-maid's, and he turned on his heel, saying with a tragicomic air:

"I have deserved my fate, and must submit to it."

But as he was about to leave the courtyard, he paused.

"Suppose I pay the husband a visit?" he said to himself. "Parbleu! I'll do it; he's just the boy to reconcile his wife and me, or at least to be of great service to me in this emergency. Let's see dear Monsieur Plays."

Albert took the main staircase this time; he asked a footman if Monsieur Plays was at his desk, and, receiving an affirmative reply, entered the merchant's office.

XVII

MONSIEUR PLAYS

The superb Herminie's husband was a little man, of middle age, neither handsome nor ugly, with a very red, babyish face, round eyes, wide open and prominent, red lips always wreathed in smiles; in a word, what might be called a happy face; and happy he was to the last degree.

When he saw young Vermoncey enter his office, Monsieur Plays's face assumed a curious expression; it was evident that he was embarrassed, and did not know how he ought to receive his visitor. This reception in no wise surprised Albert, for he knew that Monsieur Plays adapted his ideas to his wife's on every subject; one was sure of a cordial welcome from the husband, so long as he was in madame's good books; but as soon as she looked coldly on anyone, or had trouble with one of her adorers, the dear husband dared not be friendly to the person from whom madame had withdrawn her favor. And as Monsieur Plays was one of those men who would like to be on good terms with the whole world, his wife's caprices sometimes caused him very great embarrassment.

"Madame Plays has been giving me a horrible name to her husband," thought Albert, noticing the stiff manner in which the merchant greeted him. And, determined to divert himself with the embarrassment of the unfortunate husband who turned a cold shoulder to the young men who ceased to pay court to his wife, he went up to Monsieur Plays, grasped his hand just as he was about to withdraw it, and shook it violently.

"Good-morning, my dear Monsieur Plays!" he cried. "I am delighted to find you. I have been meaning for a long time to come to see you. But time passes so quickly! This is the first moment I have been able to find for a week."

Monsieur Plays did not know what reply to make; he bowed, took his pen out of his mouth and put it back again, glanced timidly about the room, as if he feared that his wife would appear, and stammered at last:

"Monsieur Albert—certainly—very well—and you—— You are very kind. But, you see, I am working just now—I am doing something——"

Albert pretended not to understand the lack of cordiality in that reply; he threw himself into an easy-chair, and continued:

"And the pleasures, Monsieur Plays, how do the pleasures, the little love affairs, come on, eh? Aha! it seems that you're a great lover of the sex, but you keep it dark! Oh! you have made many conquests, they say; I've heard of you in the foyer at the Opéra—yes, and in the wings too."

The merchant, who was highly flattered to be looked upon as a rake, smiled and rubbed his hands as he replied:

"No, really! you have heard of me at the Opéra?—and in the wings? But I have never been there; Madame Plays wouldn't allow it."

"I believe you, and she is right. But one may know some of these theatrical ladies without going there."

"No, no, I assure you! But, wait; I believe that a lady did ask me one day to pay a draft that had fifteen days to run, on the plea that she had to take a little journey; but I believe she told me she was a *marcheuse*."[L]

"You see! you acknowledge the corn, rake that you are!"

"What? Why, it never occurred to me that that lady was on the stage. She said she was a *marcheuse*, and I understood that she liked to take long walks."

"Oh! you joker! play the innocent, if you will; but you know perfectly well that that's what they call the supernumeraries at the Opéra."

"I give you my word that I had no idea of it. What do you say? there are *marcheuses* there?"

"Yes, monsieur; and they are a very popular class of lorettes."

"Then there ought to be *trotteuses*[M] there, too."

"Ha! ha! you're a sad rascal, Monsieur Plays! And the best part of it is that you conceal your game so perfectly."

Monsieur Plays roared with laughter; he was overjoyed to have discounted a draft for a lady connected with the stage, who had mentioned him in the wings. But he suddenly remembered that his wife had told him that she would not receive Albert any more, that he was an exceedingly ill-bred young man, who had been shockingly rude to her in society; whereupon the poor husband became sober, repented of having laughed, and muttered, with a piteous

glance at Albert:

"I don't know why I am laughing, for I have a great deal to do. I have some accounts to look over, and I am away behind. I have an endless amount of work on hand."

Before the young man could reply, a small door leading from the office to the private apartments was suddenly thrown open, and Madame Plays appeared.

The robust Herminie was in morning dress, but there was always something piquant, something seductive, in her costume as well as in her eyes. A figured dress, very high in the neck, entirely concealed her charms, but outlined them with an exactitude which produced a rather more startling effect than nudity; two globes, possibly a little large, but very well placed, proudly embellished her ample chest; a tightly laced waist and very pronounced hips served as a pedestal to that bust; and her somewhat dishevelled hair, with long corkscrew curls falling over her shoulders, formed an attractive setting for Madame Plays's face, to which her excitement and her angry glance, as she entered her husband's office, gave much animation.

Herminie manifested no surprise when she saw Albert; it was evident that she expected to find him there, but she hurled a glance at him with which she apparently hoped to strike him to the earth. The young man withstood that awful glance as coolly as if he were provided with a lightning rod, and answered it with a low bow, while a faint smile lurked about the corners of his mouth.

Monsieur Plays was terrified when his wife appeared; he thought that she had heard him laughing with Albert, and he saw that she was angry; so he could not decide what to do, and, in his embarrassment, chewed his pen instead of simply holding it in his mouth.

"Ah! you have company, monsieur?" said Herminie, biting off her words, and looking from Albert to her husband; "I am sorry to interrupt your conversation, messieurs. Doubtless you have some very interesting things to say to each other. If I had dreamed that Monsieur Vermoncey was here, be sure that I should not have come."

"My dear love—we were saying—I don't know what. I didn't expect a visit from——"

"I called upon you first, madame," Albert interposed; "but I was told that you had the vapors, that I could not see you; so I came to ask your husband about your health, as I was anxious about it."

"Yes," murmured Monsieur Plays, spitting out a piece of his pen, "yes, Monsieur Albert came to——"

"Ah! so you are anxious about my health, monsieur! That is a surprise; I should never have guessed it. Ha! ha! admirable! You amuse yourself at a person's expense, you play a trick upon her—a shameful, outrageous jest of a sort you wouldn't dare try with a grisette—and then, a week afterward, you come here as if nothing had happened, with a cool, placid air! Oh! it makes me ill, it sets my nerves on edge; I would like to smash something!"

All this was emitted with remarkable volubility by the superb Herminie, as she paced the floor in intense excitement. Her husband drew back when she talked of smashing something, and faltered:

"I was busy working, going over my accounts, and——"

"All right, monsieur, all right! I don't ask you what you were doing. Well! what are you eating now? what's that you are twisting about between your teeth? Have you taken to chewing tobacco? that would be the last straw!"

"No, my dear love; I was just sucking my pen—for amusement."

"That's an odd stick of candy," said Albert, laughing.

Even Herminie could not restrain a smile; but she instantly resumed her wrathful expression, and turned her back to her husband to speak to Albert:

"I shall never forget that abominable letter! I would never have believed, monsieur, that you would write such things! It was in the vilest taste!"

"On my honor, madame, I do not know what you mean; I am not aware of having written a single word that could offend you."

"Oh! this is too much! to make such a statement as that! I am terribly sorry that I destroyed the insolent letter, but I know it by heart."

Monsieur Plays had returned to his desk, and was mumbling between his teeth:

"Five and six are eleven, and eight makes nineteen—and eight makes nineteen——"

"And then, it was so idiotic: 'your face is constantly before me, calf's head *en tortue*,'—isn't that very refined?—and —'I send you an intimate friend—perfectly fresh.'—Ah! your friend was fresh, and no mistake! Such a little fool! and how I treated him!"

"What you say perplexes me entirely. I cannot understand it. There must be some mistake—you must have read some other letter."

"Oh, no! it was addressed to me all right!"

"Nineteen and twenty-four make forty-three; put down three and carry—and carry——"

"Be quiet, Monsieur Plays; you are insufferable with your addition! What do I care what you carry? Hold your tongue!"

Monsieur Plays subsided, with an air of consternation, nor did Albert say anything more; but he produced the lovely bouquet, which he had thus far held behind his back.

When Herminie saw it, her face softened, and it retained only a slight pouting expression as she said:

"Ah! you have a bouquet."

"Yes, madame; I intended to offer it to you when I called, but I was not fortunate enough to be admitted."

"It is very pretty."

Monsieur Plays walked timidly to Albert's side, and murmured:

"Your bouquet is charming; I was saying to myself: 'It smells very sweet here, and it can't be me.'"

"Will you condescend to accept it, madame?"

"I ought not to, for I am sure that it wasn't intended for me; but I am so fond of flowers! Well, give it to me."

She took the bouquet and held it to her nose.

"It is very sweet," she said; "it perfumes the whole room. But, no matter; I detest you, I will never forgive you

while I live, I forbid you to come to my house any more."

"Oh! madame, the idea of bearing malice to such an extent as that! and for what? for a misunderstanding, a blunder perhaps, but in which you surely cannot believe that there was any intention to offend you. No, you will not be so cruel—you will allow me to continue to call upon you."

Herminie played with her bouquet without replying, but Monsieur Plays said smilingly to Albert, in an undertone:

"She'll allow you to; I am sure that she doesn't bear you any ill will now."

"Why do you interfere, Monsieur Plays? I don't know what you mean by meddling in my affairs! Keep quiet, I tell you again; this doesn't concern you!"

Monsieur Plays set about cutting a quill.

"Besides, I don't like people who have so many whims," continued Herminie, after a short pause. "If you pass a week without thinking of a person, why shouldn't you pass months? To what motive do I owe monsieur's call to-day?"

"I had a motive, madame," Albert replied, with a smile; "I have heard a great deal of a cashmere shawl which you wore at Count Dahlborne's reception; it is a marvel of beauty, it seems, and I have heard it extolled so highly that I am very desirous to see it. Will you not be kind enough to show it to me?"

Herminie thought that Albert resorted to that pretext in order not to make her husband jealous; for she was far from suspecting that the shawl was really what had brought her fickle lover back to her. The idea amused her, and she replied, with a laugh:

"Oho! so you came to see my cashmere! Well! I won't show it to you; if I did, I should have to admit you to my boudoir, and I have sworn that you shall never put your foot there again."

"But we swear so many things! A pretty woman's oaths are written on sand, and the slightest breath effaces them."

"And what are men's oaths written on?"

"On brass.—Isn't it true, Monsieur Plays, that we men keep to our oaths?"

"Why, yes; such things have been known. I myself, for instance, swore that I would stop taking snuff when I married Madame Plays, because she doesn't like to hear people sneeze: well, I have kept my oath; to be sure, I still sneeze, but not so often."

While Monsieur Plays indulged in this reflection, his wife looked fixedly at Albert, and there was in her eyes an animation, a flame, which indicated something very different from anger. On his side, the young man bestowed a very tender glance on her, and said:

"Come, don't be cross with me any more, but promise to show it to me."

"No; I should have to admit you to my boudoir."

"I am so anxious to see it."

"Indeed! you want to see it, do you?" said Herminie, with a sly smile.

Monsieur Plays moved about on his chair, saying:

"Come, my dear love, as it will give him pleasure, do show it to him. Bless my soul, how good that bouquet smells!"

Herminie was touched; she smiled at the young man in a very significant way, and held out her hand to him.

"Oh! I am too weak," she cried; "you abuse my weakness—ah! Dieu! Well, give me your hand and escort me to my apartment. But I won't show it to you, I tell you!"

Albert took the hand that Madame Plays offered him, and, with a bow to her husband, left the room with her by the little door.

Monsieur Plays seemed overjoyed, and whispered in Albert's ear as he passed:

"I know her; I promise you that she'll show it to you."

XVIII

A SECRET PACT.—THE PÂTÉ DES ITALIENS

It was only nine o'clock in the morning, and Célestin de Valnoir was already ringing at Madame Baldimer's door. Rosa, her maid, answered the bell, and smiled at the young man as if she were expecting him.

"This is a very early hour for me to call on your mistress," said Célestin, assuming a presumptuous, self-sufficient air; "but I received a note from Madame Baldimer last evening, in which she informed me of her return to Paris and requested me to call this morning before nine; and I am always prompt at a rendezvous with a lovely woman."

"Yes, monsieur; madame expects you, for she told me to admit you as soon as you came."

"Madame Baldimer is still in bed, I suppose?"

"No, monsieur; madame got up early, because she expected you."

"Mon Dieu! that was no reason! I could have talked with her just as well in bed—indeed, I should have preferred that. But, no matter, take me to her."

The maid led Célestin through several rooms, and ushered him into her mistress's presence. Madame Baldimer was seated in a reclining chair, dressed in a velvet robe de chambre; her hair was dressed very simply and kept in place on top of her head by a sort of net; plainly, she was not yet dressed for the day, and was not at all anxious to make a favorable impression. None the less, she was extremely pretty in that négligé; but women are never more seductive than when we see them unadorned except by their natural charms; it very rarely happens, however, that they are willing to allow themselves to be seen in that condition.

Madame Baldimer greeted Célestin with a faint smile, and said, pointing to a chair near her own:

"You are on time; that is well done of you—I like that. Promptness is so rare in this world. Pray be seated."

"You should be certain, madame, of the zeal with which I always comply with your wishes; you are aware of my devotion to you; you know that there is nothing I would not do to please you. Love even leads me to betray

friendship."

"Friendship!" echoed Madame Baldimer, and a sarcastic smile played about her lips; "oh, no! you are not betraying that, I assure you. Have you ever been Albert's friend?"

"To be sure, madame; we are very intimate."

"You men, when you have met once or twice at parties or dinners, when your dispositions have seemed congenial, when you have laughed at a good story told by someone you hardly know, instantly shake hands, adopt the familiar form of address, and suddenly become as intimate as if you had been thrown together for years; and you imagine that you have gained a friend! But friendships formed so hastily are as hastily broken. They are not proof against any passion: vanity, self-esteem, selfish interests, love, soon put an end to the noble sentiments of which you have made so great a parade, and you are often amazed to find that all the annoyances, all the disappointments, all the vexations, you suffer are the work of those whom you call your friends. It's not the same with women, monsieur; they are not so free with their friendship as you are, but when they do give it, when they become attached to another person of their own sex, it is almost always for life."

"But it must be someone of their own sex!" laughed Célestin. "You admit that, yourself."

"I believe, monsieur, that there are women who are capable of loving a long time—yes, forever, the man who has shown himself worthy of their love. But as they generally have to do with ungrateful wretches who make a sport of seducing them, only to betray and abandon them, you must agree that they would be very foolish not to punish men sometimes for the wrong they so often do them."

"Mon Dieu! fair lady, I will agree to anything you please. I will say that men are villains, monsters, whatever you choose, provided only that you allow me to love you, and that you award me the prize due my devotion and my passion."

Monsieur Célestin took possession of a hand with which the pretty widow was toying with the folds of her gown, and attempted to put it to his lips; but Madame Baldimer snatched it away, and said sharply:

"Stop that, monsieur, I beg; we have not yet reached the point at which I owe you any recompense; and I am not the woman to pay in advance."

"But it seems to me that I have done all that we agreed upon. When I first met you in society some months ago, I experienced, as many other men did, the power of your charms; when I spoke to you of my love, you said—and these are your very words, I have not forgotten them: 'You are very intimate with young Albert Vermoncey, are you not? Well, keep me informed of everything that young man does, promise to do everything for me that I ask you to do, and I will reward your devotion.'—Isn't that what you said?"

"Exactly; not a word changed. When I first met you, monsieur, young Albert was already paying court to me; you very quickly joined the ranks, which was quite natural; Albert was your friend, so you naturally tried to supplant him. That sort of thing is always done among friends."

"But, madame——"

"Isn't that true, monsieur?"

"When love speaks louder than friendship——"

"Ha! ha! delicious! But, do you know, it was not worth while to interrupt me to say that. I formed my judgment of you on the spot, and I said to myself: 'I should like to amuse myself at the expense of young Vermoncey; I propose that he shall be my victim, that he shall learn that all women are not overjoyed to yield to him. Here's a gentleman who will second my projects to perfection; he is an intimate friend of Albert, and he is paying court to me because he sees that his friend is very much in love with me; so that I may be certain that he will ask nothing better than to assist me in setting snares for the man I propose to make a fool of.'—Thereupon I made my propositions to you, and you accepted them. And now, monsieur, it doesn't seem to me that you have any reason to reproach me."

Célestin, who had listened to Madame Baldimer, biting his lips from time to time with a dissatisfied air, leaned back in his chair and replied:

"But when is there to be an end of it all, madame? When will you cease to torment poor Albert—and when will you reward my love?"

"Mon Dieu! monsieur, you are very inquisitive, in a very great hurry. I cannot tell you yet."

"You see, I sometimes say to myself—— Excuse my frankness, madame."

"Oh! speak freely; frankness from you will astonish but not offend me."

"I say to myself: 'Is it not possible that I myself am Madame Baldimer's dupe, while fancying that I am helping her to make a fool of Albert? She wants to know everything that my rival does; if he acts as if he had forgotten her, I give her that information, and she soon appears before him, he finds her wherever he goes, and he does not hold out long against the glances she fastens upon him. It seems to me that a woman who was in love with Albert would act in that very way, and it would be quite interesting if Madame Baldimer were amusing herself at my expense, while I am thinking that it is Albert she wants to make a fool of!'"

"Ah! you have thought that, have you, monsieur? Upon my word, that would be most original; and, to speak frankly, you deserve to be treated in that way."

"How so, madame?"

"But don't be alarmed, it is not so at all. I am not in love with Monsieur Albert. I, love him! on the contrary, I hate him!"

As she uttered these last words, Madame Baldimer's face glowed, and her eyes seemed to flash fire.

"You hate him!" repeated Célestin, in a doubting tone. "Hm! that is rather strange; a woman doesn't ordinarily hate a man who has never been her lover. I should like it better if Albert were indifferent to you. Indifference is further from love than hatred is."

"You may be perfectly sure, monsieur, that that young man's alleged passion for me will never be satisfied. But it is my pleasure that it shall not die out—on the contrary, that it shall become more and more ardent. Whether it is coquetry, hatred, caprice, or some other sentiment, that prompts my action—that is my secret, monsieur, and I do not choose to tell you anything more. Now, if you do not care to assist my designs any further, go, monsieur; it is useless for you to stay here any longer."

The lovely widow rose as she spoke, but Célestin seized her arm and forced her to resume her seat.

"Mon Dieu! madame, how quick you are! how prompt in forming your resolutions! Be calm, I implore you! there is no rupture in our relations; I am your slave, as always. Speak! command! I am at your service. Too happy to wear your chains, as I hope that some day my love will be crowned."

"Very good," rejoined Madame Baldimer, with a smile; "and now, answer me. I have been away ten days; what has Albert done during that time?"

"Am I to conceal nothing?"

"That was our agreement, as you know."

"He has seen Madame Plays again."

"Madame Plays—— Ah! very good; I can guess why."

"That woman has been his mistress; and when a man returns to a former mistress, it is very easy to guess why."

Madame Baldimer bestowed a glance on Célestin which signified: "You are no better than a fool!" but she contented herself with that pantomime, and said simply:

"What else?"

"He has called here several times to find out whether you had returned from the country."

"I know that; my concierge told me."

"Your absence has seemed very long to him—especially as you didn't tell him where you were going."

"Ah! he would have liked to know—and so would you, wouldn't you? But go on."

"Why, that's all."

"What! no new intrigues, no escapades, no card parties?"

"No, nothing—for the last few days we have been so virtuous!"

"No husbands deceived, no rivals to dread?"

"Nothing of the sort. There was a wager on the subject of a very pretty grisette, who is courted by a messenger; but Albert refused to go into it. Indeed, the thing isn't so easy as I thought at first. This very morning, I believed I had won my bet; my plans were carefully laid—the girl ought to have stepped into a very clever trap that I had laid for her. But, not at all; she avoided it! Those little grisettes sometimes have the presumption to insist on being virtuous. We should be very much to be pitied, if we hadn't the ladies of fashionable society to fall back on."

"Ah! that's an unkind fling of yours; but beware; there are some great flirts who may do as the grisettes do; one must not be sure of anything in this world. Let us return to what you were saying: a very pretty grisette, and a messenger for your rival. Do you know, that would be very interesting! Messengers are not long-suffering, and they don't stand by and allow their loves to be taken from them with the complaisance and patience of the majority of our husbands in fashionable society. You really must involve Albert in this intrigue. He must fall in love with this grisette. If she is pretty, I see no great difficulty about it; and you are so clever, Monsieur Célestin, surely you can bring it about. Oh! it would be so amusing!"

Célestin was utterly unable to understand Madame Baldimer's purpose in urging him to do his utmost to make Albert fall in love with a pretty grisette.

"Well, monsieur, don't you hear me?" cried the fair American, irritated by the young man's silence.

"Yes, madame; yes, I hear you perfectly. But I confess that I don't understand you! and my brain is in a whirl when I try to divine your object. You do all that you can to turn Albert's head. If he seems to be a little less enamored of you, you redouble your fascinations and coquetries to bring him to your feet; and, lo! you insist now that your adorer shall fall in love with a pretty grisette, and scold me because my friend is not involved in a lot of other intrigues! I say again, all this is infernally hard to understand."

Madame Baldimer frowned, as she replied:

"But it isn't necessary that you should understand me, monsieur; it is enough, it seems to me, that it is my wish."

"I am very sorry, madame, but you should not do so much to inflame Albert's passion for yourself. He, who used to take fire at the mere sight of a woman, is indifferent now to the loveliest; and it is your fault."

"Really! Do you think that he loves me to that point?"

"I am afraid so, for his sake."

Madame Baldimer reflected a few moments, then rose, and said, with a gracious smile:

"Adieu, Monsieur de Valnoir! our interview has been very long, and I have nothing further to ask you."

"Shall I see you soon?"

"I think so; however, I will write, as before, when I have anything to ask you. I do not need to remind you that Albert must not know that you have seen me."

Célestin smiled and bowed, and stepped forward to take the fair American's hand; but she had already vanished.

"A strange woman!" muttered Célestin, looking around the room in surprise. "Gad! I have known a great many of them, but never one whose heart was so difficult to decipher as hers. Never mind; she is very beautiful, very refined, very fashionable, and it will be delicious to whisk her away from my dear friend Albert."

Célestin left the lovely widow's abode, and repaired to the boulevard, where he met Mouillot, who ran up to him, crying:

"Victory! he is ours! we have him, or at least we shall have him this evening!"

"Whom are you talking about?"

"Parbleu! little Tobie, the man of the fetich."

"The deuce! who found him?"

"Bastringuette, apparently; for she just left a message with a waiter at Tortoni's, who repeated it to me not a minute ago, that the young man we want will be at the Pâté des Italiens this evening."

"Ah! that is delicious; do the others know it?"

"No, as I have just learned of it. But I will undertake to tell Balivan, and you must let Albert know. Let us all meet here to-night at eight. Tobie is to be on Place des Italiens at nine, and we must meet earlier than that."

"Very good; we will be there."

Bastringuette had, in fact, met Tobie the night before, quite late, on an unfrequented street; it was dark, and Monsieur Pigeonnier was walking very fast. But the flower girl had eyes which rivalled an eagle's, and she had easily recognized the man she had been asked to find.

Since the game of bouillotte in Balivan's studio, little Tobie, who had gone away with four hundred and fifty francs in his pocket, had not been fortunate in his speculations; he had flattered himself that he would be able to do a fine stroke of business with that money, to make some advantageous purchase, and thereby to redeem his olive before long. But, instead of that, a creditor, who had succeeded in finding him at home by dint of passing the night at his door, had compelled him, by the use of some exceedingly brutal arguments, to pay a long overdue note for three hundred and eighty francs.

So that Tobie was not in a position to redeem his fetich, and that is why he never appeared on the boulevards, why he shunned all the places where he was likely to meet any of the witnesses of his transaction with Varinet, and fled as soon as he caught sight of an acquaintance; for he would have been forced to confess that he had not the wherewithal to redeem his olive, which would have humiliated him beyond measure. If he could gain time, he hoped to be able to move his aunt, Madame Abraham, or at least to obtain an interest in some profitable transaction in which his commission would be large enough to enable him to settle with Varinet. Almost always, in unpleasant emergencies, we imagine that we are saved, as soon as we succeed in gaining time; we are happy when we have much of it to spend, and we do not reflect that time is life, the only really valuable thing in this world; that one may regain fortune, honors, the favors of a fair lady! but that a day lost can never be recovered.

Hearing somebody running behind him in the street, little Tobie had a fright; but he recovered his courage when he heard a woman's voice calling:

"Why don't you stop, monsieur, when I say I want to speak to you? *fichtre!* if you make women run like this, they must have lots of fun with you!"

Tobie stopped, scrutinized Bastringuette, and demanded:

"What do you want of me?"

"I don't want anything, my little darling; you're too dainty for me. I don't like men with pink cheeks."

"Ah! I think I recognize you now; you're the girl who sells violets."

"When there is any, my little ducky."

"If you've been running after me to offer me flowers, you might have saved yourself the trouble."

"No, it isn't for that; I have a message for you."

"Who gave it to you?"

"A lady, and a very pretty lady too."

"A lady—what's her name?"

"She didn't tell me; and you don't suppose I asked her, do you? but she described you so that I couldn't make any mistake. She has something to say to you, and she'll be at the Pâté on Place des Italiens to-morrow night at nine o'clock."

"To-morrow night! at the Pâté!"

Tobie reflected for some time; he tried to think who the lady could be who wished to see him; and at last he thought of Madame Plays, who had left him so abruptly on the Champs-Élysées; perhaps she knew the whole story of Albert's conduct now, and wished to revenge herself with him for her lover's faithlessness, and to compensate him for the outburst of temper to which she had given way when she left him.

"If Albert did write anything offensive in that letter," he thought, "she has probably learned that I had nothing to do with it; she is sorry that she treated me so badly, and means to treat me better now. I am less surprised, because, when I was making love to her, she seemed to be deeply touched; everything was going along finely, and, if it hadn't occurred to her to read that infernal letter, I should certainly have triumphed.—What sort of looking woman was it who gave you the message?" he asked Bastringuette.

"Oh! a very fine-looking woman."

"A little large, wasn't she?"

"Yes, monsieur, she's plump; but it's becoming to her."

"Light chestnut hair?"

"Very light—almost a blonde."

"That's it. A voice something like a man's?"

"Oh! a splendid voice; when she speaks, you'd think it was a hand organ. She ought to sing well, she had."

"There's no doubt about it—it was she!"

"Do you know who she is?"

"I think so; but I know so many of 'em, you see!"

"But you'll keep the appointment, won't you, monsieur?"

"Oh! to be sure!"

"So much the better; for it seems as if the lady was broiling to see you.—'If I'd known his address,' she says, 'I'd have written to him; but I don't know where he lives.'"

"That's true, she doesn't know it; and there are very few people who could tell her; I don't talk much about my address."

"Good-night, monsieur! my errand's done, and I'm going home to bed. Don't forget your appointment at the Pâté."

"Never fear."

Bastringuette turned on her heel, and Tobie did the same, saying to himself:

"It seems that she's paid. I'm not sorry, I like that way better;" and he went his way, building castles in Spain touching his liaison with the susceptible Plays.

Célestin called on Albert at midday, and found him gazing at a magnificent cashmere shawl that was spread out on

a divan.

"What the devil are you doing?" inquired Monsieur de Valnoir.

"I am admiring this shawl, as you see; isn't it superb?"

"It is, indeed; but it seems as if I had seen it on somebody."

"You have seen its mate on Madame Plays."

"Ah! that's it. And what are you doing with this one? Are you in the way of giving your mistresses cashmere shawls?"

"Why not! If you should see this shawl on the fair American's shoulders, do you think that she would still laugh at my love?"

Célestin pressed his lips together, then replied:

"Oh, no! I should be compelled to believe, on the contrary, that you are a fortunate mortal. But it must have been very expensive!"

"Five thousand francs!"

"The deuce! it's a present worthy of a prince; but I don't believe she will accept it."

"And I am sure that she will."

"Has Madame Baldimer returned from the country?"

"Yes, last night; and look, do you see this little note?"

"By the perfume alone, I divine that it's from a woman."

"I have just received it; it's from the fair widow, and she expects me at ten this evening."

"At ten o'clock; she makes appointments for rather a late hour."

"So much the better; I will try to prolong the interview, and not leave her till to-morrow morning."

Célestin turned away to hide a grimace which he could not control; then he replied, in a very vivacious tone:

"Pending your love rendezvous, will you meet us this evening, a little before nine? We propose to nab Seigneur Pigeonnier, who thinks that a lady is to meet him on Place des Italiens."

"Oh! I will be there, of course. Poor Tobie! we must have a little fun at his expense; but afterward, if he can't pay, I'll lend him five hundred francs, so that he can settle with Monsieur Varinet."

"The devil! You are a good fellow. Are you in funds?"

"My father is so kind to me! he gives me money without being asked."

"Parbleu! he has nobody left but you; it's right that he should satisfy all your desires."

"But I have been spending too much money for some time past; I mean to reform."

"Is that why you pay five thousand francs for a shawl?"

"This will be my last folly."

"And you propose to lend Tobie five hundred francs?"

"I am so happy! I would like to be able to oblige all my friends."

"If I had suspected that," thought Célestin, "I would have invented a story to make him anxious to oblige me too.—Shall we dine together to-day?" he said aloud.

"It is impossible. I promised my father to dine with him. I have done it so seldom lately that he looks on it as a great favor, and he's too kind to me for me not to try to please him."

"You are becoming a model of filial respect!"

"Célestin," exclaimed Albert, in a very sharp tone, "I allow you to joke about whatever you choose, except my affection for my father; that is a sentiment which must be respected. It seems to me that it would be very unfortunate if there were nothing left in the world to respect."

"Oh! mon Dieu! don't lose your temper! I had no such purpose as you imagine. Until this evening! we shall expect you at the usual place."

It was not quite nine o'clock, but it had been dark for some time when the young men left Tortoni's café and bent their steps toward Place des Italiens. They had just started, when Mouillot said:

"One moment, messieurs! we have forgotten something. Here, take this."

And he gave each of his friends an olive.

"An olive!"

"What's this for?"

"Why, can't you guess? We are going to watch for Tobie, one at each corner of the square; and as soon as we see him, we will all descend on him, each presenting our olive and demanding five hundred francs."

"Very good! splendid!"

"Poor Tobie! This experience will be enough to disgust him with olives, and I'll bet that he won't stuff his pockets with them again when he dines out."

They soon reached Place des Italiens, where they separated, each going to one corner. They agreed that, when Tobie appeared, they would wait until he reached the middle of the square, and then advance upon him at the same time, so that the four olives, accompanied by as many demands for five hundred francs, might be presented simultaneously.

Five minutes passed. Tobie did not appear. Five more minutes passed. The young men coughed loudly from time to time, as if to assure one another that they were still there. To while away the time, Albert thought of Madame Baldimer, whom he was to call upon very soon. He enjoyed in anticipation the pleasure he was about to afford her by presenting her with that shawl, which she coveted, and he hoped that his gallantry would be lovingly rewarded.

Célestin also thought about his relations with the lovely widow, saying to himself from time to time:

"Tobie will not come! he probably suspected something, or was afraid. We shall lose our olives."

Mouillot stamped impatiently, muttering:

"This is getting to be an infernal bore. I believe it's going to rain, too. The sell is on us, after all! Sacrebleu!

messieurs! I say there! do you like this? For my part, I've had about enough."

Balivan was engrossed by the portrait of a woman which he was soon to begin, and he was wondering whether he would paint it against a dark or a light background, in a salon or in a garden.

Several more minutes passed. A very fine rain began to fall. Albert, Célestin, and Mouillot were about to desert their posts, when shouts of: "Murder! police! help!" arose in the middle of the square.

The three young men ran toward the place from which the cries came, and found Balivan holding a short man by the arm.

"It's no use for you to yell," he was saying; "you owe me five hundred francs for this olive!"

"What in the devil are you doing, you fool?" cried Mouillot; "let the gentleman alone, will you! It isn't Tobie!"

The man whom Balivan had seized was a respectable bourgeois, who was loitering about in front of the Opéra-Comique, intending to buy a check and see the last play.

Balivan confounded himself in apologies. But the bourgeois, who had had a horrible fright, continued to shout. The soldiers who were on guard at the theatre came up, with several policemen, and a crowd soon assembled. The young men were surrounded, and the man whom Balivan had attacked pointed them out to the soldiers, saying in a voice rendered almost inaudible by terror:

"Arrest those four men. They're all thieves; they tried to rob me of five hundred francs, and I had only forty sous about me! This one threatened me; he tried to murder me with an olive. Arrest all four."

The young men tried to explain to the soldiers that it was all the result of a jest. But the officers took them away, saying:

"You may explain at the station."

"That miserable Tobie!" muttered Mouillot; "a nice mess he's got us into with his olives!"

"And my appointment!" thought Albert. "God grant they don't keep us long!"

"It is all Balivan's fault," said Célestin. "With his absent-mindedness, he was perfectly certain to make some blunder."

As for the young artist, he stalked along in the middle of the crowd, thinking:

"Yes, I will paint her with a country scene for a background."

XIX

THE QUARREL AND THE RECONCILIATION

On the day following that on which Elina had asked the messengers about Paul, he returned to his place with his *crochets*, wearing his jacket and cap; but his face was noticeably paler, his features more drawn, than before his prolonged absence.

The young messenger seated himself in his usual place, nodding to Sans-Cravate and Jean Ficelle, who were there before him. The former abruptly turned his head away when he saw Paul, and clenched his fists with an angry gesture; but Jean Ficelle, on the contrary, assumed his playful expression and walked to Paul's side.

"Hallo! hallo! here's the prodigal son back again! Yes, it's him, sure enough. Is it possible, Paul, that you've come back to sit alongside of us on a street corner? are you going to be a messenger?"

"I have never ceased to be one," replied Paul, looking earnestly at the house in which Elina worked.

"That's a good one! How about the time we met you dressed like a swell? I don't think you was doing errands much just then! You was on a spree, you know, and it seems to have lasted a long while! Ten days of it! Gad! that's a whole carnival, sure enough!"

"You are mistaken; I haven't been on a spree; you know perfectly well that it's not my custom."

"Not with us, that's true; but you play the nobleman with your mistresses, it seems. Oh! I can understand that when a man's been doing the handsome thing by his girl for ten days, he don't feel inclined to treat his friends to a glass. And then, you have so many girls at once! Ha! ha! you're a Don Jean, as they say in fashionable society. But you must take care that you don't get robbed yourself. Bless me! those things happen to everybody."

Paul shrugged his shoulders, and made no further reply to Jean Ficelle; but he went to Sans-Cravate, whose back was still turned to him, and put his hand on his shoulder.

"Are you still angry with me?" he said. "Well, Sans-Cravate, you are all wrong; yes, you are wrong, for I have done nothing to make you angry. I love you still, for all your roughness and your hot temper, because I know that you have a good heart. I never gave you bad advice, and it seems to me that I deserve your confidence; but you prefer to listen to those who take you to the wine shop, with such people as that Laboussole."

Sans-Cravate turned his head little by little; at first, he was determined to pick a quarrel with Paul; but, as he listened to him, he felt that his anger subsided, in spite of himself; and when he looked at him, when he saw his gentle, honest eyes looking into his, he could not control his emotion, his genuine affection for his young comrade stirred anew in the depths of his heart.

Paul divined what was taking place in Sans-Cravate's heart, and he held out his hand, saying:

"Oh! I know well enough that you are not a bad fellow! You cannot believe that I am Bastringuette's lover, since you know that I am in love with the young dressmaker who works in the house opposite—Mademoiselle Elina. And even if I weren't, as if I could ever give a thought to my friend's mistress! Somebody has spoken ill of me to you, and you listened because you had drunk a little too much; but now that you are cool, you must see that that was all nonsense. Come, give me your hand, and let us forget the past!"

Sans-Cravate put out his hand to grasp Paul's, but drew it back again, crying:

"Yes, *sacrédié!* it makes me unhappy to be at odds with you. I liked you, and I feel that I'd be glad to like you still. But it ain't a question of what anybody's told me about you, but of what I've seen with my own eyes. You say that you have nothing to do with Bastringuette, that you don't go with her; prove it, and I'm your friend. It ain't that I still

care about Bastringuette, or want to make up with her; oh! there's no danger of that! but I just want to be sure that my friend hasn't gone back on me—played a trick on me, as they say; that's all."

"What do you want me to do? How can I prove it, if my word isn't enough?"

"Oh! it's easy enough: that day we met you dressed like a gentleman, on the corner of Rue Barbette, you came out of a house on Vieille Rue du Temple. Bastringuette came out of the same house a few minutes after you; I saw her—do you hear! You say that you wasn't with her; that may be, although it looks bad! To clear the thing up, just you tell me who you'd been to see—where you'd been in that house. It will be easy for me to go and find out whether you're telling the truth; it won't take me long to walk there. Come, tell me; and if there hasn't been any fooling with my false wench, why, then I'll come back and open my arms to you; I'll beg your pardon, and hug you till I stifle you!"

Sans-Cravate's eyes were wet; it was clear that his most earnest desire was to be able to call Paul his friend once more, and he waited anxiously for his reply. But Paul hung his head, his face became serious, and he dropped the hand he was holding out to his comrade.

"I am sorry that I cannot satisfy you," he said; "but I cannot tell you what you ask. I tell you again that it was not Bastringuette whom I went to see in that house; if she did go there, it was probably a mere coincidence; but it is certain that she was no more looking for me than I was looking for her."

Jean Ficelle, who had softly drawn near and waited with manifest curiosity for Paul's reply, began to whistle the air of: *Go and see if they're coming, Jean, go and see if they're coming.*

"What's that!" rejoined Sans-Cravate, with an angry gesture; "you can't tell me who you went to see—who it is you know in that house! It seems to me there's no difficulty in doing that—and when a man ain't doing something crooked, he don't make such a mystery about it."

"Probably I have reasons for acting as I do."

"And you won't tell me your reasons?"

"It is impossible!"

Sans-Cravate stamped the ground angrily, and uttered an energetic oath.

"All right, then; all's over between us; I don't know you any more; you are no mate of mine; I forbid you to speak to me—do you hear? I forbid you; and if you should ever come within range of my eyes, with Bastringuette—not that I care a hang about her! I despise her! I hate her!—but, never mind; if I should see you with her, look out! I shan't always be patient, and you'd be likely to pass a bad quarter of an hour."

Paul made no reply, but took his *crochets* and carried them some fifty yards away, toward the house where Elina worked; and there he took his stand.

Jean Ficelle went up to Sans-Cravate, who pretended to look in the direction of the boulevard, and said:

"You did well to give that sneak his walking ticket! What a fool he looked when you asked him who he went to see; he couldn't answer. *Pardi!* I guess not; he'd have to own up that he'd done wrong. I'll give you a comparison: it's just the same as if you saw me opening your trunk, and you says: 'What are you looking in there for?' and I says: 'I can't tell you what I'm looking for;' and you says: 'Tell me!' and I——"

"All right! enough of that! you're never done with your comparisons, and they don't amuse me."

"That's all right! Look here, I'm going to suggest something better. The sight of your rival has put you in a bad humor—that's natural; if I had someone in front of me as had turned my girl away from me, I wouldn't be satisfied till I'd given him a good licking; that would be rather hard, to be sure, as I don't happen to have any girl just now. As I was saying, you're out of sorts, but you've got some chink. That fat woman who's owed you a long while for moving her, and came and paid you this morning—you didn't expect that, so it's just the same as money found; and when you find money, you must spend it right away, or it'll bring you bad luck! So, let's not work to-day; let's go and take something. I know all the good places, you know; we'll just fold up our *crochets* and enjoy our youth. How does that strike you?"

Sans-Cravate hesitated.

"Not work to-day," he muttered, "in the middle of the week, when everybody's at work——"

"*Ouiche!* everybody—who feels like it! I'll show you a lot of good fellows to-day, who know how to enjoy themselves! Besides, can't a man take a good dinner once in a while, and loaf a bit if he feels like it? There's days when you can't help it. Anyway, it's getting late."

"Late! it's only half-past nine."

"Well, you see there's no business doing; we won't get anything to do to-day; it's the dead season; no one's doing anything."

"Drinking ain't the way to save money to send a marriage portion to my sister Liline."

"You've told me that your sister was pretty; and when a girl's pretty, she don't need a marriage portion; and then, ain't there a lady at Clermont who takes an interest in her, and has taken her into her family and given her an education?"

"Yes, but——"

"Well, she'll find a husband for your sister, that's plain enough; so you don't need to worry about her."

"Poor Liline! I'm very fond of her; she's so pretty and gentle—as gentle as I am rough! I mean to go down into the country next spring, and see my sister and my father; and perhaps I'll stay with them, for I have nothing at all to keep me in Paris now."

Sans-Cravate sighed profoundly as he spoke, and his eyes scanned the boulevards as if he were looking for someone.

"Well, that's all right; you can go home next spring, and I'll show you out of the city; if you want, I'll wait for you at the barrier till you come back; but at the present time, if you don't take a little pleasure, you'll be as yellow and dry as parchment; you've changed already, you're losing your fine color."

"Oh! I don't care about that now! there's nobody I want to please."

"Nobody knows! nobody knows! you mustn't get careless. A man ought to be handsome all the time, as he's made to seduce; that's all I know. A comparison: it's like a horse that's never curry-combed; his coat loses all its gloss."

"It's sure enough that there's twelve francs here," said Sans-Cravate, tapping his pocket, "that I didn't count on at all."

"We must squeeze 'em dry. You've got twelve francs and I've got fifteen sous; we'll put 'em together, and spree it till they're dead! What do you say?"

Sans-Cravate was still hesitating, when he turned and saw Paul with his eyes fastened on him; thereupon he sprang to his feet and kicked his *crochets* aside, crying:

"Yes, yes! let's go and enjoy ourselves; to the devil with work! you're right. And while that lasts, I shan't have to look at people I hate. Let's be off, Jean Ficelle! No more work as long as the money holds out!"

"Bravo! that's talking! I imagine I am listening to Solomon himself."

In another moment, Jean Ficelle had bestowed the *crochets* in their usual place, and the two messengers walked away arm in arm, Sans-Cravate without looking at Paul, while Jean Ficelle, on the contrary, ostentatiously cast a sneering glance at their young comrade.

"Poor Sans-Cravate!" said Paul to himself, when he saw the two men leave their stand and their work; "he lets Jean Ficelle entice him away, and perhaps he will end by becoming as much of a ne'er-do-well as his companion!"

But the young man soon turned his eyes once more on the neighboring porte cochère; he was sorely disappointed because Elina did not come out, and wondered what she could think of him, when she had failed to find him in his usual place for eleven days.

He kept his eyes fixed on the door of the house in which the little dressmaker worked, almost every minute of the day; if he went away to do an errand, his eyes turned instantly in that direction when he came back; and he waited and waited, hoping that his love would come out; but she did not appear.

At last the night came, and the hour at which the girls ceased their labors, unless they were detained by some unusual press of work. Paul had determined not to go away without seeing Elina, even if he had to pass the whole evening in the street.

But just before nine o'clock, Elina came out at last, and, although it was dark, her first glance was at Paul's usual stand; not seeing him there, she quickened her pace, when she heard a well-known voice behind her:

"How fast you go, mademoiselle!"

"Ah! is it you, Monsieur Paul? You almost frightened me; you see—I am—I am not used to seeing you now, and I thought you were not here."

"I have been here since morning; I hoped you would come out for a minute, but I had to wait until now. Ah! the day has seemed terribly long to me."

"Really, monsieur; but for the last eleven days I have been expecting to see you in your place. Every morning I came early, so as to have time to talk a little with you; but, no, monsieur was never here. I was foolish enough even to ask leave to go out during the day, thinking that you would be there, but I took all those steps for nothing. Of course, I was a great fool to think of—a person who wasn't thinking of me. When one is thinking of anybody, he doesn't let eleven days go by without a word."

Elina said all this very rapidly, as if she did not wish to give her anger time to cool. Paul listened, walking by her side, and replied with the accent that comes from the heart:

"Elina, can it be that you believe that I no longer love you?"

The girl slackened her pace, and her voice indicated that her anger had already begun to subside, as she answered:

"Yes, monsieur; I do believe it—I am very sure of it. Not to come for eleven days! not even to find some means to be there just for a moment, to say a word to me. Oh! that was very cruel."

"Why, do you suppose, mademoiselle, that the time has not seemed long to me? that I have not been miserable at being deprived of the happiness of seeing you and hearing your voice; you, whom I love so dearly, and who are in my thoughts every instant?"

Elina stopped altogether, and there was no trace of anger in her voice.

"Well, monsieur, if that is true, then what is the meaning of this long absence? what became of you for eleven days? it seems to me as if they were months!"

"Believe that some very powerful motive was necessary to keep me away from you."

"A motive—that is no answer. Tell me, where have you been, what have you been doing? I have been told that you are a very mysterious person, that you have several occupations—is that true? No; for you would have told me. I have been assured, also, that you had robbed your comrade Sans-Cravate of his—his—mistress."

"Oh! surely you did not believe that either, did you, mademoiselle? I, rob my comrade, my friend, of his mistress! for I am fond of Sans-Cravate, although he has the reputation of being hot-headed and quarrelsome. I have seen him give all he possessed, the proceeds of a whole day's work, to a poor woman who went by with two children in her arms, and dressed in rags. And the man who does that cannot be a bad man. I, take away his mistress! Is such a thing possible?"

"Ah! that is what I said when I was told of it: 'Is such a thing possible?' but they seemed to laugh at me because I refused to believe it."

"Who?"

"Your comrades."

"Have you spoken to them?"

"Mon Dieu, yes! I ought not to have done it, but I couldn't contain myself. When you didn't come, I said to myself that some accident must have happened to you, or else you were sick. Oh! I was awfully unhappy."

This time the girl's voice trembled, not with anger, but with sobs; and Paul, who was close beside her, took her hand and pressed it lovingly in his own, saying:

"How happy I am! you still love me! Ah! this moment makes me forget all my cares. To think that anyone should dare to say that I love any other woman! You do not believe it, Elina, you will never believe it! Poor messenger that I am, am I not fortunate enough to be loved by you? what more could I desire?"

"Yes, I believe that you love me. I won't be angry any more; it makes one too wretched to be angry with a person one loves. Look at me; I am willing to see your face now. Oh! it seems to me that you have grown paler, that you have changed, since I saw you. Have you been sick?"

"No; it's the vexation and disappointment I have suffered."

"You haven't told me yet what you were doing those eleven days."

"I have been with a person, a friend, who was very ill; he had nobody but me to take care of him, so I could not leave him."

"Oh! in that case, I am not angry with you any more. But you never mentioned this friend to me."

"Because I seldom see him—only when he needs me."

"You are not lying to me? you haven't taken anybody's mistress?"

"I have thought of nobody but you."

"Good! now I am happy again. I had so many things to tell you; but when two people are together, they don't think—that is to say, they think too much—well, I don't know how it happens, but I forget everything else."

"Dear Elina!"

"Oh! wait—I remember now. First of all, there's a young man—one of those who came and laughed at us, you remember, when we were in the loft."

"Yes, indeed, I remember; but which one?"

"He's tall, but not handsome, and he has a bold, impertinent manner."

"I see which you mean; it must be Monsieur Célestin."

"Well, I noticed several times that he followed me when I came out of Madame Dumanchon's at night, to go home; he walked very close to me, and spoke to me, said a lot of foolish things, I don't know what, for I didn't listen, I never once answered him, and I walked so fast, to avoid hearing him, that I assure you he had to run to keep up with me.—'If Monsieur Paul was here with me,' I said to myself, 'he wouldn't dare to follow me, and I shouldn't be afraid of this horrid man.'"

"Poor Elina! did that fellow dare to insult you?"

"I don't know whether he did or not, for I didn't listen to him. Once he tried to take my arm and stop me, but I released myself so quickly, and pushed him away so hard, that he stood as if he was dazed, in the middle of the street. Well, he didn't follow me any more, and I was very glad; but this morning——"

"This morning?"

"One of your comrades—not Sans-Cravate, but the other one——"

"Jean Ficelle?"

"Yes. As I came down from my aunt's lodgings, I found him at the door.—'Mademoiselle,' he said, 'my comrade Paul would like to speak to you; he's waiting for you at a little restaurant close by, at the end of the street; I'll show you the place.'"

"The villain!"

"That seemed very strange to me; however, as I had asked your comrades about you yesterday, I believed that he had seen you, and that you had asked him to give me that message. So I followed this Jean Ficelle.—'Why don't Monsieur Paul come himself?' I asked him. 'What prevents him? is he sick?' But the man only answered, in a sort of wheedling tone: 'I don't know, mamzelle; but he asked me to tell you that he must speak to you, and I'm just doing his errand.' At last we arrived in front of a restaurant, and he said: 'This is the place; my comrade's expecting you; go right in, don't be afraid, and ask for Paul; and they'll take you where he is.'"

"Oh! what an infernal scoundrel that Jean Ficelle is! to second the scheme of a man who intended to outrage you! So that is what he meant to hint at this morning when he said that someone might rob me of the woman I loved. And I was so far from suspecting it! I didn't pay the slightest attention to his words.—But what happened next?"

"Well, I was about to go into the restaurant, when something, I don't know what, held me back. The girls in the workroom have often talked about places to which men had tried to entice them on one pretext or another. I said to myself: 'If Monsieur Paul is in here, it seems to me that it will be enough for me to send him word that I am here, and he will come out.' Jean Ficelle had disappeared, so I waited till a waiter passed the door, and said to him: 'Be kind enough to tell Monsieur Paul that I am waiting for him down here.' The waiter laughed, and told me I must go upstairs; but when he saw that I insisted on staying in the street, he said he would take my message; and in a moment I saw the same young man coming who had followed me so often. When I saw him, I cried out; he tried to hold me, but I was already a long way off, thanking heaven that I didn't go into the house."

Paul's blood fairly boiled with rage when he learned that Jean Ficelle had stooped to further the projects of a man who could have had no other purpose than to ruin Elina. If his comrade had been in his place at that moment, he would have made haste to demand an explanation of his conduct, and would have been very likely to remove any inclination on his part to act again as the agent of a seducer. But Jean Ficelle and Sans-Cravate had not reappeared since the morning; and Paul, to reassure Elina, was compelled to promise her that he would not seek a quarrel with his fellow messenger.

"There is no danger for me now," she said; "Jean Ficelle did what he was told to do, in order to earn money. Certainly it is very wrong to deceive a young girl, for, of course, he knew that it wasn't you who sent for me. But all messengers are not over particular. So much the worse for the dishonest ones! Despise that man, but don't quarrel with him; if you do, monsieur, I shall never tell you again what happens to me."

"Very well; I will obey you."

"That's right; and then, you must always be with me in the morning when I go to my work, and at night when I go home; be my protector, my guardian angel, and I am very sure that no one will try again to induce me to go into a restaurant."

"To be always with you—that is my dearest wish; but sometimes——"

"Your work—yes, I understand. But try to be always at liberty in the morning and evening. Isn't it enough to work all day?"

"And if anyone should send word to you to go to a strange house, never consent."

"Don't be afraid; I will remember the little restaurant. I wish you could have seen that man's face when he saw that I had escaped him. Oh! it would have made you laugh. Mon Dieu! it must be awfully late; we have been talking a long while."

"It seems to me as if it had been only a minute."

"Oh! don't think that it's a bore to me! far from it; but my aunt will want to know where I have been so late. Do you know what time it is, Monsieur Paul?"

"I haven't any watch, mademoiselle."

"Nor I; but we can look into the watchmaker's as we pass. Almost eleven, do you see? And I had so much more to say to you!"

"And so had I!"

"It must wait till to-morrow. Here I am at my door; adieu! till to-morrow!"

"Till to-morrow!"

"I'll try to remember all I had to say to you."

The lovers parted, regretting that they had not time to talk more. It is always so while love lasts; for even if they have nothing more to say, they still have the pleasure of looking at each other.

XX

TWO RIVALS

The clock had just struck eleven. Madame Baldimer, dressed with even more coquetry than usual, had been waiting a long while in her boudoir; impatience, uneasiness, and anger gleamed in her eyes. Again and again she rose, paced the floor excitedly, stopped to listen for the doorbell, then looked at her clock. For the third time she pulled a bellrope, and her maid appeared.

"Has no one come, Rosa?"

"No, madame."

"It is inconceivable! I wrote him to come at ten, and now it is eleven! He is always so eager, so prompt! I cannot understand it. If he had triumphed, I could conceive of his failing to keep an appointment; but so long as a man is not our conqueror, he is our slave. Can it be that Albert is not like other men?"

"Is it Monsieur Albert Vermoncey whom madame expects this evening?"

"To be sure."

"And if Monsieur le Comte Dahlborne should come also?"

"Well! you will admit him."

"Even if Monsieur Albert is here?"

"Mon Dieu! yes; how stupid you are!"

The maid left the room. Madame Baldimer threw herself on a divan, with her eyes still fixed on the clock; and as the hand circled the dial, her face assumed a serious, sombre expression; one would have said that, with the speeding minutes, all the plans she had formed were vanishing in air.

At last, the bell rang. The fair widow drew herself up with an almost convulsive movement.

"Here he is!" she exclaimed, and her features assumed an expression of joy and triumph.

In another instant the door opened. The maid announced Monsieur Albert Vermoncey, and the young man darted joyously into the boudoir.

"Here I am at last!" he cried; "I have had a hard time of it, madame, and I did think that it would be impossible for me to-night to enjoy the pleasure of seeing you, and of this delightful interview which I desired so earnestly!"

"Mon Dieu! monsieur, what has happened to you, pray? I have been expecting you since ten o'clock. I had no sooner returned from the country than I hastened to let you know; I even did you the favor to say that I should expect you this evening. I thought that you would be very glad to see me again. But, instead of that, monsieur does not come. Perhaps I did wrong to write you—I have taken you from your pleasures——"

"Oh! do not say that. But pray listen to my story—it is very amusing, I assure you. I am just from the guardhouse."

"From the guardhouse! Why, what have you been doing?"

"It all grew out of a joke we intended to play on a certain young man; I and three of my friends were waiting for him on Place des Italiens. As he owes five hundred francs to a gentleman to whom he gave an olive as security,—it's a gambling debt,—we agreed that, as soon as he appeared, we would all rush upon him, each of us presenting an olive and demanding five hundred francs. But one of my friends, who is naturally very absent-minded, made a mistake and pounced upon a respectable citizen, who was waiting to buy a check for the Opéra-Comique. He was frightened, and shouted *thief*. We ran up, and so did the guard; to cut it short, we were all four taken to the guardhouse at the theatre, and I fancy we should have been locked up for the night, had it not been for a staff officer, a friend of my father, who happened to pass. He answered for us, and then they consented to believe that we were not thieves, and they set us at liberty."

Madame Baldimer laughed heartily at Albert's adventure. Meanwhile, he took up a package which he had deposited on a table when he came in, and placed it on the lovely widow's knees.

"See," he said, "is not this what you expressed a wish to possess?"

Madame Baldimer removed the paper, which contained a magnificent cashmere shawl. Her face was radiant and she bestowed the sweetest of smiles on the young man, murmuring:

"Oh! but you are really too gallant; it is too beautiful, and a present of such value—— No; I cannot accept it."

"You accept a superb fan from Count Dahlborne!"

"There's a vast difference between a fan and this; people will say that I lead you on to do foolish things."

"Ah! I shall be only too happy to do them, if your love is the reward."

Madame Baldimer did not reply, but she allowed Albert to take her hand and cover it with kisses. He tried to put his arm about her waist; but she gently repulsed him, saying:

"But how did you succeed in finding out that it was this very shawl that I wanted?"

"Didn't you tell me that it was like one that Madame Plays wore at one of Count Dahlborne's receptions?"

"Yes, I remember——"

"Well! I called on Madame Plays and asked her to show me the beautiful cashmere she wore that day."

"But I thought that you had quarrelled with that lady."

"I presented her with a bouquet, and she forgave me."

"Just for the bouquet?"

"Why, yes."

"Hm! I imagine that the shawl must have cost you something more."

"You are mistaken."

"Poor Herminie! if she knew that she owed your visit solely to your desire to give me a shawl like one of hers! Ha! ha! ha! she would be frantic! What traitors men are, aren't they?"

"We are driven to it sometimes."

"Ha! ha! I like to think of going to see her with this shawl over my shoulders—she was so proud of hers! she will be struck dumb."

Madame Baldimer continued to laugh. Albert tried to give a more sentimental turn to the conversation, and, as a woman is not usually cruel when she laughs, he tried to take advantage of her merriment to renew certain manœuvres which would, he hoped, lead him to a complete victory. But his adversary, laughing all the while, defended herself with a dexterity which did not indicate that her heart was disposed to surrender.

Albert was beginning to consider that Madame Baldimer prolonged his torment a little too far, when the doorbell rang again.

"Who can have come so late to call upon you?" cried Albert; "it is almost twelve o'clock, and I thought that you would receive nobody but me to-night."

"Really, I don't expect anybody, unless possibly it is Count Dahlborne. That man pesters me with his attentions. He has probably heard of my return, and he loses no time——"

"But a man doesn't call at this time of night, unless he is on very good terms with a woman!"

"Ah! monsieur, that suspicion——"

"Very well! if it's the count, send him away—don't receive him."

Before Madame Baldimer could reply, the maid announced Count Dahlborne, and the Swede instantly made his appearance.

Albert's features contracted. Madame Baldimer welcomed the count with an affable smile; and he, as cold and formal as ever, saluted her with his usual stiffness, imprinted a kiss on her hand, and sat down beside her, precisely as if Albert were not present.

The young man amused himself tearing his gloves, while his reflections took this turn:

"This must come to an end; I didn't give her a shawl that cost five thousand francs for the pleasure of seeing this man."

Madame Baldimer made one or two of the commonplace remarks which people employ to open a conversation.

The Swede replied with his usual brevity. Albert did not say a word.

At last, at a moment when nothing was being said, the count took a velvet case from his pocket, and handed it to Madame Baldimer, saying:

"Here is a trifle—to take the place of the fan; it isn't so breakable."

The widow opened the case, which contained a magnificent opera glass of most beautiful workmanship; she uttered a cry of admiration, and, taking the glass from the case, handed it to Albert, saying:

"Did you ever see anybody so gallant?"

"It looks very much as if this woman were making a fool of me!" said Albert to himself.

However, he restrained himself, and, merely glancing at the glass, cried with an affected enthusiasm which closely resembled mockery:

"Oh! it is magnificent! Great God! how beautiful it is! I would like right well to know where monsieur finds such beautiful things!"

The Swede bit his lips, but said nothing.

Madame Baldimer continued to extol the opera glass; and Albert, glancing at the shawl, which lay neglected on a chair, said to himself:

"God! what fools men are sometimes!"

But the conversation languished. Madame Baldimer made but a feeble effort to sustain it. The Swede said a word or two at once, never more than that; and Albert contented himself with ejaculating at intervals:

"Mon Dieu! what an opera glass! it is dazzling!"

Whereupon the count made an imperceptible grimace, and glanced furtively at the young man.

It was long after twelve o'clock. The gentlemen seemed no more disposed to give way to each other than on the day of the fan. Suddenly Madame Baldimer rose.

"It is very late, messieurs," she said; "I am going to bed, and I bid you good-night!"

The two men rose to salute her.

The lovely widow took occasion to whisper to Albert, as she asked him to hand her the shawl:

"That man is insufferable to me; try to rid me of him."

Albert simply bowed, without a word.

Then, as she passed the count, she said in his ear:

"That young man is always at my heels; pray find some way to relieve me of his presence."

The Swede, in his turn, made a low bow.

Thereupon she left the two gentlemen in the boudoir, each reflecting upon what she had just whispered to him. They glanced at each other from time to time—Albert with a mocking expression, the count with a slight frown.

After some minutes had passed thus, the Swede decided to speak first. He walked up to Albert, and said to him, still in a most ceremonious tone:

"It seems to me, monsieur, that you meant to be understood as making fun of the opera glass which I presented to Madame Baldimer."

"Faith! yes," the young man airily replied; "after all, monsieur, that's as good a motive as any! and I fancy that we both understand what we have in view."

"Perfectly, monsieur. At what hour to-morrow, if you please?"

"Oh! not too early, if it's all the same to you; for I am a little lazy about getting up in the morning."

"Very good—say ten o'clock?"

"Ten o'clock it is, at Porte Saint-Mandé; there are a number of very pleasant, solitary little nooks in that neighborhood, and it's less common than the Bois de Boulogne. Is that satisfactory to you?"

"Entirely so; and your weapons?"

"Whatever you choose."

"Pistols, then."

"Agreed."

"I shall have one second; I believe that one is sufficient, in this country?"

"We are at liberty to have two; but, as you say, one is enough."

"Until to-morrow, then!"

"Until to-morrow, monsieur le comte! and now, I believe that there is nothing further to detain us here."

The Swede bowed with an almost affable expression, and opened the door of the boudoir, pausing to allow Albert to go out first; but he would not. After a contest of politeness, the count finally went first, and they soon reached the foot of the staircase.

The concierge was asleep; before he opened the door, Albert produced a dainty cigar case from his pocket and took out a cigar, saying:

"I am in the habit of smoking every night before I go to bed."

"I am very much annoyed," said the count; "I have forgotten my case, and I also am fond of smoking when I go home at night."

"In that case, allow me to offer you a cigar, monsieur le comte," said Albert, offering the Swede his case. "I am sure you will like them; they are very good indeed."

Monsieur Dahlborne bowed, and took a cigar. Meanwhile, the concierge had opened the door, and Albert lighted his cigar at the lamp in the porch. When they were in the street, noticing that his rival had no light, he offered the lighted end of his cigar, and the count lighted his by it; then they bowed again, with the utmost courtesy, repeating:

"Until to-morrow!"

"At ten o'clock."

"At Porte Saint-Mandé."

XXI

TOBIE AS CHEVALIER

Tobie left Bastringuette, convinced that the lady who desired to see him the next evening could be no other than she whom he had failed to triumph over on the Champs-Élysées. He determined to be very prompt at the rendezvous, and not to take his charmer to a private dining-room overlooking a mountebank's booth.

The young man passed the whole of the next day dressing and curling and perfuming himself.

"To-night," he thought, "the voluptuous Plays shall not escape me; indeed, as she herself has made the assignation, it is probable that it is not her intention to be too cruel. I shall have in her such a mistress as I desire. She is rich, and they say she is capable of doing insane things for a man she loves. Suppose she should be willing to redeem my olive from Varinet—why not?—until Aunt Abraham gives me an interest in her business. Faith! I feel disposed to be very amorous."

The night arrived in due time; Tobie, having become less timid since he had a love affair in prospect, left his lodgings just at dusk. It was only half-past eight, and he was walking slowly in the direction of Place des Italiens, when, at the corner of Rue du Mont-Blanc, his attention was attracted by a lady crossing the street, whose figure resembled that of the person he expected to meet; quickening his pace a little, he soon overtook her, and found that it was, in truth, the sentimental Herminie. He at once approached her and offered his arm, saying:

"I was on my way to the rendezvous; you see how zealous I am, for it is not nine o'clock; but it seems that we are equally eager for the meeting."

Madame Plays started back, surprised to see a stranger offer her his arm; but in an instant she recognized Pigeonnier, and exclaimed:

"What! is it you, monsieur? Are you on your way again to replace your friend—that blackguard Albert? Ah! what a monster that fellow is! how I detest him!"

"Why, no, madame; I have come on my own account; I am on my way to the Pâté des Italiens, as you know."

"As I know? What difference does it make to me where you are going?"

"Why, don't you understand? I was going to the Pâté des Italiens, at the time you mentioned."

"Oh! you weary me with your *pâté*, monsieur! I don't understand a word you say."

"What, madame! wasn't it you who gave me a rendezvous for this evening, at nine o'clock?"

"A rendezvous! I! Why, you're mad, monsieur! I never gave you a rendezvous!"

Tobie was petrified; he saw that he had formed false hopes; but, determined to make the most of his meeting with Madame Plays, he rejoined:

"I was told that a pretty woman wished to see me. The description which was given me of the person was so seductive—I thought it was you—and notwithstanding the somewhat—er—savage way you treated me the last time I saw you, it made me very happy to think that I was going to see you again."

Madame Plays was never insensible to a compliment; she could not help laughing as she glanced at the short, stout youth; then she replied, with an irritated air:

"Oh! you're not the one I have a grudge against; but that monster, that ungrateful wretch! Can you conceive such a thing as his making a fool of me again?"

"Who, pray?"

"Why, Albert, monsieur—your friend Albert."

"Oh! Albert—it's so long since I saw him."

"Well, I have seen him again, I have had that happiness. I didn't want to receive him, I had given orders that he wasn't to be admitted—and if it hadn't been for that idiot of a Monsieur Plays!"

"I am very curious to hear the story."

"Very well; I will take your arm, and tell it to you."

"Ah! how kind you are!"

"And perhaps——"

"Perhaps—— Oh! please finish the sentence, divine creature——"

"First of all, I want to be revenged on Albert, I give you warning; and the man who should avenge me—oh! I don't know what I would not do for him!"

"O God! you have given me a glimpse of heaven, of Olympus! I will avenge you, I give you my word; yes, I will avenge you twice over; you will see what an avenger I am!"

"Enough! Bless my heart, what a libertine you are! You think at once of things that——"

"And what do you expect a man to think of when he's beside a pretty woman?—of roasting coffee?"

"Yes, monsieur, yes, I saw Albert four days ago; he called on me, and I refused to receive him. Then what does he do? He goes to see my husband, and makes himself at home in his office;—my husband is so foolishly good-natured! he made Albert welcome, and I went there, by chance, and found him there with a lovely bouquet. He made such repentant eyes at me, that I was kind-hearted enough to allow myself to be moved. In a word, I consented to let him go with me to my boudoir; there he said—some pleasant things—nothing to speak of—then begged me to show him the lovely cashmere shawl that I wore at Count Dahlborne's party. I yielded to that caprice, and monsieur went away, making an appointment with me for the next day, which he did not keep."

"That was abominable!"

"But that is not all. I have learned since that he has bought the only shawl like mine in Paris, probably to give it to some woman who was pleased with mine. So, you see, he came back to me solely to see my shawl; and, since then, I have written to him six times, and he has not come again, nor has he even deigned to write a word in reply!"

"Ah! such conduct is very blameworthy."

"Say rather that it is worthy of a street urchin."

"I dared not say it, but I thought so. And you, who deserve to be so madly adored! As for the letter of the other day, I had not read it; I handed it to you in all confidence. If I had known that it contained anything offensive, you must be convinced that I would not have undertaken to deliver it."

"I believe you. But to come just to see the shawl, to buy one like it to give to some woman, to make an appointment with me and not keep it, and not to answer a single one of my letters—oh! that is too much, and I am an outraged woman! that is to say, monsieur, I must have blood! For lack of a better champion, I would have appealed to my husband; I would have worked him up to the point of fighting with Albert. Yes, he would have fought, for he does everything I want him to. But, all things considered, I prefer that he should not be the one to avenge me; that wouldn't be exciting enough; and as you offer yourself, I accept you."

Tobie was rather embarrassed; he was not expecting that Madame Plays would demand that he fight a duel with Albert; he did not suppose that she contemplated such a serious vengeance as that, and he feared that he had gone too far.

The lady observed his indecision, and at once continued:

"You hesitate! you are not worthy of a glance from me. Release my arm, monsieur, and do not speak to me, do not look at me again; I do not know you!"

"Why, no! no! I am not hesitating," cried Tobie, detaining the arm that was passed through his; "I will do whatever you wish; I will fight with Albert, since that will give you pleasure."

"Very well. You will kill him!"

"I can't promise to kill him outright, but I will do all that I possibly can."

"Well, you will wound him at least, and bring me one of his ears."

"Oho! do you really want one of his ears? It seems to me that I might bring you something better than that."

"I want some proof of your victory."

"Oh! I will bring you one, I promise you."

"Then you will be—my chevalier."

"Couldn't I be that at once; I only ask to be armed."

"When you have conquered Albert."

"Give me the kiss, at least."

"Can you think of such a thing, here, on the boulevard?"

"Let us take a cab; one can be created a chevalier very nicely in a cab; why, one of my friends was admitted into the Freemasons in a *citadine*."

"No, monsieur, no; I won't get into a cab with you now. You see, I know you; you are too enterprising; when you have avenged me, it will be a different matter. Then I shall feel bound to reward you."

"Ah! mon Dieu! how I wish that that time had come!"

"It depends entirely upon you whether it comes soon."

"It won't be long, I promise you. I will go in search of Albert, and you will have news of him very quickly. Either you will be avenged, or I will perish in the attempt!"

"Bravo! you are a man of spirit. Come and tell me the result of your duel—for you will be the victor, I have no doubt. You may come up to my boudoir by the narrow staircase on the right in the courtyard; it is on the first floor. Say to my maid: 'I am Tobie,' and you will be admitted."

"Ah! I shall swoon with joy on the threshold of your boudoir!"

"I should say that you would do much better to come in."

"I will come in, adorable creature! I will come in, and you will be obliged to turn me out!"

"And now, adieu! I must leave you; I am going to take a cab and pass the evening with one of my friends."

"And you won't allow me to go with you?"

"No. Adieu!"

Madame Plays hurried away, and Tobie, who had entirely forgotten the rendezvous on Place des Italiens, returned to his lodgings.

"Most assuredly I shall not fight with Albert," he said to himself; "I haven't the slightest inclination to do it. But I will tell him of my meeting with Madame Plays, as well as her proposition to me. Albert is a good fellow, he likes a joke, and he will help me to invent some way of making her think that we have fought. Oh, yes!—but my olive! However, it isn't Albert that I owe the money to, after all, and I'll tell him Varinet hasn't shown up."

Nine o'clock was just striking, the next morning, when Tobie called at the Vermoncey mansion and asked Albert's servant if his friend was visible. The servant ushered Tobie into the young man's bedroom, where he was still asleep.

"It's I, my dear Albert," said Tobie, speaking very loudly; "if you want to sleep some more, don't wake up; I will go away."

Albert woke, rubbed his eyes, recognized Tobie, and murmured sleepily:

"What! is it you, Tobie? where in the devil have you come from?"

"From home, of course."

"And why didn't you come last evening to Place des Italiens, where somebody was waiting for you?"

"Oho! how do you know that?"

"Parbleu! because it was Mouillot, Balivan, Célestin, and I who made the appointment with you through Bastringuette."

"Really?"

"We meant to play a practical joke on you, and we got ourselves arrested and put in the guardhouse!"

"Ha! ha! charming! delicious!"

The little man twisted himself about in an easy-chair, and laughed till he cried.

"But tell me why you have come to see me so early in the day? have you come to redeem your fetich? Perhaps you don't know Varinet's address?"

"I didn't come for that, my friend. I have another reason; I have a favor to ask of you."

"You want to borrow five hundred francs?"

"That isn't what I came for, but if you are willing to lend it to me, it would be very welcome just at this time."

"Well, why did you come and disturb my sleep?"

"In the first place, my friend, it's late, and I wouldn't have waked you if your servant hadn't told me that you had something on hand this morning."

"Great heaven!" cried Albert, hastily throwing off the bedclothes; "you remind me! what time is it, pray?"

"About a quarter past nine."

"I haven't a minute to lose, for I have a duel this morning at ten! Gad! I must make haste."

"What's that? you are going to fight a duel?" said Tobie, involuntarily recoiling from his friend, and concluding that Albert was aware of Madame Plays's hopes; "why, no, Albert; no, you mustn't fight; it isn't worthwhile—a burlesque duel is all that's necessary."

"What in the devil are you talking about? do you mean to say that you know the cause of my duel with Count Dahlborne?"

"Count Dahlborne? oho! you're going to fight with him, are you?"

"To be sure."

Tobie breathed more freely.

"No, I know nothing about that," he replied, running his hand through his hair; "I got it mixed up with something else. Imagine, if you please, that Madame Plays, whom I met last night, absolutely insists on my fighting with you."

"Oh! as to her, it's a different matter. Poor woman! What answer did you make?"

"I promised to kill you for her."

"Very good; listen—perhaps it can be arranged to suit you: if the count kills me, you must tell Madame Plays that you did it."

"Oh! the idea! Poor Albert! I should be so distressed! Are you really going to fight?"

"Most certainly I am. By the way, as you are on the spot, you must be my second; for I shall not have time to send for anybody else."

"Your second!"

"You don't mean to refuse, I trust?"

"You see, my dear fellow, if you should be wounded, I should be ill, I know."

"Nonsense! you must overcome such weaknesses as that; you shall be my second, and I'll lend you five hundred francs to redeem your olive; and I give you leave to tell Madame Plays that you have beaten me, wounded me, killed me—whatever you choose."

"I haven't the heart to refuse. I will sacrifice myself and be your second. Shall we breakfast?"

"I think not; but afterward, if I am the victor, there'll be nothing to prevent."

While they were talking, Albert had dressed; he took his box of pistols, sent for a cab, and entered it with Tobie, who was very pale and agitated. As they passed the Café de Paris, on the boulevard, Albert cried:

"Oh! mon Dieu! I have forgotten something!"

"What is it? Have you two duels on hand?"

"No, but if anything should happen to me—I haven't written a word of farewell to my father. I will step into this café, while you go and find a messenger for me—Sans-Cravate, if you can."

"Very well, my friend."

Albert alighted from the cab and went into the café to write his letter; meanwhile, Tobie turned back to the corner of Rue du Helder to find the messenger. Sans-Cravate and Jean Ficelle were not in their places, but he saw Paul and hurried to where he stood.

"You must come with me, my boy."

"Yes, monsieur."

"You will be given a letter to deliver."

"I will deliver it, monsieur."

"You are to carry it to—but my friend probably won't want it to be delivered at once. It's a very serious matter—a duel."

"Is it you who are going to fight, monsieur?"

"No; but I am to act as second, which is almost the same thing. The letter's for his father. Sapristi! this business upsets me so—it seems to me it would be much better if we could prevent this duel."

"How can that be done, monsieur?"

"I haven't any idea; but come."

Paul accompanied Tobie. Albert had written his letter, and was waiting by the cab.

"Hurry, hurry!" he shouted to Tobie, who did not quicken his pace. "It has just occurred to me that you can take this letter and give it to my father, if I am killed."

"Thanks; much obliged; a delightful commission that! No, indeed; give it to this fellow."

Albert handed Paul the letter, saying:

"Now, my friend, listen carefully to what I say. If you do not see me again within two hours, you will take this letter to my father, Monsieur Vermoncey, Rue Caumartin—the address is on the envelope; but not before two hours from this time! do you understand?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"Take this;—and now, Tobie, let us be off."

Albert entered the cab, but Tobie seized the opportunity to whisper in Paul's ear:

"Carry the letter at once; then his father, knowing that he is going to fight, may succeed in preventing the duel."

"Come on, Tobie! we have no time to waste."

"Here I am; I was just fixing my suspenders."

When the young men were in the cab, the driver, spurred on by Albert, lashed his horse, which started off at a rapid trot; and Paul was left standing on the boulevard, with the letter to Monsieur Vermoncey in his hand.

The young messenger considered what it was his duty to do. The sight of Albert recalled the adventure of the loft, Célestin's insolence, and his schemes to seduce Elina. For a moment, he was tempted to wait the prescribed two hours before delivering the letter. But such impulses, inspired by hatred, could not long exist in his heart.

"This Monsieur Albert isn't as vicious as the others," he thought; "he allows his friends to lead him into folly, just as Sans-Cravate allows Jean Ficelle to lead him. But I don't believe that he is bad at heart. And if he should be killed! Mon Dieu! I think I have heard that his father had no one left but him, that he had lost all his other children. Ah! I must at least try to save this one for him. I will deliver the letter at once."

Paul went to the address written on the letter. He did not know Albert's father, he had never seen him; and yet, the thought of his grief if his son should fall in this duel awoke the keenest interest in his heart.

"I would like to speak to Monsieur Vermoncey—the elder," said Paul to the concierge.

"Second floor, door at the left."

"Is he at home?"

"Yes; he never goes out so early."

The messenger ran hastily up the two flights of stairs, rang at the door, and said to the servant who answered the bell:

"I would like to speak to Monsieur Vermoncey."

"What do you want of him?"

"I have a letter for him."

"Give it to me; I will hand it to him."

"Oh! no, I must give it into his own hands."

"But monsieur is breakfasting. However, I'll go and tell him. Wait."

"But tell him that it is very urgent, most important."

The servant left Paul in the reception-room, frantic with impatience. At last the man returned, and ushered him into the room where Monsieur Vermoncey was breakfasting.

Albert's father looked up at the young man, who seemed to be profoundly agitated. Paul's interesting and by no means ordinary face prepossessed everybody in his favor; Monsieur Vermoncey addressed him kindly:

"You wish to speak to me, my friend?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"You have a letter for me, I understand?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"Give it to me."

"Oh! pardon me; but I must tell you first under what circumstances it was handed to me."

"Very well, go on. But you seem much excited, my friend; try to be calm. If you have come in behalf of some unfortunate person, I will try to grant his request."

"Oh! it isn't that, monsieur; this letter that I have brought is from monsieur your son."

"From my son?"

"Yes, monsieur; he handed it to me a few minutes ago, and said: 'If you don't see me again in two hours, take this letter to my father; but not before.'"

"What does it mean?"

"But his friend, the man who was with him, whispered to me: 'Go to Monsieur Vermoncey at once; there's to be a duel.'"

"A duel! O my God!"

Monsieur Vermoncey rose, took the letter from Paul's hand, and hastily ran his eyes over it.

"The unhappy boy!" he cried; "he says good-bye to me, asks me to forgive him for fighting. Ah! he must have determined to kill me too. But you say it was only a moment ago that Albert gave you this letter?"

"Yes, monsieur—out on the boulevard."

"Ah! then he shall not fight; I will stop this duel. O my God! my son, the last of my children! to lose him as well would be too horrible!"

Monsieur Vermoncey put on his hat and hastened downstairs, followed by Paul. When they were in the street, he looked anxiously at the messenger, and said:

"You know where this duel is to take place, do you not?"

"No, monsieur; they did not tell me that."

"What! his friend did not tell you?"

"No, I suppose he didn't think of it; and it didn't occur to me to ask him."

"What a misfortune! Where are we to go, then? where shall we find them?"

"One moment, monsieur; they were in a cab in front of the Café de Paris; they have not gone to the Bois de Boulogne, for the cab drove away rapidly in the direction of Porte Saint-Denis."

"Then they must be at Vincennes; yes, that must be the place. We will go there. Isn't that a cab yonder? just call it."

"Yes, monsieur."

Paul ran to call the cab; Monsieur Vermoncey stepped in, and said to the messenger:

"Come with me, my friend; you must help me in my search."

"Gladly, monsieur; but I will get up behind."

"No, no, come in here, with me; you understand my suffering, I can see that. You will help me to find my son, to prevent a ghastly calamity. Come quickly!"

Paul stepped into the cab and seated himself beside Monsieur Vermoncey, who said to the driver:

"Twenty francs, forty francs, as much money as you want, if we are at the Forest of Vincennes in half an hour!"

The driver urged his horses to a gallop.

XXII

THE DUEL AND ITS RESULTS.—A TOKEN OF VICTORY.—TOBIE'S REWARD

Albert and Tobie arrived at Porte Saint-Mandé as the clock struck ten. They alighted from their cab, and saw a carriage a few yards away.

"The count is ahead of me," said Albert; "but it's all right; we are in time. Yes, I see two gentlemen walking along the avenue yonder. Those are our adversaries. Come, Tobie, forward!"

"What do you say? *our* adversaries!" cried Pigeonnier, walking as if he had on three pairs of trousers; "I have no adversaries; I didn't come here to fight!"

"Yes, yes, that's all right, don't be alarmed. In old times, the seconds used to fight; and if you want to follow the example of the *raffinés*,—under Louis XIII, for instance, they sometimes fought six against six; those were pleasure parties, on my word!"

"A delicious kind of pleasure! I have no admiration for the manners of those days."

"Well, Tobie, come on, for heaven's sake! What the devil! are your trousers too tight for you? you act as if you couldn't walk!"

"Yes, they cut me; they hurt me terribly."

Count Dahlborne's second was a Swede, a friend of his, who was as tall and stiff as he; he had been in Paris only a few days, and did not understand French, his ability to speak that tongue being thus far limited to the phrases: *Oui, monsieur*, and *bien obligé*.

Albert went forward to meet his opponent, and they saluted each other with much courtesy.

"Allow me to present Monsieur de Mulberg," said the count, waving his hand toward his second.

Albert, assuming that it was a Swedish custom to introduce one's second, stepped back, and said, indicating Tobie, who persisted in remaining in the background:

"And I have the honor of presenting Monsieur Tobie Pigeonnier."

The salutations were repeated, and Monsieur de Mulberg walked up to Tobie and held out his hand, saying:

"*Bien obligé*,[N] monsieur!"

"What's that? it isn't worth while," rejoined Tobie, allowing his hand to be shaken with a decidedly ill grace.

Albert pointed to a path at the right, and said to the count:

"Let us go in this direction; we shall be able to find a place where we shall not be seen or disturbed."

They all followed Albert, Tobie still in the rear and walking as if he were very uncomfortable. Albert halted in an isolated open space, surrounded by dense bushes, saying:

"It seems to me that we shall be very comfortable here."

Count Dahlborne nodded his head in assent, and turned to his friend.

"Arrange the preliminaries with monsieur, Monsieur de Mulberg," he said.

Monsieur de Mulberg walked gravely to Tobie, and began to talk Swedish with him, offering his pistols. Tobie poked him in the stomach, and said:

"Look you! I believe you agree with me that this affair can be arranged. What is the difficulty? I'll bet that it's some foolish trifle."

Monsieur de Mulberg, who was a very ceremonious individual, was much offended because the little man presumed to poke him in the stomach. He frowned, uttered a violent oath, stamped on the ground, and handed Tobie a pistol, exclaiming:

"*Oui, monsieur, bien obligé.*"

Tobie hastily drew back, saying to his principal:

"How do you expect me to agree to anything with this gentleman? He talks some language I never heard before, and looks all the time as if he meant to fire at me."

"Look you, monsieur le comte," said Albert, "I fancy that we can arrange matters better than our seconds can. Let us stand thirty paces apart; we will each walk forward ten paces when your second claps his hands, and fire when we please. Is that satisfactory to you?"

"Perfectly."

"I will take my place.—Tobie, count off thirty paces, starting from here."

Tobie acted as if he were uncertain whether he would do it or not; but he finally decided to do so, and made each of his paces twice the usual length.

"You want to fight, do you?" he said to himself; "and you don't think anything about breakfasting. All right! get it over at once! To think that that Monsieur Vermoncey doesn't come! The messenger probably didn't understand me."

The distance being marked off and the adversaries in their places, Monsieur de Mulberg clapped his hands, and Tobie lay flat on the ground, muttering:

"Nobody knows what may happen! Unskilful men have been known to shoot their seconds, but I don't suppose they'll aim at the ground."

The combatants walked forward two or three steps, then fired at almost the same instant. Albert received the bullet in his coat collar. But Count Dahlborne was less fortunate; he was shot in the left arm, near the shoulder, but did not fall.

"Are you wounded, monsieur le comte?" asked Albert, running up to him.

"Yes—in the arm—the shoulder, I believe. Oh! it's a trifle. I don't see why we should go any further. But you are a fine young fellow, and I consider it my duty to tell you what Madame Baldimer whispered to me last night when she left us."

"Ah! she said something to you, did she? And to me, too."

"She whispered these words in my ear: 'This young man is constantly at my heels; find some way to rid me of his presence.'"

Albert turned pale when he heard what his fair enslaver thought of him.

"I give you my word of honor that she said that to me," added the count.

"I believe you, especially as she said to me, speaking of you: 'That man is insufferable to me; try to rid me of him.'"

"She's a woman who isn't worth having two respectable men fight for her. I abandon the field to you, monsieur; I shall go no more to her house."

"Oh! my love has vanished, monsieur le comte; I mean to go there once more, simply to bid her farewell and tell her that I am no longer her dupe; then I shall never see her again."

During this conversation, Albert supported the count, while Monsieur de Mulberg went to fetch the carriage. As for Tobie, immediately after the exchange of shots, he sprang to his feet and ran after Monsieur Dahlborne's second, crying:

"It won't amount to anything—a wound in the arm—it isn't dangerous."

But Monsieur de Mulberg, to whom it had seemed very strange that their opponent's second should throw himself flat on his stomach as the shots were fired, bestowed a wrathful glance upon him, and turned away, muttering:

"*Bien obligé*, monsieur."

"Go to the devil! You make me sick!" said Pigeonnier to himself, as he walked toward the cab. "One would say that he was angry because his friend isn't killed!"

Monsieur de Mulberg arrived with the carriage, and Albert assisted the count to get in; then they parted, with a shake of the hand.

Albert went to join Tobie, who was already in their cab.

"Well," exclaimed the latter, when his friend came in sight, "I trust that we are satisfied! Victors! and not a scratch! That is a very agreeable ending. We shall eat breakfast enough for four."

"Oh! I am indignant beyond words! I am furious!" said Albert, as he entered the cab.

"The deuce you are! I don't understand at all. Are you furious because you aren't wounded?"

"Bah! I am not talking about the duel! It's that woman I am thinking of! that woman who has mocked at me and my love! who hoped, perhaps, that I would be killed!"

"Oho! so it was on a woman's account that you fought. They have the very devil in them, these women, to insist upon it that we should all fight for them!"

"I am going to her now, to confound her.—Whip up your horse, driver; you may drop me at Rue Neuve-Vivienne.—Do you, Tobie, go at once and find that messenger, and get my letter. You will understand that it must not be delivered to my father, for it would cause him unnecessary anxiety."

Tobie made no reply. He recalled what he had told Paul to do, and wondered what the result would be.

"Oh! these women! these women!" cried Albert; "I am utterly unable to understand this one. What coquetry! what perfidy!"

"It's Madame Baldimer, isn't it?"

"Yes; it is she! Oh! I will tell the whole world of her shameful conduct! Our homage is not enough for her; she must have our blood!"

"Thanks! she shan't have mine; I wouldn't prick myself with a pin for her. But, by the way—what about our duel—concerning Madame Plays?"

"Tell her that you killed me."

"Killed you!"

"You can safely say that, as I am going to leave Paris for several months. I want to divert my thoughts; above all things, I want to forget that woman who has made a plaything of my affection. I shall start this very evening."

"All right; it's agreed that I have killed you, that you are dead. She will find out later that it isn't true; but what do I care? when she has once accorded me her favors, she can't take them back. Such things, when they're once given, aren't to be taken back. To be sure, although they give them away, they still have them; that is very agreeable for those who like to be generous."

The cab had reached Rue Neuve-Vivienne. Albert alighted in front of Madame Baldimer's house, and said to Tobie:

"Now, go at once and find the messenger, so that he won't carry the letter to my father."

"Yes, yes! I will go. But I say, Albert, you promised to lend me—you know—the money to redeem my olive."

"Oh, yes! Well, come to the house soon—this evening; I will give you the money."

"I won't fail. By the way, you will gratify me by not telling the other fellows that——"

Albert was not listening; he had hastened to the stairs, and he ran up without taking breath. When he reached Madame Baldimer's door, he rang. The maid opened the door.

"Your mistress—where is she? I must speak with her instantly. I absolutely must!"

The tone in which the young man spoke, his agitated manner, the pallor of his cheeks, alarmed the maid, who replied:

"Madame is at home, monsieur, and I would certainly tell her that you are here, but—at this moment—I don't dare to go in—because——"

"Because—well, go on."

"Because madame is not alone. There's a gentleman with her."

"A gentleman! What gentleman? It can't be Count Dahlborne, for I have just left him, and he is wounded."

"No, monsieur; it isn't Count Dahlborne."

"Well, then, who is it? Tell me, Rosa. Here, take this, and conceal nothing from me."

Albert resorted to the irresistible argument; he took several gold pieces from his pocket and put them in the servant's hand, and thereby completely loosed her tongue; indeed, she had a tender regard for the young man, because he was an exceedingly comely youth, and with many women, especially young women, that, too, is an irresistible argument.

"Well, monsieur," replied Rosa, speaking very low, "madame is with that tall young man—one of your friends, I think, as I have met him sometimes walking with you."

"What! can it be Célestin?"

"That's the name—it is Monsieur Célestin."

"And he comes here? Madame Baldimer receives him?"

"Oh, yes! quite often, too."

"Is he her lover?"

"No, no! oh! as to that, I assure you that he isn't anything of the kind; not that he doesn't want to be, for he makes love to madame; but, between you and me, I think she's fooling him."

"He comes to see her! and he never told me!"

"*Pardi!* he'd be mighty careful not to, as he comes and tells madame everything you do; and, between you and me, I think that's all madame receives him for."

"The villain! can it be possible? play the spy on me!"

"And this morning, only a moment ago, I heard—because, you see, when I'm near the door, I can hear very well

without listening; I have sharp ears—I heard Monsieur Célestin tell Madame Baldimer that you were to fight a duel this morning with Count Dahlborne; that he was watching last night in the street, and heard you say: 'Until to-morrow, at ten o'clock, at Porte Saint-Mandé.'"

"Ah! this is too much!"

And Albert rushed toward the salon, paying no heed to Rosa, who besought him not to betray her; he strode rapidly through two rooms to the boudoir, opened the door, and found himself in the presence of Madame Baldimer and his intimate friend Célestin.

The lovely widow was half reclining on a couch, listening to Monsieur Célestin, who sat on a chair a few feet away, apparently talking with much earnestness.

At sight of Albert, both were petrified; but in Célestin's case, it was simply regret at being surprised in Madame Baldimer's house; whereas, in her case, it was consternation and rage at the certainty that her hopes were crushed.

"It is I," said Albert, throwing himself into a chair; "I am sure that you did not expect me; madame flattered herself, no doubt, that Count Dahlborne had relieved her of my presence, as she begged him to do last night, after making a similar request of me, in a whisper, with respect to him."

The fair American turned ghastly pale, while Monsieur Célestin rose and took his hat.

"As it happens, my dear friend," he said, "I learned that you were to fight a duel this morning, and I came here to tell madame, because, knowing that she has a—most affectionate regard for you, I thought that—that she might perhaps prevent the meeting."

"Why don't you say, also, that it is because you are in the habit of coming here to report to madame everything I do, and that, abusing my confidence in you, you have been false to our friendship in the hope that that would serve your love."

Célestin bit his lips and lost something of his assurance.

"Oh! upon my word," he faltered, "what an idea! Someone has slandered me. I am not capable—— But you probably have much to say to each other. I do not wish to disturb your tête-à-tête. Au revoir, Albert!—my respects, madame!"

And Célestin left the room, his departure being apparently unnoticed by the two persons he addressed.

Madame Baldimer kept her eyes fixed on the floor, and seemed to be absorbed by the emotion caused by Albert's unexpected arrival. He gazed earnestly at that woman whose beauty had set his heart on fire, and tried to find in the expression of her face something that betrayed the falseness of her heart.

After a prolonged scrutiny of her features, which led to no discovery, unless it were this—that a perfectly regular face affords much less scope than another for the observations of the moralist, Albert turned his eyes elsewhere, and chance willed that they should fall on Madame Baldimer's feet, which, at that moment, she had not remembered to keep out of sight, as she usually did.

We have already said that her foot was the fair American's weak point, and that, like the peacock, her pride did not attach to that part of her person, which, for that reason, she almost never showed.

Albert was amazed at the sight of that broad, flat foot, so entirely out of harmony with the lady's slender figure; and the longer he looked at it, the more conscious he became of a feeling of something like satisfaction, of well-being; his heart seemed to be relieved of a weight; his anger vanished, and he ended by laughing heartily, saying:

"Mon Dieu! I was mad! Gad! if I had only seen it sooner!"

Madame Baldimer looked up when she heard Albert laugh, and saw that his eyes were fastened on her feet. A deep flush overspread her face, she hurriedly rearranged her dress, so that it covered even the soles of her shoes; but it was too late, the effect was wrought. Albert rose and bowed to the fair widow, saying in a mocking tone:

"On my honor, madame, if I had seen them sooner, I assure you that I would not have fought for you!"

Madame Baldimer's eyes gleamed with a furious expression difficult to describe. Having said this much,—and he could have wreaked no more cruel vengeance on a coquette,—Albert left the house and hurried to his own home.

At sight of him, the concierge uttered a joyful exclamation, which was echoed by one of his father's servants, who was in the courtyard.

"Well, what's the matter?" queried Albert; "why does my presence produce this effect on you?"

"Oh! monsieur, is it really you? What joy!"

"We were terribly afraid you were dead, monsieur——"

"That you had been killed in a duel——"

"Ah! how happy monsieur your father will be when he sees you—he was so anxious, so distressed, when he went away!"

"How did my father know that I had a duel for this morning? Who could have told him?"

"A messenger, who came with a letter; and we heard Monsieur Vermoncey say, when he was coming downstairs: 'If only I arrive in time to prevent this duel, and nothing has happened to my son!'"

Albert was grieved that the affair should have come to his father's ears, for he was well aware of his great love for him, and he realized how anxious he must be at that moment; but he did not understand why the messenger had brought his letter, as Tobie should have found him in ample time to countermand the order.

"Where did he go to look for me?" asked Albert. "I didn't mention in my letter where we were to fight, and the messenger couldn't have known that."

The concierge and the servant had no idea; they could only tell what they knew: that Monsieur Vermoncey was very anxious, very much agitated; that he was talking to himself aloud when he came downstairs; that when he was in the street, he stopped, and, after talking a few seconds with the messenger, sent him to call a cab; and that, when it came, they both got in and drove away very fast.

Albert did not know what steps to take to find his father, for he feared that, while he was looking for him in one direction, Monsieur Vermoncey would be prosecuting his search in a diametrically opposite direction. However, as he could not remain at rest when he thought of the suffering he had caused his father, he sent for a cab, and had determined to scour the neighborhood of Vincennes and Saint-Mandé, when the servant, who was standing at the

door, cried out:

"Here he is, monsieur! I know the cab, and I can see monsieur your father and the messenger inside. Here he is!"

A moment later, a cab did, in fact, stop in front of the house. Albert was in the street, making signs by which his father might recognize him. Monsieur Vermoncey uttered a joyful cry, and, leaping from the carriage, threw himself into his son's arms and held him to his heart for a long, long time. If you have ever thought that you had lost the object of your affection, the being who, more than any other, makes life dear to you, you will realize to the full the bliss of recovering him and holding him in your arms. You fear lest that bliss is only a lie, and you feel that you must prolong it to the utmost in order to make sure that it is real.

Paul's eyes were wet with tears when he saw Albert in his father's arms. He, too, was happy that nothing had happened to the young man whose father was so devotedly attached to him. And yet, there was always a strain of sadness in his feelings when he saw a child caressed by its parents.

At last, Monsieur Vermoncey, being a little calmer, started to go upstairs with his son, and Paul was about to leave the house; but Albert's father, noticing it, said to him:

"Come, my friend; come upstairs with us."

The young messenger obeyed, and followed Monsieur Vermoncey and his son to their apartments.

There Albert tried to understand what had happened; he asked Paul why, instead of following his instructions, he had neglected to wait two hours before bringing to Monsieur Vermoncey the letter he had given him. The messenger told what Tobie had said to him, and Albert angrily stamped on the floor, crying:

"That Tobie must always put his foot in it; he is the cause of all your anxiety."

"This young man," said Monsieur Vermoncey, pointing to Paul, "having noticed that you drove along the boulevards toward Porte Saint-Antoine, I thought that your duel would probably take place at Vincennes. We drove there in a very short time. After appointing a place of meeting, we beat up the woods, I and this good fellow—who seconded me with a zeal which I cannot praise too highly! We met at the appointed place, tired out and no wiser than before. Being convinced that you were not to fight at Vincennes, I was about to start for Romainville, when this young man advised me to inquire first at Saint-Mandé. There I learned that you had been seen, and that the duel had evidently taken place, for a wounded man had been taken away in a carriage, going at a very slow pace. But was it you, or was it your opponent? that, it was impossible for me to find out; so I decided to come back here, suffering torments of anxiety which you can well imagine. But here you are! I ought to reprove you, but I like to think that you will remember the torture I have suffered to-day, and that you will not subject me to such misery again."

While Albert promised his father to be more prudent in the future, Monsieur Vermoncey went to his secretary, took from it ten napoleons, and handed them to Paul.

"Here, my friend," he said, "accept this from me. What you have done for me to-day cannot be paid for, I know; for I have found in you what we often seek in vain among people who claim to be our friends: a man who understood my distress, who shared it, and who did everything in his power to relieve it. And it was not selfish interest that guided you; no, it was your heart alone; for I saw tears of joy fall from your eyes when you perceived my son in the distance. You are kind-hearted and susceptible to noble sentiments; you must be a worthy fellow and a blessing to your parents; take this as a souvenir of this day."

Paul was deeply moved and could hardly make out to say, in faltering tones:

"But this is too much, monsieur; I was paid beforehand—I do not want any more; I am so happy to have been useful to you."

Monsieur Vermoncey took the young man's hand, and, while pressing it affectionately, placed the money in it.

"Come, come! accept it as a favor to me; you will grieve me if you refuse. Take the money to your mother, so that she too may be happy to-day."

Paul lowered his eyes without replying, and Monsieur Vermoncey continued:

"By the way, my friend, where is your stand?"

"Rue du Helder, monsieur, at the corner of the boulevard. Monsieur your son knows me very well."

"Are you his regular messenger?"

"No, monsieur; but my comrade Sans-Cravate is; his stand is—not far from mine."

"That is true," said Albert; "and if I had found him this morning, I probably should have employed him to do my errand."

"Well," continued Monsieur Vermoncey, "hereafter I propose to employ no other messenger than you. What is your name?"

"Paul, monsieur."

"Very well, Paul, you understand, you are to be my messenger. You are not sorry, I trust, are you?"

"Far from it, monsieur; and I will do all that I can to deserve your confidence."

"I am sure of it, my friend; and now—au revoir!"

Paul bowed low and left the room, touched to the quick by the interest manifested by Monsieur Vermoncey, and with his heart filled with a strange joy, the cause of which he was at a loss to understand.

When Albert was alone with his father, he embraced him again.

"You were right," he cried, "perfectly right! when you told me that some love intrigues were very dangerous, that there were women who led us much further than we meant to go; and when you told me to distrust my friend Célestin, whose manner did not attract you. Yes, father; you judged him fairly. My friend Célestin is a traitor, who deceived me and tried to rob me of the woman I was trying to overcome; and as for her,—as false as and even more treacherous than Célestin, as she had not love for an excuse,—she pretended to love me, gave me the most alluring hopes, and secretly requested a Swedish count, who was paying court to her, to rid her of me as soon as possible."

"What infernal perfidy! Can it be that women treat you so—young as you are, and amiable, and made to please!"

"Yes, father. But not all of them, luckily."

"Who is this woman, pray, whose heart is so black?"

"An American; or, at least, a person who has lately come from America; for I believe that she is a native-born

Frenchwoman; an alleged widow,—very beautiful, I must admit,—who calls herself Madame Baldimer."

"Baldimer; I have never heard that name before."

"She has been in Paris only a year, and frequents a certain—rather eccentric social circle, which is not that which you frequent. Well, I had the good luck to inflict only a trifling wound on the Swedish count, with whom she had the cleverness to involve me in a duel—a most excellent gentleman, who, like myself, has sworn to have no more to do with Madame Baldimer. I have told my friend Célestin what I think of him. And now, father, to enable me to forget entirely this affair and the woman who caused it, let me travel a few months; it will do me good; it will force me to break these Parisian habits and intimacies, which are not all beneficial, as I have had a chance to find out. I shall return a new man, refreshed and sensible. You will let me go, won't you?"

"Yes, my dear boy; although it is painful to me to be deprived of your presence, I am not selfish enough to object to a journey which cannot fail to do you good. To leave Paris for some time will certainly be beneficial to you; and it will be to your advantage to see a little of the world. But you won't be away too long, will you?"

"Two or three months at most."

"Where do you mean to go?"

"I have no idea; I would like to have an opportunity to start at once."

"Mon Dieu! if you care to see Normandie, my doctor came to see me last night, and offered to take me there with him, without expense, in a comfortable post chaise which one of his patients has sent him. He starts to-day, at three o'clock."

"To-day, at three o'clock. Parbleu! that suits me exactly. As well Normandie as any other place. At all events, when I have had enough of it, I can go somewhere else. Quickly, father! give me a line to your doctor, telling him that he will have a travelling companion; meanwhile, I will make what preparations are indispensable, put some money in my pocket—and off we go!"

"You still have some money, I trust?"

"Oh! yes, father; of course, I haven't spent the ten thousand francs you gave me a few days ago."

Albert bit his lips as he spoke; the memory of the cashmere shawl made him sigh; but he soon banished the thought, and went to make his preparations for departure, while Monsieur Vermoncey wrote to his doctor.

While all this was happening, Tobie Pigeonnier had not remained inactive. On leaving Albert, he returned to Paul's stand; but the messenger was not there.

"What good would it do if I should wait for him? I told him to carry Monsieur Vermoncey his son's letter at once. It's too late now for me to tell him not to carry it. I did it with the best intentions. Papa Vermoncey must have received the letter a long while ago; he must think that his son is dead now, and probably he is in terrible distress, scurrying about the suburbs to find some trace of his child; it's a calamity, and I am very sorry; but, after all, when he sees his Albert again, he'll find out that he isn't dead, and he'll be consoled. So I don't need to worry any more about that affair. I must give a little thought to my own concerns now. Albert has given me leave to say that I fought a duel with him and killed him; that is delicious; he is going to travel for some time, my lie won't be discovered right away, and, before it is, my love will be crowned with its greenest myrtle. O superb Plays! thou shalt be mine! I quiver with joy at the thought. But before I call on her, I must go home and make a most careful toilet."

Tobie bent his steps toward his abode, but, before he arrived there, he recalled the fact that he had not breakfasted as he had hoped to do in the capacity of second in a duel; his stomach told him that he must satisfy its cravings before attending to anything else. He felt in his pocket, and exclaimed:

"*Fichtre!* I have fifteen francs with me, my whole fortune at this moment. Suppose I treat myself to a *déjeuner à la fourchette* of the right sort—why not? Albert is going to lend me five hundred francs—to redeem my olive; but, after all, I'm not obliged to go and redeem it to-day. The gentleman with white eyebrows, who is very rich, can afford to wait a few days more. Meanwhile, I'll go to see Aunt Abraham, with my five hundred francs in my pocket, and I'll take care to jingle them so she will think I'm doing a big business, and then perhaps she'll make up her mind to give me an interest in her business. I'll breakfast at the Café Anglais. I'm hungry enough to treat myself handsomely."

And the little dandy, swaggering as if he had his cane, and all puffed up with the good fortune that he anticipated, entered the Café Anglais with his nose in the air, seated himself at a table, called the waiter in a loud voice, ordered oysters, kidneys, chicken *à la tartare*, and beaune première, with the assured air of a man who cares nothing for the expense and whose only thought is to breakfast bountifully. He was served promptly, he ate with zest, his appetite was even keener after the oysters, and became more imperative than ever after the kidneys. Tobie denied it nothing, until it was completely satisfied. Not until he had eaten for an hour and a half, almost without intermission, did he decide to stop. It was high time; his bill amounted to fourteen francs fifty centimes. He generously gave the waiter fifteen centimes, put the remaining seven sous in his pocket, and went to his lodgings, his brain excited by thoughts of love, and by the bottle of beaune he had consumed.

Tobie passed his clothes in review—an operation which required much less time than he could have wished. After a careful examination of his three waistcoats, his two pairs of trousers, and his only coat, he put on those which he judged to be in the best condition; then he curled and crimped and anointed himself, and saturated himself with eau de cologne; as he had no other perfume, he drenched his handkerchief with essence of lemon used to remove stains; the result being that his concierge, when he passed, mistook him for a bowl of Roman punch.

Thus arrayed and anointed, young Pigeonnier repaired to Madame Plays's abode.

"She accepted me for her chevalier," he said to himself; "I will go and tell her that she is fully avenged. She will be delighted with me, and she will reward my valor by the sweetest caresses. By the way, what did I kill Albert with? With a pistol? no, that is too commonplace. With a sword—I like that better; it's more after the style of the chevaliers of old; I split his head open—no, I pierced his breast with a sword-thrust. Ah! here is her house; I must not forget the directions she gave me: the little staircase at the right; I am to go up to the first floor, and say: 'I am Tobie,' and I shall be admitted at once. But, mon Dieu! it just occurs to me; she told me to bring her a token of my victory; sapristi! I forgot all about that; what, in heaven's name, shall I take her for a token?"

Tobie walked back and forth in front of Madame Plays's house, scratching his head in his efforts to think what he could carry her in default of Albert's ears, which she herself had suggested. He searched his pockets, but could find only his handkerchief perfumed with lemon, and the seven sous remaining from his fifteen francs; there was nothing

which could possibly be produced as a token of victory.

Tobie had almost determined to present himself without a token, when, as he looked about, he spied at some distance one of the enormous rolls, or *carrots*, which are commonly suspended over the doors of tobacco shops. It arrested the young man's attention, and an idea entered his mind, which he caught on the wing and clung to. He walked rapidly to the tobacco shop, and arrived there still in possession of his idea, which he proceeded to put into execution.

The dealers in tobacco are almost all women, and Tobie said to the woman behind the counter:

"A cigar, madame, if you please."

"There they are, monsieur; take your choice."

"Oh! I want something better than those; I must have a very fine five-sou cigar; one can get a very fine cigar for five sous."

"Yes, monsieur; here are some; but if you want a still larger one, we make them for ten sous; they're magnificent—almost as big as carrots. Would monsieur like one for ten sous?"

"No, no! that's too big; this one will do very well."

Tobie selected a five-sou cigar, and had it carefully wrapped in paper, to the amazement of the dealer, because a man who buys one cigar ordinarily begins by lighting it. At last, armed with his cigar, which he placed in his pocket, he returned to Madame Plays's house.

"Now I am all right," he said to himself; "I have all I require, I have my token of victory. Albert almost always has a cigar in his mouth, and I'll say that I found this one in his pocket and took it. What a bright idea that was of mine! O suggestive carrot! how glad I am that I happened to see you!"

Tobie entered the house, stalked by the concierge, calling to him, with a superb air: "Madame Plays!" ascended the little staircase, rang, and said in a cajoling tone to the maid who opened the door:

"Be good enough to announce me to madame; she will receive me at once."

"What is monsieur's name?"

"Tobie. I am Tobie. Just say to your enchanting mistress: 'Madame, it is Tobie,' and she will understand."

The maid turned on her heel, muttering:

"Tobie! Tobie! that's a funny name. Seems to me, madame used to have a little dog of that name."

Madame Plays was before her mirror, trying a new way of arranging her hair on top of her head, which was supposed to make her look like a Spartan woman. Madame Plays was much inclined toward Greek styles; and ever since she had heard that the women of Sparta used to dance a dance called *Bibasis*, which consisted principally in kicking themselves behind with their heels, she had passed part of the day practising that dance.

"If there are idiots who say that it's nothing more than the cancan," she would say to herself, "I'll just answer: 'You are donkeys; it's the *Bibasis*, an old dance of the Greeks revived.'"

When her maid announced Tobie, she started.

"Tobie!" she exclaimed. "Oh! yes, to be sure! I had forgotten all about him. Let Tobie come in; let him come in at once!"

The maid ushered the young man into the room, and retired. When he entered the boudoir, Pigeonnier deemed it fitting to assume an air at once tender and melancholy; so he stepped forward and saluted Madame Plays with an expression bordering on the tragic.

"It's you, is it, monsieur?" she said. "But I remember, you were my chevalier. Well! what news do you bring me?"

Tobie struck an attitude, and replied:

"It is, in very truth, as your chevalier that I present myself, madame; you ordered me to avenge your wrongs by fighting with Albert, and I have obeyed you."

"Oho! indeed! you have fought a duel with him, have you?"

"Yes, madame."

"When was that?"

"This morning, at Saint-Mandé. A thousand witnesses can inform you that I went there with Albert."

"And what did you fight with?"

"Swords, madame."

"Well! what was the result?"

"I fulfilled your wishes to the utmost, madame; you wished me to kill Albert, and I have killed him—a sword-thrust in the breast; he died on the spot. I shed tears over my victory, I am not ashamed to admit it.—But as I placed my hand on the poor fellow's heart, to find out whether he still breathed, I felt this cigar in his pocket, and took it. You desired a token of my victory: this is the only one that I can offer you."

Madame Plays listened to Tobie with the air of one who could not believe what she heard; but when he had concluded, she rushed at him with a furious gesture and cried, snatching the cigar from his hand:

"You have killed him! Can it be possible? such a lovely boy! the only man I have ever loved! Yes, I was saying to myself this morning: 'I have never loved any man but him.'—And you had the villainy to kill him! and you come to tell me of it, you murderer!"

Tobie was utterly crushed.

"But, madame," he faltered, "I simply carried out your orders; you ordered me to avenge you."

"That is not true! I couldn't have said that. Or if I did, I was mad, and you shouldn't have paid any attention to it."

"But, madame——"

"To think of killing Albert! such a handsome brunette, and such lovely eyes! Take yourself out of my sight, monsieur—go instantly, or I won't answer for the effects of my anger. Go, I say, you monster, you villain!"

"What, madame! when I fought solely to avenge you——"

"Oh! what infamy! to say that it was I who—— Leave the room, monsieur!"

Seeing that Tobie did not stir, Madame Plays pushed him roughly toward the door. The little fellow, who was

nearly overturned by the shock, clung to a chair, and could not make up his mind what to do. Meanwhile, the robust lady opened the door herself, and, while Pigeonnier's back was turned, kicked him with all her force.

"Oho! you refuse to go, do you?"

By that means, Tobie was at last ejected from the room, and the door was instantly closed and locked upon him. He flew into a rage in his turn, and muttered angrily as he descended the stairs:

"Sacredieu! this is too much! By heaven! I have had enough of that woman; a slap in the face the other day, and now a kick! What under heaven will it be the next time? So she is mad because I have killed Albert! She plays little Hermione, and treats me like Orestes. To be sure, Orestes didn't receive a kick in the rump; she has interpolated that.—So you mourn Albert's death, do you?—Very good! just to punish her, I won't tell her it isn't true. *Bigre!* what a love affair! I don't want any more of it, thanks!"

Holding his hand to the injured part, Tobie betook himself to Albert's house, to get the five hundred francs which he had promised to lend him, and which might well act as an antidote to the affront he had undergone.

But when he inquired for his friend, the servant said:

"Monsieur Albert started for Normandie half an hour ago."

"He has gone away, and left nothing for me?"

"No, monsieur."

Tobie was tempted to beat his brains out against the wall.

"This caps the climax," he said to himself, as he walked away; "I have two sous left! Perhaps I had better go and jingle them in Aunt Abraham's ear, to induce her to make me a partner in her business!"

Copyright Copyright 1903 by G. Barrie & Sons.

THE RENDEZVOUS AT THE CAFÉ

———

Another person had, in fact, entered the café. It was a man of twenty-six or twenty-seven years, of medium height, well set up, with dark brown hair, a slightly flushed face, sharp eyes, turned-up nose, and a huge mouth—everything, in short, which denotes a jovial companion.

NOVELS

BY

Paul de Kock

VOLUME IV

SANS-CRAVATE;

OR,

THE MESSENGERS

VOL. II

LITTLE STREAMS

PRINTED BY ARRANGEMENT WITH

GEORGE BARRIE'S SONS

THE JEFFERSON PRESS
BOSTON NEW YORK

Copyrighted, 1903-1904, by G. B. & Sons.

SANS-CRAVATE;

OR,

THE MESSENGERS

[CONTINUED]

XXIII

A NEW PATRON

Several days had passed since Albert left Paris. His sudden departure had greatly surprised his friends and boon companions, and, as they did not know the cause of it, each of them formed his own conjectures.

"He probably thought that there wasn't enough sport in Paris," said Mouillot, "and has gone elsewhere in search of adventures."

"I have no doubt that he is following some woman who has magnetized him," observed Monsieur Dupétrain; "someone who can make him go to the end of the world by the power of her magnetic fluid."

Balivan, distraught as always, exclaimed at first:

"What! Albert has left Paris? That's very strange! Can he have gone on a sketching trip?"—But on the next and following days, as he smoked his cigar on the boulevard, he never failed to say: "It's a surprising thing—I haven't met Albert to-day."

Monsieur Varinet, the young man with white eyebrows, and holder of Tobie's olive, said nothing at all.

There were two persons who might have informed these gentlemen as to the cause of Albert's departure: Tobie Pigeonnier, who had been his second in the duel, a fact of which he would have boasted everywhere had he not been forced anew to shun the society of his friends; for, being less prepared than ever to redeem his fetich, and to cut a figure in society, the little man had disappeared; no one ever saw him, by day or by night, so that it might well be believed that he was dead or had left Paris; and Monsieur Varinet was beginning to contemplate distrustfully the little, dried fruit which he still kept in his purse.

The second person was Monsieur Célestin de Valnoir; that gentleman, who had known of Albert's duel, was not long in learning of his departure from Paris. He was no sooner absolutely certain of that fact than he hastened to Madame Baldimer's to inform her.

That lady, whose features had assumed a more serious expression than ever since her rupture with young Vermoncey, received Célestin rather coldly; when she had listened to what he had come to tell her, as to something which she already knew, she replied shortly:

"Your intimate friend has left Paris without you! It seems to me that he has treated us about alike; our discredit is complete. The result is, monsieur, that I fancy that you are not likely to know much more than I about his affairs

hereafter, so that you will not be called upon to put yourself out to please me."

Célestin tried to assume a sentimental air, as he replied:

"Hereafter, madame, I shall not come to talk about Albert, but about myself and my love for you. I have broken entirely with my friend, for Albert, having found me with you, is too jealous to forgive me. I care very little, however, for his hatred or his indifference, since you have promised to reward me."

Madame Baldimer rose and bowed low to her visitor.

"I will keep my promise, monsieur, as you will see very soon."

And the next day, Célestin received a parcel carefully wrapped in paper, and a short note, in Madame Baldimer's hand, containing these words only:

"I promised to pay you for what you did for me, and I keep my promise, monsieur. Deign to accept the contents of this parcel; it is your compensation."

Célestin hastily tore off the wrapper, and found the magnificent shawl that Albert had presented to the fair American, and the costly opera glass given her by Count Dahlborne. Thus she rewarded Célestin by sending him the gifts she had received from her other two adorers.

At first, he gnawed his lips in anger, muttering:

"What does she take me for? I consider her damnably impertinent. The idea of offering to pay me! It won't take me long to send back her parcel."

But, after examining the two objects, Célestin thought better of it and sent neither of them back.

"They will help me to seduce some other woman," he said to himself.

Madame Baldimer had estimated him at his exact value.

Paul had resumed his occupation; as before, he arrived at his stand very early in the morning; but Elina, too, came to her work at the dressmaker's before any of her fellow apprentices had left their beds—in spite of which fact, she was sometimes the last to appear in the workroom; for every morning she slackened her pace when she saw the young messenger, who ran quickly to meet her. It rarely happens that there is not some doorway, some passage, some porte cochère, which offers shelter to those who wish to talk, and who are very glad not to stand where they are exposed to the eyes of everybody who passes. Lovers especially seek sheltered nooks and dark corners; when they are walking together on the street, you will see them look out of the corners of their eyes, to right and left, hoping to espy some obscure passageway, and agreeing that it is a great pity that all the new houses have porte cochères. And as soon as they discover the most uninviting nook, they hasten thither to talk a moment. That moment sometimes lasts for hours. Oftentimes a concierge, disgusted that any one should talk unless they talk to her, calls out impertinently from the end of the passage:

"Aren't you most through chattering there? Well! those people are making themselves at home! They make assignations in my passageway! They keep other folks out, but what do they care! If I didn't keep an eye on 'em, God knows what they'd be up to on my premises! God! what a place this world is getting to be!"

Another one will say nothing, but begin to sweep pools of water against the legs of the couple who have stopped in her doorway. Or else she will close the door of the passage, saying:

"Who do you want to see? You can't stand there, I tell you!"

But all these petty annoyances slide lightly over the good nature of a pair of lovers. If they are obliged to go away, they stop again a little farther on; or they defy the sweeping, the unkind remarks, the silly jests, and the inquisitive glances of the gossips of the quarter, who, in most cases, act as auxiliaries to the concierges. What do they care what is said, or what happens about them? oftentimes they don't see it. It is so pleasant to love and to tell each other of it, to gaze into the loved one's eyes, to talk in whispers, to understand each other at the slightest hint, to exchange ardent thoughts and warm breaths. When we are enjoying such bliss as that, it engrosses us and leaves us no senses with which to be conscious of anything else. She was quite right, was that lady of the good old time, who, when her knight sought a shelter from the rain, cried:

"You no longer love me! if you did, you would not have noticed that it rains!"

Elina told Paul all that she did, all that she thought, all the plans she formed during the day and sometimes during the night; for one does not always sleep at night, especially if one is very much in love.

The young messenger received these sweet confidences with the deepest interest, for he was always included in Elina's projects. The little dressmaker had not a thought or hope which did not relate to Paul; and she told her lover so with an artless sincerity which enchanted him. But, for all that, he was often very depressed, and that grieved the young girl, who said to him one morning:

"Aren't you glad that I tell you all my thoughts? don't you approve of my plans for the future? Instead of being gratified that I think of you all the time, it seems to sadden you and make you unhappy; if that's how it is, monsieur, I won't tell you anything more!"

"Oh! do not think that, mademoiselle," Paul replied, as he took Elina's hand. "I listen to you with the greatest pleasure; I am too happy to hear what you say, to know that I am always in your thoughts. But, do what I will—I think ——"

"What, pray?"

"That all these plans are not certain to be carried out. For, before I can marry you, before I can have the happiness of calling you my wife, I must have money in hand. Your aunt, Madame Vardeine, will never consent to give you to a poor messenger; and she will be in the right. Oh! yes, parents are always right. You are fitted to marry a rich man, with an established position—a man whose honorable calling will not expose you to the risk of having to blush for your husband. Not that I despise my trade! far from it; but the world has its customs, its exigencies, its laws, which we are bound to respect. The man who stands at the street corner, to do errands, cannot hope to be received in the salon of the humblest bourgeois. And you, Elina, with your charms, your intelligence, your beauty, are capable of conferring happiness on a man who will be able to take you into society, who will have an attractive position and a name to offer you. Whereas I lack everything. Ah! you see that I do wrong to love you! and that I am justified in

being depressed!"

While her young friend was saying this, little Elina showed, by repeated impatient gestures, how far she was from sharing his ideas. At last, barely giving him time to finish, she cried:

"Hush! hush this minute! for what you are saying is very wicked. So you would have me cease to love you, because you are a messenger! But I insist upon loving you, monsieur, and I will love you whether you want me to or not. Besides, what you say isn't fair to yourself. Are you like other messengers? do you swear every time you speak? are you coarse and vulgar, and rude in your manners? No, you are just the opposite; you are perfectly well fitted to go into a salon; indeed, you would not be out of place; all you would have to do would be to change your jacket for a coat; and is that so hard to do?"

"No; but the coat isn't enough."

"I beg your pardon, monsieur—a coat and education. But are you obliged to remain a messenger forever? When we are married, you can go into something else; you will have saved something, for you can't spend very much money, you live so modestly; you never go to the wine shop. I have heard your comrades say more than once: 'He must be saving money; he works hard, and never enjoys himself.'"

Paul looked at the ground as he replied:

"Alas! no, mademoiselle; I haven't saved anything; I have no money."

"Why, what do you do with your money, then?" cried Elina. "You can't give it to your parents, as you haven't any."

Paul blushed, and stammered:

"I haven't been able to save anything, mademoiselle; it isn't my fault."

Elina feared that she had wounded him, and made haste to say:

"Oh! pray forgive me for saying that. Mon Dieu! perhaps you will think that I care for money! I care nothing at all about it, I tell you; don't grieve, Monsieur Paul; we shall have enough, anyway. I am rich, you know; I have what my father left me, and when I am of age my aunt will have to give it to me. Then it will be yours, and with that we shall have enough to start a nice little business. Come, monsieur, don't be cast down any more, when I tell you that we shall be very happy some day."

Paul sighed as he kissed Elina's hand; but soon the smile reappeared on his lips and love in his eyes; how could he complain when he saw how dearly she loved him?

Such was generally the end of these interviews on a street corner, under a porte cochère, or at the entrance of a passage.

Such loving words as these are not always exchanged behind the gorgeous hangings of a salon.

I do not say this to induce you to make love on street corners; but solely to show you that it is done everywhere. The poor must have some compensation.

After these affectionate conversations with the little dressmaker, Paul returned to his place lighter-hearted and more content with his lot. Then he would look about for Sans-Cravate, with whom he was most desirous to be reconciled, because he had, in the depths of his heart, a feeling of affection for him, which he could not overcome. Genuine affection is not readily destroyed, and, when you have a sympathetic feeling for a person, it is like the natural instincts: drive it away if you will, it returns at a gallop.

But Sans-Cravate was almost never in his place; as soon as he had earned a few sous, Jean Ficelle enticed him away to spend them.

One morning, when Albert had been away from Paris for some time, a gentleman stopped in front of Paul, who was sitting on his *crochets*, and said to him:

"I was looking for you, my friend; I have something for you to do. Do you recognize me?"

"Oh! yes, monsieur," Paul replied quickly, and with evident emotion; "you are Monsieur Albert's father; I should be very blameworthy if I had forgotten you—you were so kind to me!"

"I was no more than just," Monsieur Vermoncey rejoined, with a smile. "Come with me, if you will; I have several errands for you to do."

Paul followed Monsieur Vermoncey, who took him up to his apartment and gave him several letters to deliver, to which he was to bring back answers—some verbal, others written. The young man set off at once; he performed the commissions intrusted to him promptly and with marked zeal; as most of those to whom he was sent gave him no written answers, he had to remember exactly what each of them said to him. But he had an excellent memory, and he transmitted the messages faithfully to Monsieur Vermoncey.

Albert's father was surprised at the remarkable celerity with which Paul had made the journey to several places at a distance from his house, and greatly pleased by the way in which he had carried out his wishes. He paid him generously, saying:

"You have done well, my friend, very well! but another time you need not hurry so; barely an hour and a quarter to go to all four corners of Paris! I call that going like the wind, not walking! I don't want you to make yourself ill in my service."

"Oh! you need have no fear, monsieur; it is a pleasure to me to show you my zeal."

Monsieur Vermoncey seemed surprised by the young messenger's language. He looked earnestly at him for several seconds, then dismissed him, saying:

"Until another time! but only on condition that you won't go so fast."

A week later, Monsieur Vermoncey's servant came after Paul, who went with him at once. The young man was ushered into his patron's apartment, and the servant left him in the library, saying that he would tell his master that he was there.

In a few moments he returned, and said:

"Monsieur has not finished the letter he was writing, and now he has a visitor; he told me to ask you to wait a little while, if you can."

"Yes, yes; so long as monsieur wishes," Paul replied.

"Stay here, then; it's pleasanter, and nobody goes through this room."

Left alone, Paul sat down and glanced timidly about. Against all four walls were shelves filled with books, which were protected from the dust by sliding glass doors; but several of the doors were open, and the books were at the service of those who cared for them.

The young man gazed for some time, with something like envy, at those treasures of wit and learning gathered in so small a space; he read the names of Voltaire, Rousseau, Corneille, Molière, Montaigne, La Fontaine, and said to himself:

"Mon Dieu! how fortunate anybody is to own all these books! to be in such good company! for an author's mind is himself, his works are his thoughts, and when reading him one can imagine that he is listening to him; that it is he who is speaking. What a blessed thing is genius! it does not die! A man can never have a moment's ennui when he is in the company of those men!"

Paul heaved a sigh, and, thinking that he might have a long while to wait in the library, concluded that he would do no harm by opening one of the books which were before him; so he put out his hand and took the volume that was nearest him. It was La Rochefoucauld's *Maximes*; he resumed his seat, and began to read it with avidity.

He had been in the library quite a long while, but he was still reading, and the time passed very quickly. Suddenly he felt a hand on his shoulder, and, turning his head, saw Monsieur Vermoncey, who said to him with a smile:

"Ah! I have caught you."

The young man blushed, and hastily rose to his feet.

"Pray forgive me, monsieur," he faltered, "for presuming to take down one of those books; but I had to wait—and I thought that—that——"

"There is no occasion to apologize, my friend; you have done no wrong. On the contrary, it is greatly to your credit that you are fond of reading. What book have you there?"

"La Rochefoucauld's *Maximes*."

"That is rather a serious work; what do you think of it?"

"What he says is very sad, and does not give one a very high opinion of men. But I'm afraid it is true."

Monsieur Vermoncey looked at Paul in amazement.

"Really, my friend," he said, "you are no common messenger; I have noticed already that you express yourself in much better language than most of those in your station, and now your opinion of this book proves that I was not mistaken; you have had a good education, have you not?"

"Yes, monsieur; an excellent man, who had no children, became interested in me and took me into his family when I was hardly ten years old. He was kind enough to send me to school; and I was so happy not to remain ignorant, that I made the most of the instruction that was given me."

"How does it happen that your patron, having given you an education, allowed you to become a messenger? He should have completed his work and found you a place."

"Ah! monsieur, it was not that excellent man's fault. He took me into his own office as clerk; but at his death I lost everything, place and patron. It was then that I became a messenger; it was necessary for me to earn money."

"To assist your parents, I suppose?"

Paul lowered his eyes, and murmured very low:

"Yes, monsieur; it was for them."

"I understand you now!" cried Monsieur Vermoncey; "you are a good son; you sacrificed your hopes, your future, to what you considered the duty of making yourself useful at once to those who gave you life. Poor fellow! your conduct is very noble. But you must leave a trade which is not for such as you. Yes; I will undertake to find you an honorable and lucrative position."

"Oh! monsieur—such kindness!"

"Why, it is not more than justice. Anyone can see that you ought not to be a messenger. Do you know how to write?"

"Yes, monsieur; my handwriting is not very bad; I know how to figure also."

"Very good. I will find a place for you, never fear. I can't promise that it will be very soon, for here in Paris there are so many applicants for even the smallest places, that there are very few vacancies; but I promise you that—yes, within three months you will have changed your position in life."

"Mon Dieu! what have I done to deserve that you should take so much interest in me?"

"In the first place, all that you did the first time I ever saw you, to help me to find my son; and, secondly, you attracted me at once; I felt that you were a worthy young man. Rely on me hereafter; I propose to replace the protector you have lost."

"Ah! monsieur."

Obeying an irresistible impulse, Paul seized Monsieur Vermoncey's hand and put it to his lips, then let it fall, and drew back, as if he feared that he had offended him; but Albert's father, deeply touched, took the young man's hand and pressed it warmly.

"Come, come, be of good heart, my friend; you will make your way. But, pending your change of occupation, will you do another errand for me—take this letter and this casket to one of my friends?"

"Oh! yes, monsieur; whatever you choose; I am at your service, and shall always be; even if my position should change, my devotion to you would remain the same. You will see that my heart is not ungrateful."

Paul took the letter and casket, and hastened away to deliver them at their destination. He acquitted himself of his commission with his accustomed zeal, and his new patron said, as he dismissed him:

"I shall not forget you, my friend; I shall begin at once to look after a place for you, for I shall not be content until I see you engaged in some employment worthy of your education and manners."

Paul thanked Monsieur Vermoncey again, and took leave of him, mentally returning thanks to heaven for giving him a new protector. He began now to believe that Elina's delightful plans might be carried out, and that the dreams of happiness of which she so often told him might some day come to pass.

XXIV

WINE.—CARDS.—BLOWS

It was eleven o'clock in the forenoon; Sans-Cravate, who had done a good day's work the day before, carrying billets-doux for several young men of fashion, who are always generous when they are in good humor, had gone off to walk as usual with Jean Ficelle, who led him toward Pont d'Austerlitz, to the place where games of chance were usually in operation.

As they walked along, the two friends, who had already refreshed themselves several times, talked with much animation; and the amusing part of it was that while one of them talked on one subject, the other talked on another, and neither of them listened or answered; which did not prevent them from going on.

"Yes!" said Sans-Cravate; "I don't think any more of her than if I'd never known her. Damme! if anybody should ask me now what color Bastringuette's eyes are, I should be hard put to it to answer. I don't remember."

"And you see," said Jean Ficelle, "there is people who say that you never win at cards. But that's all nonsense! and the proof is that I might have made my fortune if I hadn't been a coward."

"But to say that she wasn't pretty, that there wasn't something alluring about her—I should lie, if I denied it. But all women have that. Parbleu! you only have to be in love to find it out."

"Look you, I'll give you a comparison: You haven't got any money, and you stake what you have—then you win! But if you have anything, you're afraid of losing it; so you won't risk it, and you miss the chance of making a fortune."

"And that fellow who's always looking at me, and acts as if he wanted to speak to me. Oh! just let him come—I'll give him a warm reception! It ain't that I've seen him with Bastringuette. No, I'll have to admit that; since that day on Rue Barbette, when we met Paul dressed like a swell, and Bastringuette a little farther on—I've never seen him with her, and they do well to keep out of sight! For if they should act as if they meant to laugh at me—why, by heaven! it would go hard with 'em!"

"And then, you see, there's some who are mighty smart—they always win. I know one fellow—and he's a great swell—who makes six francs a day with *biribi;* that's a trade that would suit me down to the ground!"

Suddenly Jean Ficelle put his hand on his comrade's arm and stopped him, saying:

"Look, they're already at it, the rascals! They go to work early, they're no sluggards!"

The messengers had reached the river bank, near a game of *table-basse*, run by a tall fellow whose tongue was never at rest; he bewildered his audience by his incessant chatter.

A number of men of somewhat forbidding aspect were gathered about the game. But as two countrymen approached, the spectators made room for them; and the sharper offered them a dicebox with some little balls, crying:

"Come, messieurs, try your luck! every throw wins something, and it's only twenty sous a throw; and for twenty sous, if you choose, you can win a magnificent silver repeating watch, or a cover of the same metal, which you can have the pleasure of presenting to your good wife; or a thimble,—also of the same metal,—with which you can do homage to your venerable mother, if you are fortunate enough to possess her still."

The peasants could not resist the temptation; one of them took the dicebox and threw the balls, and Jean-Pierre counted. (*Jean-Pierre* is the sobriquet by which these charlatans call one another.) He counted with amazing facility and dexterity; his addition always seemed perfectly fair, but no one ever won prizes worth more than two or three sous.

"Come, messieurs, keep on, try your luck again," cried Jean-Pierre; "that throw turned out well for Jean-Pierre, but the luck will change; you'll win the big prizes, messieurs! and Jean-Pierre will be in the hole. But he will always be only too happy to fulfil his engagements with the honorable company."

The peasant, who had won only a box of matches for his twenty sous, threw again, in the hope of having better luck, and the product of the sale of his cabbages, beans, and strawberries soon passed into Jean-Pierre's pockets.

While the bumpkin stood rooted to the spot, dazed by the loss of his money, a mechanic approached the table, and, after looking on for some time, observed:

"I like *biribi* better."

"Here you are, monsieur! here's the *biribi* you're looking for!" cried the sharper, producing three cards from an apron which he wore, and in which was an enormous pocket whose gaping mouth seemed ready to engulf all the silver and loose change of the assembled company.

While the sharper arranged his *biribi* table, and made his three cards fly about with remarkable dexterity, another mechanic, who had followed his comrade, said to him:

"Come away, Benoît; don't bet! Those games are a fraud, you know that everyone always loses."

"What's that, monsieur, you say that everyone always loses with me?" cried the croupier, having first cleared his throat in order to speak more volubly. "Why, in that case, you can't have been present at all the throws I lost just now. Ask the honorable company here present if I haven't paid out more than a hundred francs within half an hour—yes, monsieur, a hundred francs! And I don't put it too high, and I don't count a silver watch that that gentleman over yonder won from me—the one with the handsome whiskers; and ear-rings—of pure gold, hall-marked, that I redeemed for twelve francs from that short young man who looks so happy, and who means to give the money to his virtuous mother, who has longed for a cup of chocolate for sixty years!—Isn't this so, my little man?—You see, he shows you his twelve francs and presses them to his heart. Oh, no! no one ever wins with me, messieurs! But, I tell you, this game is absolutely free from trickery; it is simply for you to guess where the card called *biribi* is. It isn't my fault when you guess wrong. The sums I have already lost are enormous! But if I should tell you that I always lose, I should lie; no, messieurs, I don't always lose; but you have an even chance, if you have a sharp eye, if you pick it out of three cards—that's very few—three—only three cards; if you pick out *biribi*, why, Jean-Pierre is certainly in the hole. Come, messieurs, make your bets! I pay cash, my pockets are well lined! there's plenty of the *quibus*! it rests with you whether it passes from my pockets into yours."

The gambler concluded his discourse by slapping the pocket which contained his money; and the workingman,

bewildered by that torrent of words poured forth without pausing to take breath, made up his mind to try his luck; he followed with his eyes the three cards which Jean-Pierre moved about on the table, from right to left and left to right, with a rapidity which made the eyes ache; then, believing that he was sure of his card, he placed upon it all the money he had received for his week's wages, which was all that his family had to live upon.

"Will you take all that at once?" he cried excitedly.

"Why not, monsieur? Jean-Pierre never weakens; he takes whatever you choose—your clothes or your handkerchiefs, if you haven't any money! Jean-Pierre will do anything to please you."

"Let her go, then; that one's *biribi*! Turn it over."

The gambler turned the card—the workman had lost; he was crestfallen and speechless with dismay, and the peasant, who also had been stripped, laughed stupidly and said:

"He ain't any smarter than I am, he ain't."

Meanwhile, spurred on by Jean Ficelle, who claimed to be certain that he could tell him how to win, Sans-Cravate was about to give way to the temptation to try his hand at *biribi*, when a confederate ran up; he had sighted a police officer on the horizon. In an instant, the games were folded up and carried off by the Jean-Pierres, who ran as fast as their legs would carry them; while their dupes remained behind, feeling in their empty pockets, and trying to decide —one of them, whether he should return to his village without the proceeds of the sale of his produce; the other, whether he dared face his children, who would ask him for money with which to buy bread.

Sans-Cravate and Jean Ficelle walked away.

"We arrived too late," said the latter; "it's too bad! I have an idea that we would have broken the bank, and then what a spree we'd have had! we wouldn't have worked for a week!"

"For my part, I am glad I didn't play," said Sans-Cravate; "the money goes too fast that way; and then, too, gambling's a miserable business!"

"Oh! *ouiche!* as if a man mustn't have some fun out of life! weren't we born to enjoy ourselves? Only sneaks, like Paul, talk that way. For my part, I claim that gambling's the spice of life; look you, I'll give you a comparison——"

"Pshaw! there's a wine shop yonder; I like that better than your *biribi*."

As the two friends were about to enter the wine shop, a man behind them hailed them:

"So you're too proud to speak to a friend, eh?"

They both turned, and Jean Ficelle uttered a joyful exclamation.

"Why, it's Laboussole!" he said; "old Laboussole! Well, this is a surprise!"

It was, in fact, Monsieur Laboussole who stood before them; but his aspect was a little less shabby than formerly: he wore a frock-coat of chestnut-colored beaver, abnormally full, and so long that he almost walked on it; it was plain that the garment was not made for him, but that did not prevent him from carrying it with a swagger, and looking down at himself often with a complacent expression, as if admiring his coat. His hat was the same one; but instead of the strip of bed ticking for a cravat, Monsieur Laboussole wore a black stock, which was not absolutely new, but nevertheless imparted to its wearer a sort of bellicose aspect. Add a pair of moustaches which were as yet in their infancy, and which persisted in growing black on one side and gray on the other, and you can form an idea of Laboussole as he accosted the two messengers.

"Well, well! is it really you, old fellow?" continued Jean Ficelle, wringing Laboussole's hand. "It's a long time since I saw you—almost three months and a half."

"Yes," said Sans-Cravate, who seemed less delighted than his comrade by the meeting; "not since the day we drank together on Rue Saint-Lazare, and monsieur was arrested."

"Oh, yes! to be sure—I remember," said Laboussole, good-humoredly. "You were present at the time of my arrest, weren't you? A blunder, my boys, an unlucky blunder, and nothing else! They mistook me for another man; and after keeping me in prison two months, they let me go in a hurry. They went so far as to make apologies—which I accepted —but it was almighty unpleasant, all the same. I was tempted to go to law, to make a claim for damages and interest; but everybody said to me: 'We've never had a doubt of your innocence; society has always done you justice, and that ought to satisfy you.'"

"*Pardi!* I never believed you were guilty, and I've said so more than once to Sans-Cravate.—Ain't that so, Sans-Cravate? haven't I told you they did wrong to arrest Laboussole, because he was as white as my shirt?"

Sans-Cravate nodded his head; whereupon Laboussole seized his hand and shook it, saying:

"Your good opinion is very pleasant to me, my boys. Yes, I am quite as white as Jean Ficelle's shirt—perhaps a little whiter, even;—but I believe you were going into the wine shop; don't let me keep you."

"On the contrary, you're coming in to have a drink with us. Who ever heard of friends meeting without wetting their whistles?"

"With pleasure, my friends; let's go in; I was just thinking that I felt the need of moistening my lips."

The three men entered the wine shop. Jean Ficelle asked for a small private room, and they were shown into one where there were two tables, both unoccupied. Wine was brought, and the glasses were filled and emptied several times. Monsieur Laboussole seemed overjoyed to have met the two messengers; Jean Ficelle manifested equal satisfaction; and Sans-Cravate himself, after drinking three or four glasses of wine, became very good-humored.

"I say, old fellow," said Jean Ficelle, scrutinizing Laboussole, "seems to me, business must have been pretty good with you since we met. On my word, you're rigged out like a landholder of Ile Saint-Louis! *Bigre!* what style!"

"Yes," replied Laboussole, drawing himself up in his beaver coat. "I'm in a very pretty line of business now. I have a position in an enterprise that is just being started; I have an idea that I'm going to make my fortune."

"The devil! there's nothing cheap about you!"

"What sort of a business is it?" asked Sans-Cravate.

"It's something new and ingenious, my friends; imagine, if you please, that a party of capitalists have conceived the idea of forming a company to insure against fleas and all insects that devour mankind; for, as you probably know, mankind is being decimated by insects, and, if we don't look out, the world will come to an end that way. Now, then, the company has a capital stock of a million. With a million francs, you see, it would beat the devil if they couldn't wipe out all the fleas in Europe. It's a magnificent chance; the shares are going up, up at a frightful rate!"

"Oh! I say! that's a funny kind of insurance!"

"Messieurs, everything is insured nowadays: life, fortune, women—yes, messieurs, a company's being formed to guarantee the fidelity of your wives and mistresses! There won't be any more cuckolds, messieurs. Think what a vast enterprise! and what an age—that will have seen it! But they haven't succeeded yet in raising money enough to start the thing; they need a lot of money, so it seems. Speaking of mistresses, what's become of your sweetheart Bastringuette? I don't see her with you, my dear Sans-Cravate; has she got the smallpox?"

"Oh! I haven't seen anything of her for a long time," replied Sans-Cravate, with a frown; "nor thought of her, either."

"Oho! did she do—what I mentioned just now?"

"Apparently."

"Come, come! let's not talk about Bastringuette," cried Jean Ficelle. "You see, Laboussole, that it puts my comrade out of sorts."

"Oh! excuse me, my boys, excuse me! I was thoughtless; it was my friendship for you that misled me. Let's have a drink!"

"What's your position in the flea business, eh?"

"A very fine one—I am an inspector. We send clerks ahead to attend to destroying the insects; then I arrive at the house of the insured, I inspect the premises, I search everywhere; and after my visit, I defy you to find anything there at all."

"Are you required to have a moustache in your position, that you let yours grow?"

"It isn't absolutely required, but in all the best places moustaches are worn, and I felt that I owed that to myself. Your health, my bucks! To my pleasure at being in the bosom of my friends once more!"

Monsieur Laboussole's tone was becoming affectingly sentimental. They drank, and touched glasses; the bottles rapidly succeeded one another; their brains began to get heated, especially Sans-Cravate's, which took fire very easily. Ere long, Jean Ficelle called for a pack of cards.

"I'll play you a game of piquet, Laboussole," he cried; "piquet, the honest man's game—just for fun, to pass the time, and to see if you know how to play it."

"I play like an oyster," rejoined Laboussole; "but still I'll play whatever you say. Because I always assert that luck may come my way. Let's have a drink!"

The waiter brought the cards. Jean Ficelle took them and sat down opposite Laboussole.

"Sans-Cravate don't play," he said; "he don't like cards."

"Why shouldn't I play, eh?" cried Sans-Cravate, with a violent blow on the table. "Piquet! why, that's my favorite game; I'm very strong at it."

"Well, you shall play after a while," replied Jean Ficelle, winking at his vis-à-vis. "Let me give the inspector of fleas a beating first."

The game began; the players announced that they were playing for two francs the game, but no money was put up. Laboussole lost three games in succession; whereupon Jean Ficelle rose, with a laugh, and said:

"You certainly ain't on your game, old man. I've got six francs to eat up; that's not bad, and I don't want you to ruin yourself treating us."

Sans-Cravate took Jean Ficelle's place, after asking Laboussole:

"Have you had enough?"

"I! nonsense! do I ever cry *baby*? I'm always on deck when a friend proposes a game. Besides, as I said just now, luck may come my way; she's a female, so she ought to change often. What are we playing for?"

"Whatever you say."

"A thirty-sou piece——"

"The devil! that's rather high!"

"We must make the game interesting."

"All right; thirty sous it is."

The game began; Jean Ficelle took his stand behind Sans-Cravate. Monsieur Laboussole frequently looked up into the air, as if to invoke Fortune and implore her to smile upon him; but his eyes always met Jean Ficelle's, who signalled to him with his fingers.

Sans-Cravate lost the first game; and Monsieur Laboussole cried, with his most affable air:

"You see, my boys, luck may turn any time; that's what I rely on."

"My revenge!" cried Sans-Cravate.

"Always, my boy! always at your service; a well-bred card player never refuses a revenge, under penalty of being called a *carotteur*; and I've never been called that. But let's have some wine first and drink a bumper! Cards make me horribly thirsty."

Jean Ficelle undertook to fill the glasses. Sans-Cravate lost the second game, and demanded another, which he also lost; but Laboussole did not cease to exclaim:

"You play much better than I do; I can't imagine how I succeed in beating you!"

Sans-Cravate continued to demand his revenge, which Laboussole was always eager to accord; while Jean Ficelle took care that the glasses should be filled as soon as they were empty. The wine and the game soon bewildered Sans-Cravate to the point that he hardly knew what he was doing; his adversary, on the other hand, retained his sang-froid, and combined with it all his social talents. It was not long before Sans-Cravate found that he had lost all the money he had with him; he had not enough left to pay for the wine they had drunk, a part of which was chargeable to him.

"I'll pay for you, and you may owe it to me," said Jean Ficelle. "I am not capable of leaving a friend in a hole."

Sans-Cravate was astounded to find himself without a sou, for he had thirty francs in the morning. He felt in all his pockets, and cried:

"How's this? I have lost all my money! I want to keep on playing and make myself good! I'll play on credit."

But Laboussole moved his chair away from the table and rose, saying:

"I'd like nothing better than to give you your revenge, my boy, but this is the time of day when I have to attend to my duties. I have three houses to inspect to-day; and if a sign of an insect should be found in one of them to-morrow, I should lose my job. A job worth three thousand francs a year, with lodging, candles, and perquisites, don't grow on every bush. So I am obliged to leave you, my bucks; but we will meet again soon; I'll look you up at your place of business on the street corner, and I'll give our worthy friend Sans-Cravate all the revenge he wants. Au revoir, my friends!"

Monsieur Laboussole shook hands with each of the messengers. When he took Jean Ficelle's hand, he left in it half of the money he had won from his comrade,—probably in accordance with a previous understanding,—then left the room, saying:

"The next time I see you, friends, I'll give you a prospectus of our enterprise, so that you can see if you wouldn't like to take some shares. You can buy three shares for seven francs ten sous. Dividends of twenty per cent are guaranteed, and you get in addition portraits of the inspectors, which you can have framed, if you choose."

When Laboussole had gone, Jean Ficelle paid the bill and took Sans-Cravate away. He made no resistance; he was dazed by the wine he had drunk, and in a savage humor because he had lost his money, and, more than all, because he had gambled; for he knew in his heart that he was not acting the part of an honest man, and that Jean Ficelle's company was a constant incitement to evil. When a man's conscience speaks to him in that way, when he listens to its reproaches, and, while trying to drown its voice, is none the less dissatisfied with himself, there is still room for hope that he will return to the path of respectability.

The messengers had been walking together for some time, at a somewhat uncertain pace. Jean Ficelle, who loved to talk grandiloquently, and who credited himself with the art of hoodwinking his hearers, was presenting his comrade with a comparison to prove that the gambler who has lost all his money is much nearer to winning than he whose pockets are full. Sans-Cravate listened, without paying the slightest attention; his face was flushed, his expression alert and quarrelsome; he did not step aside for anyone, and he had more than once roughly jostled persons who passed him, and had nearly thrown them down.

"Look out what you're doing," said Jean Ficelle; "you're running into everybody! You'll get yourself into trouble!"

"Why don't they get out of the way? So much the worse for them! and if anyone isn't satisfied, just let him say so."

Suddenly, as they were walking along the canal, Sans-Cravate spied a man talking earnestly with a woman on a street corner. To utter an exclamation, come to a halt, and grasp his companion's arm so hard that he made him cry out, was a matter of an instant with Sans-Cravate.

"What in God's name's the matter?" demanded Jean Ficelle, almost terrified.

"It's him—and her! Yes, there they are together. Look—over there, at the corner of that street!"

Jean Ficelle looked; he recognized Paul talking to Bastringuette, with great earnestness and with an air of mystery.

"*Pardi!*" he exclaimed; "the turtle-doves have evidently met here by appointment—a long way from our neighborhood, so as not to be seen. How this fits in—when you was just saying that you'd never seen Paul with your fly-away! You see 'em now."

"Yes—and I still doubted! Ah! the villain! but he's got to pay me for his treachery!"

"What are you going to do? Come, Sans-Cravate, no knock-down fight. Just give him a clip—he well deserves it—and then, off we go! for, although there ain't many people passing, we must look out for loafers."

Sans-Cravate paid no heed to what his comrade said, but strode rapidly toward Paul; Bastringuette had left him, and he was walking away by the canal, when Sans-Cravate planted himself in front of him.

"You don't go any farther," he cried.

"Is it you, Sans-Cravate?" said Paul, looking up at him. "Great heaven! what's the matter? You look like a madman!"

"The matter is that you're a coward, a sneak!"

"Sans-Cravate!"

"Who was that with you a minute ago?"

"Bastringuette."

"And she ran off when she saw me, because she was afraid I'd give her a beating; but I don't beat women, I don't; I take my revenge on men—and you've got to fight with me!"

"Sans-Cravate, you are entirely mistaken—I give you my word of honor. I am not Bastringuette's lover; I have never mentioned the word *love* to her; besides, you know perfectly well that I am in love with another woman."

"That proves that you love two at once, that's all! Oh! you can't fool me any more with your wheedling ways. You're a blackguard, a traitor—I know you now. Come, coats off!"

"Sans-Cravate, you are not in your right mind at this moment. When you are not so excited, you will listen to me."

"No, no, not a word! I've swallowed your insults and been called a coward long enough. It's time to put an end to it."

"But you are mistaken; listen to me."

"I tell you, I won't; we must fight."

"I have told you before that I will not fight with you."

"Then I'll find a way to force you to."

"Yes, yes," said Jean Ficelle, from behind Sans-Cravate; "when a man entices a friend's mistress away from him, he can't refuse to give him satisfaction."

Paul cast a contemptuous glance at Jean Ficelle, and was about to answer him, when Sans-Cravate rushed at him like a madman and shook his fist in his face, crying:

"Will you fight?"

"No, for you are drunk! I am bound to overlook your foolish behavior."

"Oh! that's it, is it?"

And Sans-Cravate, utterly beside himself with jealousy, jumped at Paul, and, seizing him around the waist, threw him against the wall of the canal. The young man tried to save himself; but he stumbled and staggered, and, as he fell, his head struck a large paving stone which, unluckily, had been left lying there; its sharp edge made a deep wound, and the blood soon formed a pool about the wounded man.

Paul did not utter a sound; but Sans-Cravate, when he saw the blood flowing from the wound, stood as if turned to stone, horror-stricken, and his face became ghastly pale. Jean-Ficelle seized his arm.

"Let's be off!" he said; "let's be off! you've given him his dose, and that's all that was needed; now let's cut sticks."

"But he is wounded, he's bleeding," muttered Sans-Cravate.

"Bah! just a scratch—a trifle; that's none of our business."

"No, I won't leave him so; the least I can do is to carry him to that shop yonder, to have his wound dressed."

Sans-Cravate stooped over Paul, who, in addition to the wound on his head, had a badly bruised arm. To take off his jacket and turn back his shirt sleeve, to see whether the arm was seriously injured, was the work of an instant; as he bared Paul's forearm, he saw a small, perfectly distinct, blue cross. He was about to carry the wounded man to a shop near by, when Bastringuette came running up; seeing Paul wounded and bathed in blood, she cried:

"What an outrage! they have murdered him! poor boy! poor Paul!"

And the tall girl, kneeling on the ground, raised the messenger's head and examined it. At that moment, several persons, attracted by her outcry, drew near the wounded man. Once more Jean Ficelle pulled Sans-Cravate by the arm, saying:

"Well! they don't need you here, you see; he'll be well taken care of."

"That's true; you are right—as she is with him, there's nothing for me to do here. Let's go!"

As he spoke, Sans-Cravate hurried away with his comrade, not once turning his head to look back, as if he were afraid to meet Bastringuette's eye.

XXV

AN EVENING PARTY.—A SOUVENIR

There was a brilliant reception at the house of a wealthy foreigner, who had taken up his abode in Paris because he had concluded that the people of that city have learned most thoroughly the secret of enjoying themselves, of varying their amusements, and of doing themselves credit with their wealth. He was absolutely right; and as the Parisians are very fond of people who give them dinners, concerts, balls, routs—in a word, festivities of every sort, the residence of the wealthy foreigner became the usual rendezvous of a large number of people, and his receptions were always crowded.

It may be that those persons who insist upon knowing in whose company they are, who are afraid to sit at a card table with a gentleman or lady whose social position is not definitely fixed, might have found much to criticise in the society which was wont to assemble in the salons of Monsieur Grazcernitz (such was the wealthy foreigner's name); but as the number of those who like to be entertained is very considerable, he was always certain of having an abundance of guests.

To obtain an invitation from Monsieur Grazcernitz, it was sufficient to have cut a figure in society, to have made a name for one's self in letters, art, or commerce, to be able to sing an aria or a ballad with taste and expression, to tell an anecdote interestingly, or even to make a pun. To the ladies, the wealthy foreigner was even more indulgent; a pretty woman, a woman of fashion, a blue-stocking, an unknown or unappreciated artist, were always welcome in his salon. One often met there people whom one never met on the fashionable promenades or at the theatre; just as we may meet at a railroad station a friend whom we have not seen for several years, a mistress who, we supposed, had gone to Russia, an old artist whom we believed to be dead—in a word, someone whom we should vainly seek in the streets of Paris.

Now, Monsieur Grazcernitz's salons were frequently honored by the presence of Monsieur and Madame Plays. Monsieur went thither as his wife's escort, and madame to display her charms and her dresses, and to make conquests. It was at that house that she had made Albert Vermoncey's acquaintance.

Madame Baldimer also was an habitué of the wealthy foreigner's salons. It was at his receptions that she had been named the fair American.

Balivan, the absent-minded painter, was also to be met with there, and the jovial Mouillot, Dupétrain the magnetizer, the young man with the white eyebrows, and Monsieur Célestin de Valnoir, who possessed the art of insinuating himself everywhere.

Tobie Pigeonnier had obtained an introduction to Monsieur Grazcernitz a short time before the loss of his olive; he had been overjoyed to find himself at a function where punch, ices, cake, and delicacies of all sorts, were served in great profusion to the guests. Since the adventure of the fetich, he had not dared to show his face in Monsieur Grazcernitz's salon, and that was not one of the least of his annoyances.

Madame Baldimer had just been announced. She entered the salon under the escort of Monsieur Dupétrain, who, by dint of telling her that he possessed the power of magnetizing and putting to sleep anybody that she chose, had succeeded in inducing her to receive him.

The fair American was magnificently dressed, and resplendent with diamonds and jewelry; the beauty of her face and the splendor of her costume attracted every eye, and a circle soon formed about her.

"That Dupétrain's a lucky dog!" said a very ugly little man; "he is Madame Baldimer's escort, she accepts his arm. How can anyone understand such a whim? to select for her cavalier an ugly creature—with nothing to recommend him—while so many good-looking young men, men of real merit, are paying court to her!"

"What does that prove?" rejoined a gentleman, laughing in the last speaker's face. "You don't suppose Dupétrain is that woman's lover, do you? on the contrary, she accepts his arm because he's of no consequence at all. Besides, she

has been courted by many other men, who have been no more fortunate for having acted as her cavalier. That lovely creature impresses me as being inclined to amuse herself at the expense of every man who is attentive to her."

"Do you think so? Haven't some of them fought duels for her?"

"Yes; I believe there has been a duel; but I don't know who the parties were."

The arrival of two new guests changed the subject of conversation. Monsieur and Madame Plays entered the salon. The host went forward to meet the superb and massive Herminie, saying:

"Mon Dieu! madame, what a pleasure it is to see you! we have been deprived of that pleasure so long! What has become of you? For more than two months you haven't been seen in society! I have asked about you several times, and been told: 'Madame Plays has gone into retirement in one of her country houses; she receives no one and sees no one; in fact, she has turned hermit.'"

Madame Plays affected a languorous air, as she replied:

"It is true—I haven't been into society for a long while! Ah! I would like never to return to it."

"What! shun society at your age, madame, when you have been its brightest ornament! Why, that is not lawful; it's a crime, it's downright robbery!—Would you allow it, Monsieur Plays?"

Monsieur Plays tried to imitate his wife's manner, as he said:

"My wife took me with her to one of our estates; it was very dull; there were only we two, and we had no visitors; for we didn't tell anybody where we were going, we went off all of a sudden, as if we were ashamed of it. But still, when something has happened to afflict one—you understand—and my wife certainly had good cause for tears in ——"

Madame Plays pinched her husband's arm, and whispered:

"Hush! that's enough; hush! Who asked you to say that?"

Monsieur Plays held his peace, and pretended to have a paroxysm of coughing as an excuse for not finishing his sentence. Monsieur Grazcernitz took the fair Herminie's hand and led her to a seat on a divan, with divers other ladies, with whom she soon entered into conversation.

But after a few seconds, the lady at the robust creature's right rose and walked into another salon; in a short time, the lady at her left likewise rose and vanished, and the fair Herminie was left alone on the divan. Thereupon several young men approached her and favored her with an assortment of the insipid, commonplace flatteries of which such a prodigious supply is ordinarily consumed in fashionable salons.

A young man who had talked with Madame Plays a few minutes left her abruptly, and observed to one of his friends:

"That's a most extraordinary thing; I can't understand it."

"What do you mean?"

"You see that lady over there, with whom I was talking just now?"

"Madame Plays?"

"Yes. Well, my dear fellow, I can't imagine what kind of perfume she has about her, but it's absolutely insufferable."

"The deuce you say!"

"It's like the smell of stale tobacco; it's perfectly sickening."

"Impossible."

"Look! there's Alfred leaving her now; let's see what he says.—Alfred!"

"What is it?"

"You were just talking with Madame Plays; did you smell anything?"

"Oh! parbleu! that was what made me leave her. I like to smoke a cigar, but a lady who smells like a guardhouse isn't at all agreeable. She must chew! that's the only explanation."

"She probably adopted the habit in her retirement."

"We must go and ask her husband."

"Oh, no! I should never dare."

"It's evident that you don't know Monsieur Plays! I'll bet you that I dare. Follow me, without making it apparent, and you'll see."

The young man who had spoken last walked up to Monsieur Plays, whom he discovered in an adjoining room, standing near a whist table and watching the game with close attention.

"Well, Monsieur Plays," said the young man, bowing to him, "you seem to be much engrossed by the game?"

"Yes; I am watching it rather closely."

"Are you studying the fine points of whist?"

"I study everything."

"You must be a fine whist player."

"On the contrary, I don't understand the game yet; for ten years, I've been watching it; but I hope that, by dint of watching, I shall learn it finally. My wife absolutely insists on my learning it; that is why I never lose a chance to look on."

"Speaking of madame, Monsieur Plays, she seems to have become a *lionne*[O] in her retirement."

"A *lionne*! my wife! Why, no; far from it, I assure you! on the contrary, her disposition has become more tractable; she is very mild and gentle now."

"You don't understand me, Monsieur Plays; by *lionne*, we men of fashion mean an eccentric woman, one who is very far advanced in the modern ideas of progress."

"What! you think my wife is advanced?"

"And, I may say, a woman who smokes. Isn't it a fact that Madame Plays indulges in that pleasure now?"

"My wife smoke! never! Oh! you are entirely mistaken. I can guess why you ask me that; you noticed that she

smelt of tobacco, didn't you?"

"Faith! yes, Monsieur Plays, I did notice it; and, if I must tell you, I am not the only person in this company who has noticed it."

"I believe you; oh! I can readily believe you, as I have noticed it myself, and this evening isn't the first time that my wife has exhaled an odor of smoking tobacco. Ever since she took me off to our country place, where we lived like bears, I have noticed that same odor; and I have said to myself more than once: 'My wife smells of tobacco, and it seems to me that the smell is getting stronger and stronger.'"

"And you haven't asked madame what caused it?"

"I beg your pardon; one day I ventured to say to her: 'Herminie, are you in the habit of smoking in private? if you are, don't mind me, I beg you; smoke as much as you please!'"

"Well?"

"Well, my wife considered my question very impertinent, and she punished me—that is to say, she ordered me not to—— But, excuse me, this seems to be a very interesting hand; a gentleman has just made the *odd*; I must try to understand."

Monsieur Plays turned his attention to the whist table once more, and the young man walked away with his friends, having obtained no new light.

While this conversation was taking place, Madame Baldimer, noticing Madame Plays alone on a divan, went and seated herself by her side. The two ladies were slightly acquainted, having met rather often at Count Dahlborne's receptions, and Herminie had no suspicion that it was the fair American for whom the fickle Albert had purchased a shawl like hers.

"What has become of you lately, madame? it seems an age since we saw you at any sort of festivity; and everybody has been lamenting it."

The tone in which Madame Baldimer spoke might, to some people, have seemed slightly satirical; but Madame Plays saw only amiability therein, and she replied, with a long-drawn sigh:

"I thank you, madame; it is too kind of you to believe that people think of me; but I have been in close retirement, as was very natural after the painful event of which I was the cause, and for which I reproach myself so bitterly! Ah! I dared not show my face!"

Madame Baldimer, after putting her smelling-bottle to her nose, with a muttered: "This is very strange; it smells like a tobacco factory here!" leaned toward Madame Plays, and said:

"You say that you were the cause of a painful occurrence?"

"To be sure; can it be that you have not heard of it?"

"I have not the faintest idea what you mean."

"I supposed that it must have made a great sensation in society, and that is why I ran away and dared not come back! And you have not heard of the duel?"

"A duel!"

"Certainly; a duel about me—that is to say—I had no idea it would go so far. Mon Dieu! there are some women who like nothing better than to have men fight for them; but my remorse is terrible!"

Madame Baldimer bestowed a piercing glance on Herminie, as if she wished to fathom her thoughts.

"Who was the man who fought for you, madame?" she asked.

"Monsieur Albert Vermoncey and Monsieur Tobie Pigeonnier, two hot-headed youths who adored me. Oh! what a misfortune it is to arouse such passions! That young Albert had deceived me, it is true; but that was no reason—— Oh! how wrong it was of me to say that I wished to be avenged!"

"Monsieur Albert fought a duel for you, you say? When?"

"The day before I left Paris for the country—about two months and a half ago."

"Well! what was the result of this duel?"

"Horrible, madame, shocking! Poor Albert was killed by that little Tobie—killed with a sword-thrust! That is the calamity of which I am the cause, and for which I shall never forgive myself!"

Madame Plays covered her eyes with her handkerchief; but, instead of the emotional outburst which she anticipated from Madame Baldimer, she was surprised to hear that lady say, with a sarcastic smile:

"Abate your remorse, madame; do not be so heart-broken, I entreat you; for the men who get themselves killed for your sake are still in remarkably good health."

"What! what do you mean by that, madame?" cried the fair Herminie, restoring her handkerchief to her pocket.

"I mean that young Albert Vermoncey is not dead."

"Not dead! Albert not dead! Oh! that is impossible, madame; it was his adversary in person who came and told me the result of their ill-omened meeting! He did not leave Albert until he was certain that he had ceased to breathe; and, as a token of his victory, he took a cigar from his victim and brought it to me, and I have worn it here, on my heart, ever since. It has never left me for an instant!"

Madame Baldimer began to laugh more loudly than ever, until she could hardly speak.

"Ah! so you carry a cigar in your bosom," she faltered, at last. "I am not surprised at this odor of tobacco, which I could not understand. Ha! ha! ha! this is most amusing! it was a delicious joke!"

Madame Plays began to take offence at the fair American's hilarity over her adventure.

"Really, madame," she muttered angrily, "I did not suppose that you were so hard-hearted! to laugh because a young man lost his life for me—or, at least, at the hands of one of my chevaliers! I cannot see what there is to laugh at in that."

"Mon Dieu! madame, how many times must I tell you that you are mistaken? that somebody has made a fool of you? Monsieur Albert Vermoncey did fight a duel, it is true, at about the time you mention; but he fought with Count Dahlborne, and I think that I can assure you that you had nothing whatever to do with their quarrel. Monsieur Albert was the victor in that duel; the count was slightly wounded. As for young Vermoncey, he left Paris immediately after the affair; he travelled in Normandie, in Belgium, and in Auvergne; and he returned to Paris yesterday with a girl

whom he has abducted and brought back with him without his father's knowledge. You see that I am well posted, madame."

Madame Plays was stupefied, and could not find a word to say; when she recovered herself, her first act was to take a piece of a cigar from her bosom and throw it, with an angry gesture, under the divan on which she was seated. When she was able to speak, she faltered:

"What, madame! can it be possible? Monsieur Albert is not dead? that monster, that perfidious wretch, still lives? You are sure of it?"

As Madame Baldimer was about to reply, a newly arrived guest entered the salon in which the two ladies were. It was Monsieur Vermoncey, Albert's father, who had never before appeared at Monsieur Grazcernitz's reunions. Having frequently met in society the wealthy stranger, who always urged him to come to his receptions, he had considered that courtesy required that he should attend at least one of them; and although he had long since ceased to find any pleasure at such functions, he had decided to pay his respects to Monsieur Grazcernitz on the evening in question.

At sight of Albert's father, Madame Baldimer's features underwent a transformation: her lips closed tightly, her eyebrows drew together, her forehead became clouded, and her eyes, alight with an unaccustomed gleam, seemed to flash fire.

Monsieur Vermoncey passed through the salon into another room; Madame Baldimer followed him with her eyes, and, when she could no longer see him, unable to control her feelings, she sprang to her feet, without answering the soft-hearted Herminie, who had asked her another question about Albert, and hastened into the room which she had seen Monsieur Vermoncey enter. He had taken a seat beside the master of the house; Madame Baldimer seated herself in front of them, and, while apparently listening to the compliments of Monsieur Dupétrain, who joined her at once, her eyes were constantly fixed on the two gentlemen facing her.

Monsieur Grazcernitz passed in review, for Monsieur Vermoncey's benefit, the company assembled in his salons; and as a householder delights to exhibit to you every corner of his house, even to the darkest corridor and the smallest closet, that he may boast of all its comforts and conveniences, so the wealthy foreigner, who was exceedingly proud of his brilliant and crowded reception, took pleasure in singing the praises of his guests, and did not mention a single name without adding a word or two to give it prestige.

"Look," he said, pointing to a little old man with an intelligent and satirical face, whose costume denoted a country gentleman; "that old gentleman at your right is a rich landholder of Bretagne; he passes ten months of the year on his estates, and when he comes to Paris retains his country costume. He has two hundred thousand francs a year, and he cares little what other people say. They wanted to make him mayor, sub-prefect, prefect even—but he refused everything. He's a philosopher after the pattern of Seneca, who inculcated contempt of wealth by drinking Falernian in a gold cup. That gentleman with the decorations, who is speaking to him at this moment, is the chief of a department, captain in the National Guard, and member of the Council of Discipline; he is said to be a very influential man. He doesn't despise offices, not he; he has three now, and is a candidate for two others. This lady here at our left is a charming person; she sings like an angel, when she is well accompanied, but she declares that no one is ever able to accompany her. The little brunette by her side is not pretty, but she's a blue-stocking! she writes poetry, novels, plays, and works for the newspapers; she's the editor of a sheet which is distributed for nothing, and has an enormous list of subscribers. Oh! that man over yonder is one of the leaders of fashion in Paris. See what a superb figure he has! people fight with one another over having clothes made by his tailor. He once shut himself up for a whole week in his room, trying to determine whether he would wear round or pointed waistcoats. That good-looking youth by the piano is an excellent composer, who will write an opera as soon as he has a suitable libretto. That tall, thin gentleman standing by the fireplace is a talented amateur on the cornet-à-piston; he was to bring his brother, who affects the trombone; they play duets together which are said to be very interesting. And do you see the little, light-haired man in the next room, with a turned-up nose and an impertinent air? He's a ballad singer of the first rank; he imitates Levassor, Achard, and everybody else, with much skill; so that there's a constant rivalry to secure him; he's all the rage at parties. That stout lady with whom he is talking has a magnificent contralto voice; unfortunately, she is never willing to sing."

Monsieur Vermoncey listened with a distraught air to his host's comments; his eyes had met those of the fair American, and, as he looked at her, he was conscious of a sentiment which he could not understand; was it simply admiration of Madame Baldimer's beauty? was it curiosity? did the sight of her awaken bitter memories in his heart? He was unable to answer any of these questions; but as Monsieur Grazcernitz started upon a grandiloquent eulogium of a small boy of nine, who, it was said, already played the violin like Paganini, Monsieur Vermoncey interrupted him.

"I beg your pardon, Monsieur Grazcernitz; but who is the lady sitting opposite us and looking at us at this moment?"

"That lady," replied the host, motioning to the boy to come to him, "why, she's a very fine woman, indeed: tall and beautiful and well built.—He plays on the fourth string variations on the air of *Le Roi d'Yvetot* which are simply fascinating, they say."

"Pardon my inquisitiveness, but there is an expression on that lady's features which seems familiar to me."

"She's a very fashionable woman! All the men are in love with her!—He can do something wonderful, too, on the treble string—also after the style of Paganini."

"But her name, if you please?"

"Little Adolphe Kromiousky; he's a Pole."

"I ask you the name of the lady sitting opposite us."

"Oh! that is Madame Baldimer, commonly known in society as the fair American."

"Madame Baldimer! Can it be that—— Ah! I am not surprised that the sight of her caused me an emotion that I could not understand! So that is Madame Baldimer!"

"Do you know her?"

"Oh! no, not I! But my son was very much in love with her; he fought a duel for her."

"That doesn't surprise me. As I tell you, she turns the heads of all the men."

"And it seems that she takes pleasure in causing her adorers to fight among themselves. Ah! I no longer consider

her beautiful; I can't bear to look at her."

"Was your son wounded?"

"No, thank heaven! but he might have been killed, and that woman's coquetry would have robbed me of my only remaining child."

"Would you like me to present little Adolphe Kromiousky?"

"Anything that will give you pleasure."

And Monsieur Vermoncey rose and walked hastily into another room, in his eagerness to shun the presence of Madame Baldimer. His host followed him, calling after him:

"Why, where are you going? young Kromiousky is in that room. He won't play anything this evening; but he is studying a fine piece of Paganini's, which he will play on a violin that belonged to Paganini."

Monsieur Vermoncey seated himself in a salon where people were singing and playing the piano; he had been there but a short time, when he saw that Madame Baldimer had again taken a seat facing him, and that her eyes were almost always turned in his direction.

"It's very strange," thought Monsieur Vermoncey; "it looks as if that woman were following me! She looks at me in a most extraordinary way. I wonder if she has been told that I am Albert's father; and if she thinks that it was by my advice that he ceased to see her? Yes, that must be the explanation of her keeping her eyes fixed on me. Does she aspire to force me too to do homage to her charms? I propose to show her that she is wasting her time and trouble."

Monsieur Vermoncey left the music room and went into that where the card playing was in progress, which few ladies visited. There was a vacant seat at a bouillotte table, and he took it, saying to himself:

"That woman is not likely to follow me here."

But he had not been playing five minutes, when the fair American appeared, and seated herself in a chair which was close beside his.

Monsieur Vermoncey felt unaccountably disturbed; the woman's conduct seemed to him so strange that he was almost frightened. However, as he was not obliged to look at her, he continued to play without turning in her direction, courtesy not requiring him to speak to a lady whom he had never seen before.

But several young men, among them Dupétrain the magnetizer, soon joined the fair American and began to converse with her.

"How is this, madame? you, in the cardroom?"

"Why not, monsieur? Are ladies forbidden to come here?"

"Of course not; but the idea of watching a game of cards, when music beckons to you, and the dance—for they have just begun to dance."

"Well, messieurs, if I prefer cards to dancing, am I not at liberty to do so?"

"Oh! but that cannot be! A pretty woman prefer cards to dancing!"

"We have heard you say that you detested cards."

"Am I not entitled to change my mind? Ask Monsieur Dupétrain here, who is gifted with second-sight; perhaps he can tell you what attracted me to this salon."

"I, fair lady? Ah! I would compel you to tell us, if you would let me put you to sleep!"

"Not at this moment; the place would be ill chosen, I should say. But you can often render a lady a great service by putting her to sleep, Monsieur Dupétrain. If I had known you earlier, I would have asked you to draw the horoscope of a young girl—in whom I was very deeply interested."

"What happened to her? Was she pretty?"

"Lovely!"

"Oh! then it must be a love story."

"Mon Dieu! yes, messieurs; it is, as you say, a love story—a story of love, and seduction; a very commonplace story to you. But we women are always interested in such stories."

"Pray tell us this girl's story, madame."

"I assure you that it is not likely to interest anybody who did not know the principal actors in it. She was a young seamstress, very poor, but perfectly virtuous, until a young man, who was little richer than she, paid court to her. The girl allowed herself to be seduced; her heart was given, and she fell; for the young man had made the fairest promises, as men have a way of doing when they seek to seduce us. The poor child became a mother; and instead of working four times harder than before, in order to provide her with the means to bring up the child, the seducer sent it to join the unfortunate creatures who are brought up by public charity and who do not know their parents. Oh! that arouses your indignation, does it not, messieurs? When the poor girl asked to see her child, to embrace it, she was put off by falsehoods. But she learned the truth at last; and while she, with a breaking heart, prayed that her son—for it was a son—might be restored to her, her seducer was busily engaged in paying attentions to a young woman of large fortune. To make a long story short, my poor girl died; and the gentleman married, became very rich, and was highly esteemed in society.—You see, messieurs, that my story is in no wise different from what is happening every day."

Monsieur Vermoncey had not lost a word of Madame Baldimer's narrative; at the outset, he had turned as pale as death; his hands shook, and great drops of perspiration stood on his forehead; he held his cards, but did not see them, and had no idea what he played. At last, one of the gentlemen who were playing with him said to him:

"You must be feeling ill. Pray leave the table, and go and get some fresh air."

Monsieur Vermoncey did not know what reply he made; it seemed to him that he had not the requisite strength to leave the room, for his knees bent and his legs gave way under him. However, he made a mighty effort, and attempted to leave the table; but in order to push his chair away, he was obliged to disturb the lady who was seated so close to him.

He turned toward her, stammering some unintelligible words. Madame Baldimer had finished her story, and all her auditors had pronounced it exceedingly interesting. The fair American fixed her piercing eyes on Monsieur Vermoncey, and said:

"And you, monsieur, what do you think of my story? Did it interest you too?"

Albert's father murmured something which no one could hear, and, having succeeded in breaking out a path, he abruptly left the salons, still followed by Madame Baldimer's eyes, for she seemed to enjoy his confusion and pallor.

While all this was taking place in the cardroom, Madame Plays, deserted by Madame Baldimer, had risen and set out in search of her husband, who had ventured to leave the whist table in order to watch the dancing. His wife spied him at last, behind a quadrille, and, seizing his arm, led him into a corner.

"I have found you at last," she said; "it's very lucky!"

"Excuse me, my dear love, for leaving the whist table," rejoined Monsieur Plays, alarmed by his wife's agitated manner; "but I assure you that I am beginning to understand; one of the players said to another: 'We have the *odd*!' from which I conclude that the *odd* is like Pope Joan or the double six; so, you see, I understand whist."

"Oh! monsieur, what do I care about whist! it's something much more important that I have to talk to you about."

"You look as if you were very warm—would you like an ice?"

"Hush! and listen to me: Albert is not dead!"

"What do you mean? that young man who was killed in a duel for you?"

"Yes, Albert Vermoncey, for whose death I blamed myself, whose sad fate I lamented. He is alive; he is in Paris."

"Then he wasn't killed dead?"

"Mon Dieu! don't I tell you that he wasn't killed at all?"

"So much the better! for he was a very pleasant fellow; and now you won't suffer with remorse any more, or shed any more tears over his premature end."

"What do you say? So much the better! Why, you don't seem to understand that I have been tricked, made a fool of, in the most indecent way! as to Albert's not being dead—I am not sorry for that, although he behaved very dishonorably to me! But why should that man come and tell me that he had run his sword through him and killed him? Why bring me a cigar which he said he had found on the body? And I had the kindness to weep and lament and go into retirement for two months—seeing nobody but you, and almost bored to death! and to carry in my bosom that cigar, which was said to have been found on the dying Albert!"

"Ah! you had a cigar about you! so that's the reason that you smelt like a—trooper, and that someone said to me this evening: 'Your wife is a *lionne*.'"

"You see, monsieur, I have been played with in the most abominable way! But this is not to be the end of it! I trust, monsieur, that you will not allow people to amuse themselves at your wife's expense, and, consequently, at your own; for to show disrespect to a wife is to show disrespect to her husband, and I have been shamefully insulted."

"But, my dear love, what do you expect me to do about it?"

"What do I expect you to do! what a question! I expect you to challenge the insolent villain who lied to me!"

"What! you want to have that poor Albert killed again? You have only just learned that he's alive, and——"

"No, monsieur; I am not talking about Albert now; but of that little man who dared to come and tell me that he had killed him in a duel. Do you know Tobie Pigeonnier?"

"Tobie Pigeon——"

"You must have seen him here two or three times."

"Oh! yes, a little short fat man; I remember him very well. He's a very good-looking fellow."

"He's a little blackguard, who lies with imperturbable assurance. It was he who offered to be my chevalier and avenge me; it was he who brought me that wretched cigar. Luckily, I didn't receive his news kindly; but, it doesn't make any difference, he was the cause of my crying my eyes out, and seeing nobody but you for two whole months; I will never forgive him for that. You must hunt him up, monsieur, and demand satisfaction."

"What, my dear love, a duel?"

"I insist upon it."

"But duelling is forbidden now."

"I don't care if it is."

"I don't know how to fight."

"Everybody knows how to fire a pistol."

"I have never tried."

"To-morrow morning I will take you to Lepage's shooting gallery; you must spend six hours there, and when you get through you will be able to fire well enough to fight a duel."

"But suppose Monsieur Tobie refuses?"

"Then you will have the right to punish him another way. Carry your stick, in case you need it."

"But, Herminie——"

"But I tell you, monsieur, that I will have it so. Now, let us go home; I shall not appear again in society until I am avenged; for it seemed to me to-night that people avoided me, and that the young men laughed and whispered together as they looked at me."

"Your cigar was the cause of that, madame."

"No matter! when you have chastised the man who chose to amuse himself at my expense, others will not be tempted to imitate him. Let us go, monsieur."

And the robust Herminie carried off her husband, who was not at all pleased at being forced to fight, and, for the first time in his life, was trying to think how he could manage to disobey his wife.

XXVI

A REMOVAL.—A SURPRISE

The weather was dark and damp and cold. Sans-Cravate was seated in his usual place, as dismal and gloomy as the weather. His eyes wandered from side to side, often resting on the spot where Paul was accustomed to stand; then he fixed them on the ground at his feet, rested his head on his hands, and sat perfectly motionless.

Jean Ficelle walked to and fro in front of his comrade, whistling or humming between his teeth, and from time to time taking a bite from a great slice of bread which he rubbed with a raw onion; but that repast seemed to be a matter of necessity, not of enjoyment.

"*Sacrédié!*" he exclaimed suddenly, halting before his friend. "It ain't any use for me to try to like this stuff—it's nasty! Dry bread and onion will never be as good as roast veal. This is a beastly sort of breakfast for a fellow to eat; but when you're breaking in two with hunger, you must stuff your blackguard of a belly with something or other! If I only had a drop of wine to wash it down with! but there's not enough in my pocket to pay for the smallest kind of a glass. And that wine shop keeper yonder won't trust me any more, on the pretext that I owe him money now! What an old fool! Parbleu! if I didn't owe him anything, he couldn't ever have trusted me. People ain't reasonable at all. I say, Sans-Cravate, business has been pretty bad lately. We don't earn hardly anything."

"That ain't surprising; when we have a few sous, you take me right off to spend 'em! then people come and don't find us in our places, so they hire somebody else; that's the way I've lost almost all my customers. Oh! I know well enough that I am doing wrong; I shall never save up money by hanging round wine shops and seeing nobody but loafers. What can they think of me at home? I am ashamed to write to my father. And my sister, little Liline, that I meant to save money for, to give her a marriage portion! Damnation! I'm an infernal coward! And to think that I haven't got the strength of mind to begin to work hard again as I used to! Ah! when a man has grief in his heart, he's good for nothing."

"Ta! ta! ta! there you go again! You're always blaming yourself, and for what? Sans-Cravate, you're no man! is it our fault if we don't get any errands to do? No. But just because we go and take a drink once in a while outside the barrier, you say we're losing our customers. That's damned nonsense! Look you: I'll give you a comparison, to prove that customers come all the same when we ain't here. There's Paul, that gawk who used to stand over yonder, and hasn't showed up for two weeks because you hit him so hard that he hurt himself a little when he fell,—well, in the fortnight he's been away haven't they sent here for him twenty times, to go to Monsieur Vermoncey, who wanted him? And five days ago, when you were off on an errand, didn't monsieur himself come and ask for him? There's a man that looks as if he was well fixed; he's the father of your old customer, Monsieur Albert. Ah! there was a young fellow who paid handsomely; how the money slipped through his fingers, and what a pity he's left Paris! If he hadn't, what lots of cart-wheels we'd have to spin!"

"But what did Monsieur Vermoncey say to you?"

"*Pardi!* he says like this: 'Tell me, my good man; your comrade who used to stand yonder, young Paul, is never in his place now; what has become of him? is he sick?'—I wasn't fool enough to tell him the truth, you understand, so I says: 'No, monsieur; he hasn't been coming here for some time, and I think he's given up the business. But I am here, monsieur, to do any errands you want done; tell me what you want, and I'll go.'—'I was anxious to see your comrade and talk to him,' says he; 'I take an interest in him; where does he live? can you give me his address?'—'Wait a minute,' says I; 'he lives in a street I don't know the name of, but I think it's No. 2 or No. 4—an even number, anyway.'—At that, my man went off as if he was mad, and I says to myself: 'Sold again!'"

"But if he really has business with Paul—why not send him to him?"

"Not much! Catch me sending customers to others, when we're short of 'em ourselves! that would be too soft. And, besides, did he ever tell us his address, the fox? do we know where he lives?"

"No; but since that unfortunate fall, which I was responsible for, you know that he has been living in Bastringuette's room and that she is taking care of him; you must know it—as it was you who told me."

"Yes, to be sure he's with her. Instead of having him taken to the hospital, where he'd have been taken care of for nothing, she took him to her own room; she's his nurse, his *sœur de pot*. Gad! a woman must love a man, to spend all her money in drugs and medicines for him! But it seems she does love him—with fire and blood!"

Sans-Cravate gnawed his nails, but said nothing. After a few minutes, he asked, in a low tone:

"How about his wound? isn't it getting better? Won't he soon be well?"

"Oh! I don't know! that is to say, yes—the wound on the head's better; it's all healed; but it seems that the arm will take longer; he broke something or other when he fell, and that can't be put right in a minute."

"What surprises me," said Sans-Cravate, after a pause, "is that the little dressmaker hasn't come once to ask us about him."

"*Pardi!* she's probably done the same as he has—some other love affair; and the proof is that she don't come to her work as early as she used to; and she goes away much earlier. She has assignations to keep, no doubt. Bah! it's no use, I can't swallow this dry; it scrapes my throat; I must have a drink! Come on, Sans-Cravate, let's go to that other wine shop, on the right; you can say it's to be charged to you, and they'll trust you."

"No; I don't propose to get trusted any more. When we haven't got any money, we must drink water."

"Why, that's nonsense! on the contrary, when you haven't got any money, you get tight to forget your troubles. Come on; I'll treat, and owe you the money."

"No, I won't go!"

The decided tone in which Sans-Cravate spoke convinced Jean Ficelle that it would be useless for him to insist; so he went away alone, shrugging his shoulders contemptuously and saying:

"As you please. I'll get along without you; I can find some friend who'll offer me a bottle."

Sans-Cravate was conscious of a secret satisfaction in not having yielded; he rested his head on his hands again, and was soon absorbed in thought—probably of Bastringuette, whom he had sworn to forget. Suddenly he felt a light tap on his shoulder; he looked up and saw Albert before him.

"What! is it you, monsieur?" he cried, overjoyed at the reappearance of his generous customer. "Ah! it's a long while since we have seen you; I was speaking of you only a moment ago."

"Yes, Sans-Cravate, it is I; I have been in Paris only a week, and I was absent more than two months. But I need you at once. Are you at liberty?"

"Always, monsieur, always at your service. You know that I am devoted to you."

"Yes, yes; I am well aware of your zeal, and I know that I can rely on your discretion, too; and that is why I have come for you. Listen; I need someone who is strong and active; I have brought a lovely girl back to Paris with me."

"Oho! I recognize you there, monsieur."

"You understand that my father must know nothing of this episode!"

"Of course not, monsieur."

"I established my young friend in a pretty little apartment, which I had had furnished beforehand; it was in a distant quarter, on Rue de Grenelle-Saint-Germain; I felt sure of never meeting my father in that neighborhood. But, as luck would have it, one of his best friends had moved while I was away, and taken lodgings directly opposite the house to which I took the young woman I love."

"*Bigre!* that won't do! you must change your quarters."

"I learned that fact only yesterday, and I have already hired a delightful little apartment on Rue Grange-aux-Belles, near the canal. This time I will answer for it that my father won't meet me! So what I want is to have my furniture moved at once from Rue de Grenelle to Rue Grange-aux-Belles."

"There is nothing easier."

"Here is some money; procure a wagon at once, and whatever else you need. Here are the addresses; you will ask for Madame Albert's apartment; that is the name I have given my young friend. The apartment is very small, only two rooms and a dressing closet, so it won't take you long to move everything. Let us see, how much time do you need? It's half-past nine now."

"Well, monsieur, at two o'clock everything will be in its place on Rue Grange-aux-Belles."

"At two o'clock; very good! you are an invaluable fellow. I am going to take my young friend out to breakfast, so that she need not have to undergo the annoyances of moving; and at two o'clock I will bring her to her new lodging, where you are to wait for us; don't spare the money."

Albert walked rapidly away, and Sans-Cravate folded up his *crochets*.

"Good enough!" he said to himself; "this is more like; my best customer has come back! how lucky that I didn't go off with Jean Ficelle! I should have missed this job. And to think that that Paul told me to distrust Monsieur Albert and the errands he gave me to do! Ah! the traitor! he's the one I ought to have distrusted; he's in Bastringuette's room, she is nursing him. She certainly must love him pretty well, as Jean Ficelle says. To be betrayed by a friend! But this is no time to think of that; I must go to work, for I've no time to waste."

Sans-Cravate procured a horse and wagon, and went to the house on Rue de Grenelle, where he asked for Madame Albert's apartment. The concierge, who had been notified and handsomely paid by young Vermoncey, was very zealous and obliging, and offered to help him to move the furniture.

"I can't refuse," replied the messenger, "for I didn't bring anybody with me but the driver, and he has to stay with his horse; I counted on your help, especially as I can give you a good *pourboire*."

"I have been well paid already," said the concierge. "That gentleman is very generous, and I'm sorry that he's going to leave me, for I lose a handsome profit. And then, the little woman hasn't got any maid as yet, and my wife's been doing her housework. She don't know anything about Paris, for she's never been here before; and my wife, who knows Paris like a cab horse, would have shown her about."

"Is she pretty?"

"Very pretty, and something innocent and childlike about her. It's easy to see that she comes from a long way off."

"Oh! Monsieur Albert has good taste; but let's go upstairs and get to work."

The concierge took Sans-Cravate to a small apartment furnished with no less coquetry than refinement; all the furniture was modern, and in the best taste; nothing had been forgotten that could add to the charm of the retreat; the hand of a rich and generous lover was visible in every detail.

"*Fichtre!* but Monsieur Albert does things in good shape!" said Sans-Cravate, after an admiring glance at the furniture; "but we must be careful not to break or injure anything. I'll take the responsibility."

The messenger set to work with an activity and skill which aroused the concierge's admiration: in two hours, everything had been taken downstairs and carefully packed on the wagon; and Sans-Cravate, having given the concierge a *pourboire*, started for Rue Grange-aux-Belles.

He soon reached the address indicated, and found the concierge as courteous and zealous as he of Rue de Grenelle, because Albert had employed the same means to win his favor. To set the human machine in motion, one need not cudgel his brains for long; it is enough to grease the joints.

"Do you want to give me a lift with the biggest pieces?" asked the messenger; "my orders are to give you a good *pourboire*."

"I'd have done it for nothing, but I'll take the *pourboire*," replied the concierge, with a laugh.

"This one has been paid, too," said Sans-Cravate to himself; "but he isn't so honest as the other; he don't say so."

They went up to the apartment hired in the name of Madame Albert: it was on the second floor, and consisted of two pretty rooms and two dressing-rooms; the paper was all new, the paint fresh; nothing was lacking but the furniture.

"The deuce!" thought Sans-Cravate, as he looked over the apartment. "This part of the job won't go all alone as the other did. All I had to do then was to take everything I found; but I don't know where to put the different things here. If I put a bed there, and they want it somewhere else; if I put a commode over yonder, and a couch in this corner, and they don't look right,—why, they won't be satisfied. The young lady ought to be here, to tell me what to do. However, I'll just do the best I can according to my own ideas; and when she comes, if it ain't right, I'll change it."

The concierge approved this reasoning, and they went about their task. Sans-Cravate worked with redoubled zeal and ardor; he was determined to fulfil his promise and satisfy Albert. He worked so hard, and spurred on the concierge so successfully, that the clock had not struck two when all the furniture was in place in the new apartment.

But the perspiration poured from the face of the messenger, who was overdone with fatigue and sorely in need of rest and refreshment.

"Monsieur Albert told me to wait," he said to the concierge, "but I don't think I need wait in the apartment; there's

a wine shop close by, and I'll go there after I've sent the wagon away. Be kind enough to come and tell me as soon as they arrive, and I'll be here in two strides."

"All right," said the concierge; "you can go and take a bite at the wine shop, and I'll let you know."

Sans-Cravate paid and dismissed his carrier, then went to the wine shop, seated himself at a table, and ordered a breakfast which he had well earned by his labor, and which he ate with much greater zest than all the *extras* he had discussed with Jean Ficelle.

He had been at the wine shop a long while, and his appetite was beginning to be appeased, when the concierge appeared and said:

"They have come, and are waiting for you; everything's all right except one commode that they want changed."

"I'm all ready!" cried Sans-Cravate, and he made haste to pay for his breakfast and follow the concierge. "Has Monsieur Albert come?" he asked.

"Yes, he came with the little lady, but he went right away again; he was evidently in a great hurry. The little lady's all alone now."

"Ah! he went away again, did he? The devil! in that case, I shan't know whether he's satisfied. But if the lady is, that's all I want, as the apartment's for her. Besides, he may be coming back."

"Yes, as you say, if the lady is satisfied, that's all he cares about."

When they reached the house, the concierge allowed Sans-Cravate to go up alone.

"You know where it is," he said; "I don't need to go with you."

And the messenger went up to the apartment, saw the key in the door, and entered the outer room, which was empty.

"The little lady is evidently in the back room," he said to himself; "I may disturb her; but still, as she wants something moved, she must be expecting me."

He began to cough, to let her know that he was there; then, as no one answered, he decided to go into the other room. He saw a woman, whose back was turned to him, as she was looking out of the window.

"Excuse me, madame," said Sans-Cravate; "it's the messenger who moved you."

The young woman turned, and disclosed a face, which, although very pale, was fascinating in its sweetness and simplicity. It was an assemblage of charming features: eyes of a blue as pure as a cloudless sky, and shaded by long, jet-black lashes; a small, well-proportioned nose; a tiny mouth with even, white teeth; and, lastly, imparting an infinite charm to the whole face, a something artless and touching—something which denoted that its possessor did not know how to lie.

Sans-Cravate gazed at the young woman, and stood as if rooted to the floor, unable, afraid, to believe his eyes. At last he stepped forward, then stopped, looked at her again, and muttered:

"Oh! my God! is it possible? is it a dream? But, no—I am mistaken—it cannot be her!"

But the girl, who had begun to tremble as she looked at Sans-Cravate, and whose eyes had filled with tears, suddenly ran forward and threw herself into the messenger's arms.

"Brother! can it be you? Mon Dieu! aren't you willing to recognize me?"

"My own sister! my Liline!" cried Sans-Cravate, taking the girl's head in his hands, and covering her face with kisses; "so it is really you!"

But the joyous expression of his face came and went like a lightning flash. He let his arms fall, stepped away from the girl, and continued with an accent of utter despair:

"My sister here in Paris—with Monsieur Albert! My sister abducted—and ruined, of course! O my God! our poor father!"

And Sans-Cravate sank upon a chair; he could not speak, he could not see; his forehead was burning, he was completely crushed by his grief. But his sister went to him again, she held out her arms to him, knelt at his feet, and said in a tone that went to his heart:

"Forgive me, brother, I beseech you; forgive me!"

That sweet voice reached the lowest depths of the messenger's heart; he raised his sister and drew her to him, saying:

"But how can it have happened? Come, tell me the whole story; don't keep anything from me, for I must know all!"

Adeline sat on her brother's knee, and said in a faltering tone:

"Yes, I will tell you how it happened; you know that I never lie."—Then, with an intonation of the voice and a simplicity of language as ingenuous as her features, she told her story as follows:

"The last time that you came home to see father, I was, as you know, living with a rich lady who had taken a fancy to me and treated me as her daughter. Father gave his consent, for he thought the education I should receive with her might be of use to me some day. So I was at Clermont, with my patroness. She made me work hard—reading, and studying music; but I often regretted our little cottage, brother, where I could run and jump about and play when I pleased; while in my patroness's salon I always had to be neatly dressed, to stand very straight, and to give up all the games I had enjoyed in my childhood; in fact, Étienne, if I must admit it, I was sometimes depressed and often bored; but I dared not say so, for fear of seeming ungrateful. My greatest happiness was to sit at a window looking on the road; for from there I could see the fields and our village and our mountains; and as I worked at my embroidery, I often looked with a sigh in the direction of our cottage.

"About five weeks ago, while I was at the window, I saw a young man ride by. He looked at me; I turned my eyes away, but I thought I could see that he bowed to me. The next day, he passed again and looked up again; and as I was sure that he bowed to me that time, I thought that it was courteous to do as much. Several days in succession he rode by; I was always at the window, always looking toward our village, but I knew very well when the young man was there. The window was not very far from the ground; he rode near and said a few words to me, which I didn't listen to the first day, but which I answered on the second. In short—I don't know how it happened, but, before long, Monsieur Albert—he was the young man on horseback—told me that he loved me, and I confessed that I loved him too. Ah! brother, if you knew how happy he looked when I told him that; he declared that he couldn't live without me, and I urged him to go to the village to see father and ask his permission to marry me. The next day, he came with a

very downcast air, and told me that he had seen father, who had refused his consent to our marriage; then I told him to see my patroness, but he said that she had other projects for me; that he knew that she intended to marry me to a very rich old gentleman whom she expected at Clermont any day. At that I wept, but Albert said to me: 'There's only one way for us to avoid being parted; that is, for you to consent to come to Paris with me; we will be married at once, and then our parents will have to forgive us.'—I refused at first; but he begged so hard, swearing that I should surely be his wife, and there was so much love in his eyes and in my heart, that I ended by giving way.—'I will take you to Paris,' he said; 'and when we are married, I'll write to your father to join us there.'—Then I thought of you, and I said: 'I have a brother in Paris, his name's Étienne, and he's a fine fellow;'—but—I mustn't lie to you—I didn't tell him you were a messenger, for at my patroness's they seemed to laugh at men who followed that calling. I said that you were learning to make money, but that I didn't know how, and Albert answered: 'We will find your brother, and I will love him too.'—Well—so I allowed him to carry me off, to bring me to Paris; I did whatever Albert wanted me to do. Forgive me, Étienne; it was very wicked, I know. But Albert is an honorable man; he will marry me, because he has promised to; I shall be his wife, and then father will forgive me, too, won't he?"

Sans-Cravate listened in gloomy and depressed silence to his sister's story; when she ceased to speak, he sat for some time, absorbed in his grief, and seemed to be waiting for her to say something more. But he suddenly pushed her away, sprang to his feet, and began to pace the floor, crying:

"So this is how these fine young men behave, whose errands we do for them! Ah! I deserve what has happened; yes, I have been doing wrong for a long time, I too am becoming a ne'er-do-well, I allow myself to be tempted to gamble and drink, and I forget my old home, and my father and family! And now, this fine gentleman who pays me so generously, this excellent customer who is always so free with his money, gives me another big fee—and for what? to help him hide my sister, whom he has abducted and dishonored! Ah! *crédié!* my hands itch!"

"Oh! brother, don't be angry. Perhaps Albert doesn't know that you are my brother."

"Oh! no, indeed he don't know it! if he had, you may be sure he wouldn't have come for me. And then, you told him that your brother's name was Étienne, and everyone here calls me Sans-Cravate. But heaven has permitted me to find you in Paris; for, do you see, Liline, I am here now, and your seducer must undo the wrong he has done, or I'll kill him on the spot!"

"Oh! my dear brother, don't have such horrible thoughts! Why should you suppose that Albert has deceived me? As he told me that I should be his wife, he will certainly marry me!"

"Marry you! Poor girl; with all the fine things you learned at Clermont, you are still very ignorant! you don't know that these young Parisian dandies take pleasure in deceiving women who are weak enough to listen to them—yes, and are proud of it; that they have three or four mistresses at once; that they fall in love with every pretty face they see."

"Oh! mon Dieu, brother! do you think Albert is like that?"

"I don't think it; I am sure of it! Haven't I served him in his intrigues a hundred times—carried his love letters and his messages? Ten thousand thunders! And I laughed at it, and thought that it was all right for him to amuse himself—to deceive poor girls who were often driven to despair by his treachery—to make sport of other people's sufferings! Ah! I was a heartless villain; and, instead of serving him so faithfully, I ought to have said to him: 'Monsieur Albert, what you are doing is all wrong, and I refuse to do any more of your dirty work.'—But when we ourselves are not injured, we don't care; it seems nothing at all to us, and we even laugh sometimes at the rascality practised on others! Ah! my poor Liline! Why did father let you go to that lady's at Clermont? why didn't he keep you with him at the cottage? and me too, instead of sending me to Paris? Ah! a man ought never to part with his children! ain't they always better off with their parents than anywhere else? Come, come; you are crying now; come and kiss me: don't cry, don't despair!"

The pretty Auvergnate wept bitterly, for her brother had torn her heart by telling her that her lover was a deceiver; but she could not believe as yet that Albert did not intend to keep his promise, and she murmured between her sobs:

"Oh, brother! I am very sure that he loves me; he tells me so all day long. Why should he have brought me to Paris, if he doesn't love me?"

"Oh! he loves you enough to make you his mistress—but his wife! remember that we are only poor folk, that I am only a messenger—while he is a young man of high social position; he is rich; he wouldn't have me for a brother-in-law; why, you see, even you yourself, who have had a fine education and learned society manners, didn't dare to tell him that your brother was a messenger."

"Oh! forgive me, brother!"

And the girl threw herself into Sans-Cravate's arms, hid her face against his breast, and sobbed as if her heart would break.

"No, no!" she repeated; "he will not deceive me."

Sans-Cravate disengaged himself from her arms, drew the back of his hand across his eyes, and cried:

"Well! this is no time to cry like two children; that won't help us. I must act; I must decide what to do. But I have made up my mind."

"What are you going to do, brother?"

"I am going straight to Monsieur Albert's father, because, you see, that's all there is to do. The son might say: 'I ain't my own master, I don't dare, I must wait.'—But that ain't the kind of answer I want. With the father we shall know what to expect, at all events. Besides, they say that Monsieur Vermoncey's an honorable man; in that case, he will understand my grief and be touched by your position; he won't be willing that honest poor folk should be dishonored by his son; he won't despise us because we haven't got any money, and because I'm only a messenger. I'll say to him: 'Monsieur, we didn't go after your son, to try to catch him; it was him that wanted my sister, and he ran off with her and promised to marry her; and if he don't marry her, *jarni!* it will be bad for him, for I ain't the man to put up with such an insult.' But Monsieur Vermoncey will understand me, and he loves his son; he's a fine man, and he will consent—yes, I feel hopeful now, for it seems to me that I have words in my heart that can't fail to move him. Come, Liline, don't cry any more; cheer up; you shall marry Monsieur Albert."

"Oh! yes, brother, yes! I'm very happy that you agree with me now."

And the artless child, with whom laughter soon succeeded tears, threw her arms gayly about his neck.

"You must stay here, Liline, and wait for me; you won't leave this house?"

"No, brother."

"When is Monsieur Albert to return?"

"This evening."

"Then I shall be back before him, and I hope to bring you good news. If I don't—if my prayers are rejected—then I'll take you away with me, sister; I won't leave you with your seducer another minute. I will work for both of us. I shan't go to the wine shop any more, that's all over; and I'll steer clear of Jean Ficelle. I will try to save up a tidy little sum before long, and then I'll take you back to father, and we won't leave him again. You'll go with me, won't you, Liline?"

"Yes, brother. But Albert will marry me, his father will consent—you said so yourself just now."

"At all events, we must hope so. Come, kiss me, sister, and pray heaven that my attempt may not be thrown away!"

The girl threw herself into her brother's arms, and he held her to his heart for some time; it required an effort on his part to make up his mind to leave her; at last, summoning all his courage, he kissed Liline once more and left her, to call upon Monsieur Vermoncey.

It was several days prior to this time that Albert's father had fallen in with Madame Baldimer at Monsieur Grazcernitz's reception, whence he had returned home in a state of violent agitation after listening to the fair American's story.

From that moment, Monsieur Vermoncey had remained in his own apartment, sunk in profound melancholy, and had denied himself to all visitors. It seemed that some deep-rooted sorrow, which had been slumbering in the depths of his heart, had suddenly awakened with renewed violence and was engrossing all his thoughts.

His son's return, however, had brought a ray of light into the Vermoncey household; but Albert, absorbed by his new passion, spent as much time as he possibly could with the girl he had brought from Clermont; so that Monsieur Vermoncey saw very little of his son, and he made excuses for him, concluding that after such a prolonged absence he was hungry for the pleasures which he found in the capital.

Sans-Cravate walked with a determined step to Monsieur Vermoncey's house, but when he arrived there he felt that his courage failed him; however, to revive it, he thought of his sister, to whom he had promised good news; he thought of his old father, and of their honor, which was in his hands; then he no longer faltered, but passed the concierge and went up to the door of Monsieur Vermoncey's apartment, where he rang.

"What do you want?" inquired the servant, when he saw the messenger, whose disordered dress, excited manner, and flashing eyes seemed to point to some extraordinary occurrence.

"I want to see Monsieur Albert's father—Monsieur Vermoncey."

"What do you want of him?"

"What I want of him concerns nobody but him and me, and I am not disposed to tell it to you."

"Did monsieur send you on some errand, and have you brought back an answer?"

"He didn't send me anywhere; but I have something to say to him."

"Monsieur is in his study; he doesn't receive anyone."

"But he must receive me!"

"When monsieur refuses every day to receive visits from his friends, I don't imagine he is likely to give preference to a messenger!"

Sans-Cravate spat on his hands and rubbed them together, then shook his fist in the servant's face.

"Do you see that?" he said; "if you don't do my errand right away, I'll smash your nose so that I'll defy you to blow it!"

Sans-Cravate's eyes were so eloquent of his determination, that the servant, having involuntarily stepped back, deemed it prudent not to resist him, and decided to go to his master, to whom he said:

"There's a very savage and rough-mannered messenger outside, who insists on speaking to monsieur. Shall I turn him out of doors?"

Monsieur Vermoncey thought that the man had probably come to bring him news of Paul, for whom he had found a place, and whom he had sought in vain at his usual stand.

"Show him in," he said.

This command was most unwelcome to the servant, who returned to Sans-Cravate and said sullenly:

"Come in; monsieur consents to receive you;—these masters are most astonishing with their whims."

Sans-Cravate trembled slightly, but did not hesitate; he entered the study and found himself in Monsieur Vermoncey's presence.

Albert's father was seated in front of the fire; he turned his head and scrutinized Sans-Cravate, who, after opening the door, stood on the threshold, afraid to go forward.

"Well, what do you want with me? speak!"

Sans-Cravate felt that his throat was parched and that he had no saliva in his mouth; some instants passed before he could articulate a word, but at last he stammered:

"Monsieur, it is—it is about—about monsieur your son."

"My son!" cried Monsieur Vermoncey, who instantly recalled the first time that Paul had come to see him, and feared that another duel was on the carpet. "My son—what has happened to him?—is he in danger? Speak!"

"No, monsieur; no, he is not in danger; and when I say that it's about him—I should say that I have come on my own account, that it's myself who—— *Sacrédié!*—excuse me, monsieur, but I am so worked up—it ain't fear—but it makes me feel queer. One minute, monsieur; my mind is coming back, and, after all, why shouldn't I dare to speak to you? you are an honorable man. I'm a miserable fool to tremble so—now, it's all over!"

Monsieur Vermoncey looked at Sans-Cravate with more interest, and waited with some curiosity for him to explain himself.

"My name is Étienne Renaud," the messenger continued, in a firm voice; "I come from Auvergne; I came to Paris to be a messenger, and they have given me the name of Sans-Cravate here; it's a nickname of no consequence, and I don't mind it. My regular stand is on the corner of Rue du Helder and the boulevard."

"I remember now that I have seen you there," said Monsieur Vermoncey, "and that you have a young man named Paul for your comrade. Have you come to give me news of him?"

Sans-Cravate made a wry face at the name of Paul, and continued:

"No, monsieur; no, it hasn't anything to do with him. I must tell you, monsieur, that I left a very pretty sister in Auvergne, who is seventeen years old now; a lady in Clermont took a fancy to her and insisted on taking her into her family, to give her an education, like a young lady. My sister's an honest girl, d'ye see, monsieur; leastways, she was till the devil sent a young gentleman from Paris down that way, and he began to hang about the house. He saw my Liline and thought she was pretty—*dame!* it would be hard for anyone not to think so,—the sweetest little face in Auvergne; and now she has distinguished manners, so that anyone would swear she was a princess! Well, monsieur, to cut it short, this young man—who's a good-looking fellow, too, worse luck! and all the women like him—well, he seduced my sister! The poor child! she believed in love right away, as you believe fine weather's coming when you see the first swallows. He told her a lot of things to turn her head, and made her believe my father had refused to give him her hand; which ain't true, I am sure, for my father loves her too dearly to refuse to give her to the man she loves. In short, he promised, swore, that he'd marry her, if she'd consent to come to Paris with him; and my sister believed it all, she never thought for a moment that the young man meant to deceive her, so she yielded to his entreaties. She came to Paris with her—her lover—I might as well say the word. And the young man who did all this is your son, monsieur, Monsieur Albert!"

"My son!" cried Monsieur Vermoncey, fastening his eyes upon Sans-Cravate, unable to believe that he had heard aright. "My son has done that! Oh, no! you are mistaken; you have been misinformed."

"Oh! it's only too true, monsieur; there's no chance of any mistake. I know Monsieur Albert well; I've been his messenger a long while; and as he always spoke pleasantly to me, I liked him—yes, I was fond of him; his good humor, his pleasant manners, his happy disposition, perhaps his very faults—all fascinated me too. In fact, I would have jumped into the fire for him; and he knew it, and he always came for me when he had some shady errand to be done. I hadn't seen him for more than two months, and I'd concluded he was travelling somewhere, when he came after me at my stand about half-past nine this morning."

"This morning?"

"Yes, monsieur; it ain't an old story, you see.—'Sans-Cravate,' he says, 'I've brought a lovely girl back to Paris with me, but my father mustn't know anything about it. I took lodgings for her a long way off, on Rue de Grenelle-Saint-Germain; but I have just found out that one of my father's intimate friends lives on that street now.'"

"True—Monsieur Delmas. Well?"

"'And so,' he went on, 'as I don't want to meet anybody I know when I go to see my young friend, I've hired another apartment, on Rue Grange-aux-Belles, near the canal.'—In short, monsieur, he employed me to move the furniture from Rue de Grenelle to the new lodgings in a great hurry, and to wait till he brought his lady there. I agreed, of course, and did what he told me to do. I finished the job before two o'clock, and I had gone out to rest a bit, for I was tired out, when the concierge came and told me they had arrived and the young man had gone right away again. I went to see the lady, to find out whether she was satisfied with the way I'd fixed her furniture. You can judge of my feelings when I recognized my sister Liline in the girl Monsieur Albert had abducted. She cried when she saw me, and kissed me, and begged me to forgive her; then she told me how it had all happened, just as I have told you; and she begged me not to get angry, because she is perfectly sure her lover will marry her as he has promised."

"My son has done that! abducted a virtuous girl! and seduced her! Oh! that is very bad—it is——"

Monsieur Vermoncey did not finish his sentence, but hid his face in his hands.

"I am only a poor, uneducated messenger, monsieur. But I have my honor, and I care all the more for it, d'ye see, because it's all I've got. At first I cried with my sister, and broke her heart by telling her that her seducer was probably a fickle fellow who only intended to deceive her as he has a thousand other women; but she seems so convinced of his love; and then, she's so sweet and pretty, poor Liline! After all, why shouldn't Monsieur Albert love her sincerely? That thought brought back my courage, and I comforted her and made up my mind right off to come and tell you the whole story, because you're the young man's father, and it can't be fixed without your consent. I thought, monsieur, that you would listen to the voice of poor people who may be ruined by your son—but who can be made very happy by you, if you choose."

Sans-Cravate ceased to speak; he was satisfied with his performance. In truth, his sister's plight had made him almost eloquent; for we never lack moving words, words that go to the heart, when we follow the heart's promptings.

Monsieur Vermoncey said nothing, but seemed absorbed in thought. The messenger anxiously awaited the words that were to come forth from his mouth, and to decide his sister's fate; but he dared not urge him to speak, and his eyes alone bore witness to his impatience.

At last, Monsieur Vermoncey rose, went to Sans-Cravate, put his hand on his shoulder, and said:

"Come, my friend, let us try to forgive a young man's wrong-doing, all the consequences of which he failed to realize. I am rich; I will take it upon myself to look after your sister's future, and that of your whole family; your father, in his old age, shall have everything to make life pleasant, and——"

"What's that? what's that?" exclaimed Sans-Cravate, stepping back and looking Monsieur Vermoncey squarely in the eye. "What are you coming at with all your talk about money? It isn't money that we ask, but the honor that your son has taken away from us and must give back. In a word, monsieur, for I don't go to a place by thirty-six roads, I have come here to demand your consent to Monsieur Albert's marriage to my sister."

"My son marry your sister!" rejoined Monsieur Vermoncey, with a slight upward movement of the shoulders. "Nonsense, my friend; surely, you can't think of such a thing; such a marriage is impossible! There are distinctions, conventions, in society, which we are bound to respect. In fact, my son cannot ally himself to a—messenger!"

"Then why could he dishonor my sister?" cried Sans-Cravate, in a loud voice and with an angry glance at his interlocutor.

"Hush, my friend, not so loud, for heaven's sake!" rejoined Monsieur Vermoncey, astonished by the tone the

messenger had assumed. But Sans-Cravate paid no heed; he was no longer the timid creature who trembled when he entered the presence of the man of the world and could not speak to him without stammering; now he was a brother demanding justice for his sister, and firmly resolved to obtain it.

"Monsieur," he said, "I am no boaster; I haven't come here to fling words in the air without any result; I have come to tell you what is going to happen. Either monsieur your son will marry my sister, you understand—either he'll marry her, or I'll kill him—unless he kills me. But as I believe there is such a thing as divine justice, and I am the injured party, I can afford to think that I shall kill him."

Monsieur Vermoncey dropped into a chair.

"Kill my son!" he cried; "my Albert! the only child left to me—the only tie that binds me to life! Do you mean to kill me too?"

"Then consent to his marriage to my sister, monsieur, and don't think you'll have any reason to blush for the connection. There's nothing dishonorable, monsieur, in being connected with honest folk who never injured anyone. The dishonorable thing is to carry trouble and despair into a family, to seduce a girl, and to abandon her when she may be carrying within her a token of her weakness; and if that should be so, monsieur, what would become of the child? He wouldn't have any father—he——"

Monsieur Vermoncey sprang to his feet, ran to Sans-Cravate, and grasped his hand, saying:

"You are right, my friend, and I must give way. Yes, I consent to my son's marrying your sister."

"Can it be possible?" cried Sans-Cravate, jumping for joy; "you consent—you are willing? I am not deceiving myself?"

"Yes, my friend, I consent; you have my word; but you must leave your present business; I will find you some more suitable employment."

"Oh! whatever you choose, monsieur; mon Dieu! I'll go back to the old home, I'll take care of the barnyard, I'll never go out of the house, if you say so."

"Never fear, my friend; I will arrange matters so that we shall all be satisfied. Go and get your sister, and bring her back with you; I will receive her as my daughter, and I desire that the marriage ceremony be performed at the earliest possible moment."

"Oh! this is too much good fortune! I knew that you were a good man. I will love you as I do my own father; and my poor sister, my Liline, how happy she will be! Why, it's enough to make one crazy with joy!"

And Sans-Cravate danced about the room, overturning furniture, laughing and singing. Monsieur Vermoncey was obliged to quiet him, and to remind him that his sister was expecting him.

"Oh, yes! you are right," was the reply; "my sister's waiting for me, and I don't hurry and tell her! What a fool I am! And that poor Monsieur Albert, who is with her, no doubt! I'll go right away and tell them how kind you are; and I'll bring them back to your arms. Oh! it won't take me long, I promise you."

A minute later, Sans-Cravate was in the street, and he ran without stopping to the house where he had left his sister. He was drenched with perspiration when he arrived. He entered the house and was already on the stairs, when the concierge called him.

"Well, comrade, where are you going so fast?"

"Parbleu! to see my sister. The pretty little lady who moved in to-day is my sister."

"I don't know anything about that, but you won't find her."

"What! has she gone out—alone?"

"No—with the young gentleman who brought her here; he came back just after you went away."

"Well! they'll be back soon, no doubt. Do you know which way they went?"

"No; and I don't think they'll be back for a long while. The gentleman sent for a cab, and put in the satchel of clothes they brought here this morning. Then he gave me the keys to the apartment, and said: 'Just air the rooms a little, now and then.'—And with that, he put the little lady in the cab, got in beside her, and good-day. It's my opinion they've left Paris."

"Gone! they have gone!" ejaculated Sans-Cravate. "Great God! Monsieur Albert probably thought that his father wouldn't forgive him; he was afraid he'd have to part with Liline. Oh! what a misfortune! But they'll write, I hope. Didn't my sister leave any word for me?"

"Not a word; but I saw she was crying when she got into the cab."

"She was crying—poor girl! and they'd have been so happy, if they had only waited for me!"

Sans-Cravate was in despair; but as he could learn nothing more from the concierge, he returned to Monsieur Vermoncey and told him of the abrupt departure of the lovers.

Albert's father was greatly distressed by the news, and he at once sent to his son's apartment to ascertain whether he had left a letter for him. The servant brought back a short note, which had evidently been written in great haste and contained these words only:

"Excuse my absence, father; I am compelled to go away again, and this time without saying good-bye to you. But don't be anxious; you will hear from me often, and I hope to see you again before long."

"And he don't say where he's going!" murmured Sans-Cravate. "What a pity! you could have written to him at once that he could come back, that everything was forgiven."

"Perhaps he will tell me where he is, in his first letter," suggested Monsieur Vermoncey; "then I will write to him, or else we will both go and join them."

"Ah! yes, yes, we will do that, that's a fine idea; but till then I must be patient. Will you allow me, monsieur, to come often to ask whether you have heard from your son?"

"Whenever you choose, my friend; you are no longer a stranger to me. Here, Étienne, take this purse, and give up your trade; from this moment you do not need to earn money."

Sans-Cravate declined the money that was offered him, and replied, in a melancholy tone:

"No, monsieur, not yet; my sister ain't your son's wife as yet; until then, let me stay as I am."

Monsieur Vermoncey's persistent entreaties could not shake his determination.

"Let's hope they will come back," he said, as he went away, "or that we shall soon find out where they are."

He returned to his stand, lost in thought, with no desire to laugh or dance, and saying to himself:

"Was it because he learned that Liline had found her brother that Monsieur Albert carried her off so quick?"

XXVII

LOVE AND FRIENDSHIP

When Paul lay on the ground, unconscious, after he had been wounded on the head and arm by his fall, Bastringuette had hastened to the spot; and seeing Sans-Cravate walk rapidly away, she had partly divined the cause of the younger man's deplorable condition.

"Mon Dieu! mon Dieu!" cried the girl; "they have been fighting—or, rather, Sans-Cravate insisted on fighting this poor boy, who ain't strong enough to stand up to him. And it must have been jealousy that made Sans-Cravate do it—because he saw me talking to Paul. I'm the cause of his hard luck—or my beastly coquetry, my foolish idea of changing lovers, when I was well off. But that's how it always is in love; when you're well off, it bores you, and you want to change; when you're badly off, you stay as you are."

While she talked thus to herself, Bastringuette did what she could for the young messenger. The people who had collected talked about carrying him to the nearest hospital, but Bastringuette cried out at the word:

"I guess not much! You don't catch me letting this poor boy go to the hospital while I have a decent place to take him to! He must have rooms somewhere himself; but as he can't talk just now, he can't tell us where they are. Anyway, it will be more convenient for me to nurse him and make herb tea for him in my room; for these boys never have a kettle fit to boil water in."

So the flower girl sent for a cab; they lifted the wounded man into it, after she had bandaged his head and arm as well as she could; then she gave her address—Rue des Martyrs, near the barrier—and when they arrived there, Paul was taken up to her room, with the assistance of the cabman and the concierge, and placed on her bed.

As may be imagined, Bastringuette's domicile was not luxurious. Her apartment consisted of a bedroom and closet, on the fifth floor, under the eaves. She called it the sparrows' entresol.

The furniture was very modest: a wooden cot-bed, a cherry commode, six cane-seated chairs,—or rather six chairs that needed to be reseated,—a small table, a mirror, a foot-warmer, and a stove. So much for the bedroom. As to the closet, it contained a row of pegs, on which nothing was ever hung. But the aspect of the bedroom was not unpleasant and did not indicate downright poverty, thanks to the spotless cleanliness that prevailed.

The bed was surrounded with calico curtains, always very white; there were also two little curtains of the same material at the window, taking the place of one large one. On the commode, on the little table, and on the window sill, there were almost always flowers, some in pots, some in blue carafes. Flowers were Bastringuette's one luxury, and more than once she had breakfasted on a crust of bread in order to have flowers during the winter, when she did not sell them.

After placing Paul on the bed, Bastringuette went to one of her neighbors and asked her to go for a doctor. The tall girl was popular in the house, because she was light-hearted and clever; and they loved to hear her talk, and repeat in her homely language all the flattering speeches made to her by the men who bought flowers of her.

When they learned that the flower girl had a wounded man in her room, the neighbors all wanted to help: one went for a doctor, another for a druggist; this one had a remedy of her own preparation, that one an infallible ointment; so that when Paul opened his eyes he found himself surrounded by women of all ages, all talking at once, and all anxious to cure him, offering ointment, herb tea, plasters, and blisters, each with at least three phials in her hand. Luckily for the wounded man, the doctor came and restored peace among the women, who were disputing with one another as to whose remedy should be preferred. The doctor began by throwing all the phials out of the window, then turned his would-be confrères out of the room; and having examined the patient, found that the wound on the head was severe but not dangerous, that he had sprained his arm when he fell, and that what he most needed were rest and good nursing.

Paul looked about the room in amazement. When the doctor had gone, Bastringuette said:

"Now, try to be calm and quiet; let me take care of you, and don't talk! the doctor says you mustn't. You're in my room; that vexes you, perhaps, but, *dame!* I didn't know your address, and I wouldn't let you be taken to the hospital. It don't put me out a bit, don't you be afraid; I'm my own mistress, and I snap my fingers at what folks say! I know well enough that there's some people always ready to see something wrong in whatever anyone does, and who'll think you're my lover. I don't care for that. There was a time when I'd have liked right well to have you, I don't deny it; I had fallen in love with you; you made my head queer, like a sunstroke. And that was when I turned my back on poor Sans-Cravate! I made a great success of that. You told me right out that you loved somebody else—and then—there was what I heard, what I found out about you. I saw plain enough, then, that you was too far above me—by the way you acted. Hush! don't speak, the doctor says you mustn't. You don't like what I say, so I'm done, it's dead; I won't mention it again. When chance let me into your secret, you made me swear to keep quiet about it; but that's no reason why I can't tell you, between ourselves, that it's a noble thing you're doing, and you ought to have the prize of virtue, the prize of—— Well, you're moving your lips, so I'll shut up. Now, go to sleep, or try to go to sleep; and when you wake up, perhaps you'll have a pleasant surprise—no one knows!"

"You are too good," murmured Paul, in a weak voice; "but I am in your way here; you ought to have let me——"

"Hold your tongue this minute! I ought to have let you be taken to the hospital, eh? That would have been a sweet thing to do! when I was the cause of it all—yes, it was my nonsense! If I hadn't made eyes at you—in fact, if I hadn't tried to catch you, would Sans-Cravate have hit you? Now, he hates me, and he's quite right; but he's all wrong to

fight you, because it ain't your fault. Come, go to sleep; the doctor said you must sleep; and I tell you again that you ain't in my way; I've got another bed in the closet, and I'll sleep on that. I'm going out to get the medicines the doctor ordered; I shan't be gone long."

Bastringuette left the room; and Paul closed his eyes, praying heaven to deal kindly with him, because his existence was still necessary.

Toward evening, after several hours of restless slumber, he opened his eyes; two faces were leaning over him, waiting for the moment of his awakening. Paul uttered a cry of surprise when he recognized Elina.

"Yes, it's Mamzelle Elina," said Bastringuette; "it's your sweetheart. I went and waited for her at her dressmaker's door, so's to tell her what had happened to you, and I had an idea she'd come back with me. That's why I said perhaps you'd have a pleasant waking-up."

Paul held out his hand to the little dressmaker, who gazed at him with eyes full of love and tears as she said:

"Oh, my friend! you are wounded! what a misfortune! But still I'm very happy that Bastringuette came and told me. She told me how it occurred, too. A horrid drunken man pushed you and knocked you down; she happened to be passing and saw you lying on the ground, unconscious, and had you brought here to her room. She's a dear, good girl, and she loves you almost as much as I do. I should have been so anxious, so unhappy, when I didn't see you! I should have thought again that you had stopped loving me. But now I'll come and see you every day; yes, monsieur, every day; in the morning when I go to my work, and at night before I go home to my aunt's.—What is it, monsieur? don't you want me to?"

"If your aunt should find it out," Paul murmured, "she would scold you, and I don't want to expose you to——"

"What an extraordinary man!" cried Bastringuette; "he's willing to be loved, but he don't want anybody to do anything for him. Bless my soul! mademoiselle will get up a little earlier and go home a little later—what a hardship! She'll tire herself, perhaps, to get here a little sooner; but she'll see you, and that'll do you good and her too."

"Oh! yes, my dear," said Elina, "let me spend every minute I am at liberty with you; let me help Bastringuette; I shall be so happy when I see you getting better every day! and the first time you go out, you will lean on her and me. Oh! you shall see how I can take care of you, too; I look like a light-headed little thing, but I won't be that any more; I mean that you shall be satisfied with me."

The young invalid felt the tears roll down his cheeks when he saw how fond they were of him; and he was so moved to find himself the object of such sweet and loving attentions, that he could not speak; but he looked from one to the other of the girls who stood beside his bed, and his eyes probably told them all that was taking place in his heart, for Bastringuette exclaimed, with her customary bluntness:

"Oh, well! if we're going to be sentimental, and all three of us cry, we shall make a pretty mess of it; it'll give him the fever, and he won't get well. The doctor said he mustn't be excited, and we've done nothing else!"

Elina sat down beside the bed, took one of the injured man's hands in hers, and said to him in a low, very low tone:

"Does it do you any harm to see how much I love you? More's the pity if it does; I'll tell you every day. And if my aunt should find out that I come to see you, why, I'll say: 'Paul is going to be my husband, aunt; and a woman has a right to nurse her husband.'"

While the little dressmaker said to her lover all that her heart prompted her to say, Bastringuette went to one of her neighbors and borrowed a wretched mattress, which she carried into her closet; then she threw some old clothes on it, and said to herself:

"I shall sleep well enough there; anyway, a nurse can't sleep much."

Elina, having to return to her aunt, left them with regret, saying:

"Until to-morrow!"

Then, after administering to her patient a draught prescribed by the doctor, Bastringuette lay down on the mattress on the floor of the closet.

"I'll be on hand if you make the least movement," she said to Paul.

Early the next morning, Elina was at the flower girl's, bringing some sugar and a small jar of preserve.

"It's my right to help take care of him," she said to Bastringuette. "My aunt gives me so much a day for my food, and I can afford to pinch myself a little for my poor Paul."

That seemed natural enough to Bastringuette, for she would have done as much.

If the certainty of being loved had been sufficient to restore the young messenger's health, Paul would have been cured in a very short time. But such was not the case; unluckily, the patient's mind was constantly occupied by other thoughts. He was worried and alarmed by his helpless plight, and the wound on his head, instead of cicatrizing, became more serious, because it was complicated by a sharp attack of fever.

The two girls redoubled their zealous attentions to the patient; Bastringuette passed part of the night with him; Elina sometimes arrived before daybreak, and often remained very late in the evening, having succeeded in making her aunt believe that she worked late at Madame Dumanchon's. Both of them deprived themselves of the most essential necessities of life, so that the sick man need lack nothing; but neither of them complained nor would have consented to surrender the place she occupied.

One evening, after a day during which the fever had not left him for an instant, Paul looked about and saw that Bastringuette was alone in the room. She had gone into a corner, so that the invalid might not see her eat the piece of dry bread of which her evening meal consisted. Paul called her, and she hastened to his side after thrusting her bread into her pocket.

"What day is it?" he asked, fixing his eyes, bright with fever, on Bastringuette's.

"What day? This is Tuesday."

"No, not that; what day of the month?"

"Oh! it's the twenty-fourth."

"The twenty-fourth! Why, how long have I been sick?"

"It was the fifth you got so used up! I remember it very well; it was a Thursday."

"The fifth; so I've been here nineteen days?"

"Well, what if it was fifty? I can understand that it bores you to be sick, but ain't you well taken care of here? Don't Mamzelle Elina and I do all that's necessary, all the doctor says?"

"Ah! yes, my good Bastringuette—indeed you do too much! But to-morrow's the twenty-fifth. Great God! It can't be postponed. That thought, Bastringuette, is what gives me the fever and keeps me from getting well."

"What thought? Come, speak out, tell me what you want me to do. I'll do it right away."

"Oh! yes, yes! you will do it, won't you?"

"Do you want me to swear?"

"No. Listen: that old lady, at whose rooms you met me, on Vieille Rue du Temple——"

"Madame Desroches?"

"Yes; I absolutely must send her some money."

"Money! Mon Dieu! as if——"

"Oh! I am well aware that you haven't any, my poor girl! I know that you and Elina deprive yourselves of everything in order to take care of me."

"No, no—nonsense! The druggist gives me the medicines for nothing."

"Listen. To-morrow morning, early, you must go to my room—the key is in the pocket of my jacket. It's on Rue du Faubourg-Saint-Honoré, No. 10. Go up to the fifth floor, the door on the left. There you will find sixty francs in the table drawer."

"Ah! what luck!"

"Wait a moment: you are to take that money, also a frock-coat, a pair of black trousers, and a black waistcoat, which you will find in a small wardrobe. They are all in good condition, almost new, I wear them so seldom. However, if you think they are not enough, take all the linen you can find—four shirts, some sheets——"

"Mon Dieu! what am I to do with all those things?"

"Take them to the Mont-de-Piété, and get forty francs on them, which you will put with the sixty; for to-morrow,—yes, to-morrow, the twenty-fifth,—you must carry a hundred francs to Madame Desroches. You must do it, do you hear?"

"Noble young man! What! you mean to go on doing without everything, to——"

"Hush, Bastringuette! you must carry that sum to-morrow to the widow of my benefactor. If that isn't done, I feel that I shall never get well."

"Oh! in that case, I'll go. Never you fear! I'll do everything you've told me, and she shall have the money to-morrow. But suppose your concierge won't let me carry the things away?"

"There isn't any concierge."

"In that case, it will soon be fixed up."

"Good! I thank you, Bastringuette. And you won't mention this to Elina?"

"Oh! dear me, no! as long as you don't want her to know your good deeds."

"I am simply doing my duty. If only heaven will permit me to finish what I have undertaken! I was so happy to think that, in a few months more—— However, you'll go to-morrow, won't you, Bastringuette?—By the way, one word more: Madame Desroches will ask you, no doubt, why I haven't been to see her for so long a time, and why I have sent you with the money. You must tell her that I sent you because I had to leave Paris, to go on a short journey for the house in which I am employed. Don't forget that."

"No, I won't forget anything."

Paul slept more quietly, thinking that the person whose self-constituted protector he was would not have to suffer by reason of the misfortune that had befallen him. That night his sleep refreshed him, and when he woke he saw Elina's pretty face leaning over him, and, in the background, Bastringuette, whose eyes seemed to express a wish to speak to him.

"Oh! what joy!" cried Elina; "you have slept till much later to-day. It's almost eleven o'clock. Luckily, I had a dress to deliver, so I was able to come back."

"And I feel much better," said Paul.

Bastringuette seized the opportunity, when she was giving the invalid his draught, to whisper in his ear:

"Your errand is done. She has the hundred francs."

Paul could not reply, but his look expressed his satisfaction. From that day the fever abated, and the young man soon became convalescent.

XXVIII

THE INEVITABLE HAPPENS

It was only a few days since Albert had returned to Paris, and he had hardly had time to see his closest friends, when he disappeared again, and no one knew the reason of his abrupt departure.

When the jovial Mouillot chanced to meet Balivan or Dupétrain or Célestin, it rarely happened that they did not discuss the conduct of young Vermoncey.

"What sort of a life is he leading now?" said Mouillot; "he goes off, and is gone nearly three months; then he comes back, we see him two or three times, and off he goes again without a word, just at the beginning of winter, when all sorts of amusements have centred in the capital."

Monsieur Célestin, who had not given out that he had had a definitive rupture with Albert, contented himself with some such reply as this:

"As I have been entirely unable to understand Albert's moods of late, I have seen very much less of him. He's a queer fish: one of those people who fly into a passion without any idea what it's all about; and I bother my head very

little as to what he does or what becomes of him!"

"For my part," said Balivan, "I am very fond of the fellow. He's heedless and light-headed, but I am sure that he's as straight as a string, and he's most obliging. He's a mighty bright fellow, too; and if he'd like, I'd be glad to take a trip to Italy with him."

"If Monsieur Albert had chosen," said Monsieur Dupétrain, "he would have made a first-class subject for magnetism; he had just the right look in his eyes to put himself in communication with a somnambulist."

"How about the fair lady that you were paying court to not long ago?" said Monsieur Célestin, in a sarcastic tone; "have you magnetized her?"

"Madame Baldimer? No; I tried, but I couldn't make it work; she's a woman who is absolutely free from nervousness."

They asked one another about Tobie Pigeonnier also, who was still undiscoverable.

"Gad!" said Mouillot; "I wouldn't give five sous for that olive stone that poor Monsieur Varinet persists in carrying about in his purse."

Madame Plays was not disturbed about Albert, but she was fully determined to be revenged on little Tobie, who had hoodwinked her so completely with his alleged duel and was responsible for her having exhaled an odor of tobacco for two months. Every morning, she sent for a carriage, entered it with her husband, and took him to a shooting gallery, thence to a fencing school; and there the submissive husband was compelled to practise an hour with the pistol, and another hour with the sword; and his wife constantly scolded him because he could never succeed in hitting the target or in learning to parry a thrust.

Poor Monsieur Plays would return home tired to death.

"My dear love," he would say to his wife, "I assure you that I prefer to learn whist; I understand it much better than I do fencing."

"Whether you understand it or not," the fair Herminie would reply, "you've got to fight with that little Tobie, who isn't likely to be very formidable. Remember, monsieur, that you are to challenge him, wherever you meet him!"

And Monsieur Plays would bend his head with an air of resignation; and when he was on the street, or driving, if he saw a man who resembled Tobie, he would hasten away in the opposite direction.

Meanwhile, two months had passed since Sans-Cravate had found his sister, only to lose her again at once. During that time the messenger had called frequently at Monsieur Vermoncey's, to ask if he had heard from his son, and if he knew where he had taken his sister. But Albert had written only two letters to his father; they were very short, and did not mention the girl he had abducted. One was dated in Alsace, and the other in Switzerland; he simply said that he was travelling, and gave no address.

As time passed, Sans-Cravate's hopes grew fainter and fainter; often, after questioning Monsieur Vermoncey, he would shake his head sadly, and mutter:

"This looks bad! I tell you, monsieur, I'm very much afraid Monsieur Albert don't intend to do what's right. I don't like this keeping my sister away from me and preventing her from writing—for if he didn't forbid her to do it, I'm sure she'd have let me know where she is before this. And then, his not making any attempt to get you to forgive him for what he's done! I'm only a poor devil, without any education, but it don't seem to me that all that looks like a purpose to keep his promises."

Monsieur Vermoncey strove to reassure him, saying:

"You can always rely on my word!"

And the messenger would return to his stand, reflecting thus:

"The father's an honorable man, that's sure; he'll never go back on what he says; but what good does it do me to have the father's word, if the son don't keep his?"

Since he had seen his sister, since he had conceived the hope that she would be received into the Vermoncey family, Sans-Cravate had entirely changed his ways: he no longer drank too much; he had ceased to frequent wine shops; he was neither quarrelsome nor noisy as before; lastly, he had ceased to consort with Jean Ficelle, and all that worthy's insistence was powerless to induce him to leave his place or neglect his work.

Once only he had met Paul, who was then convalescent, and was crawling painfully along, on Bastringuette's arm; for it was the middle of the day, when Elina could not be with her lover.

Sans-Cravate felt that he quivered all over, and that his hand trembled, when he saw his former comrade's pale, emaciated face. If Paul had been alone, it is probable that Sans-Cravate would have thrown his arms about him and begged him to forgive the injury he had done him; but the presence of Bastringuette reawakened all the pangs of jealousy in his heart, and he walked quickly away, cursing anew his former friend and his former mistress.

But, whether because he was still too weak to work, or because he preferred not to encounter the man who had nearly killed him, Paul did not return to his former stand.

The cold was sharp, the snow fell in large flakes, and the people on the streets and the boulevard walked quickly and did not often stop. Sans-Cravate was in his place, seated on his *crochets*; on his head was a broad-brimmed woollen hat, which protected him from the snow; but, despite the severity of the weather, his neck was bare, as on the warmest day in summer.

"I say, well-named!" cried Jean Ficelle, as he drew near, blowing on his fingers; "do you propose to stay here just to let the snow fall on your nose? This is no weather for customers to take the trouble to come after us. Let's go and get under cover in a wine shop."

"No, I'm done with wine shops," replied Sans-Cravate, shortly.

"Oho! so it's all up with you, is it? You're not a man at all; you've forgotten how to laugh or drink or play cards. Good-day! you're lost to society."

Jean Ficelle walked away. Sans-Cravate had not been alone on the corner three minutes, when, in spite of the bad weather, a young woman in a coquettish little cap and silk apron, and struggling with a large umbrella to shelter her from the snow, walked up to the messenger and said to him:

"Are you Monsieur Sans-Cravate?"

"Yes, mamzelle."

"My mistress would like to speak to you right away."

"Your mistress! Oh! I guess I know you; aren't you with a lady who lives in Rue Neuve-Vivienne?"

"Yes, with Madame Baldimer."

"That's the name."

"Will you come?"

"Right away, mamzelle."

Sans-Cravate followed the lady's-maid, and as he walked along he remembered that he had often carried letters for Albert to the lady in question; he presumed that she had been the mistress of his sister's seducer, and he wondered what she could have to say to him. The thought disturbed and worried him, and he had a feeling of something like terror as he entered the house, which he recognized perfectly.

Mademoiselle Rosa showed the messenger into her mistress's apartment, instead of leaving him, as usual, in the anteroom; in the small salon, she pointed to a chair and said:

"Sit down and wait; madame will come directly."

When the maid had left him, Sans-Cravate looked about in surprise; he was exceedingly curious to know what this lady, who made him wait in a salon, could possibly have to say to him. Soon a door opened, and Madame Baldimer appeared.

She was handsomely dressed, as always, but her face was paler than usual, and her mind seemed to be absorbed by unpleasant thoughts. Having made sure that all the doors were closed, she walked toward Sans-Cravate, and, motioning to him to remain seated, took a chair and placed it in front of him.

The messenger was confounded; he hardly dared to raise his eyes to the beautiful woman's face, but waited for her to explain herself. She speedily broke the silence.

"You are Sans-Cravate?"

"Yes, madame."

"But that name is only a sobriquet which your comrades have given you; your true name is Étienne Renaud, and you are of Auvergne?"

"Yes, madame."

"You have a sister, of whom a lady at Clermont took charge, and that sister, who is now seventeen years old and very pretty, a young man from Paris fell in love with; he seduced her, ran away with her——"

"What, madame!—you know?"

"I know everything; I know all about Albert's conduct. Keep your seat, and listen to me. For a long time past, led by motives which you cannot understand, I have had Albert's every movement watched. I knew of his return to Paris a little more than two months ago; and of your sister's residence on Rue de Grenelle-Saint-Germain, and of her removal. Lastly, I know of your interview on Rue Grange-aux-Belles."

"But who can have told you—unless it was my sister—or Monsieur Albert?"

"Neither the one nor the other! Mon Dieu! you are a messenger, and yet you do not know that by the free use of money one can be informed of every act of a person whom one chooses to have watched! Now, listen to me: you flattered yourself that Albert would keep the promise he made your sister, that he would repair the wrong he had done her, by marrying her. He will do nothing of the sort. Albert is like most young men, inconstant and unfaithful. Possession very soon extinguishes his love. He was very much in love with your sister when he abducted her, but now he would cry out at the idea of being faithful to her; as for marrying her, he never dreamed of it; and since he has learned that Adeline is the sister of a messenger, he can't understand how anyone else can dream of such a marriage."

"The coward! the sneak!"

"And now, what do you suppose he has done, after travelling with your sister for two months, regretting his liberty and the pleasures of Paris every day, and cursing his folly?"

"Finish, madame, finish!"

"He has hired a little cottage at Lagny for the poor girl, and, after giving her a sum of money and promising to return, he has left her there, fully determined never to see her again."

"Great God! the villain! Ah! if that was true!"

"It is all true, and it rests only with you to be with your sister in a very short time. Here is her address at Lagny, on this paper; if you need money, take this purse. Take it; I am not offering you alms, but assisting you to avenge your sister, because your revenge is mine as well; because, if you have an outrage to wipe out, I have a crime, an infamous crime, to punish, and I have sworn a solemn oath to attain my object."

"I shall attain mine too, but I don't need money for that, madame," replied Sans-Cravate, pushing away the purse.

"At all events, you will not refuse these pistols; I fancy that they may be necessary to you."

As she spoke, Madame Baldimer took from her belt a magnificent pair of pistols and offered them to the messenger, fastening her eyes upon him, already aflame with the hope of vengeance.

Sans-Cravate pounced upon the weapons, crying:

"Ah! yes, madame; yes, these are what I want most of all! But where is he? where is he hiding? you must know that too. Oh! I mustn't let him escape me now!"

"Never fear; trust to me to bring you together. At this moment he is prowling about the outskirts of Paris; but he is likely to return at any time, for he is terribly bored to have to stay away. Wait until he is in Paris; I will let you know of his arrival. But go at once to your sister. Remember that she is alone, abandoned, and that she dares not appeal to you now."

"Ah! you are right, madame; poor Liline! I will go to her at once, and bring her back with me; this time she shan't leave me, I promise you."

"I anticipated your answer. Take this paper; at this address you will find a man with a carriage. I have engaged him for you, and he will take you to Lagny and bring you back with your sister."

"Thanks, madame, thanks a thousand times! I am off. My little Liline, who believed so fully in his promises! But

you will surely let me know, madame, as soon as he's in Paris?"

"You cannot doubt it."

"If I'm not at my stand, I live on Rue Saint-Lazare, corner of Rue Saint-Georges."

"I know where you live; and I tell you again that, as soon as Albert is in Paris, I will send you word."

"I count on it, madame; now, I will hurry off and get my sister; after that, I will find a way to avenge her."

Sans-Cravate put the pistols in his pocket; Madame Baldimer handed him the address, and he ran at full speed to the place indicated, where he found a carriage waiting; he jumped in, and shouted to the driver:

"To Lagny! you have been notified, engaged for me. Go at full speed, kill your horses; I am going after my poor sister, and then I'm going to kill the blackguard who seduced her, unless he consents to marry her."

The driver seemed indifferent to all this; but as he had been well paid, he drove rapidly and hardly stopped on the road; so that Sans-Cravate arrived at Lagny in a very short time.

He glanced at the address Madame Baldimer had given him, and inquired of a village woman, who directed him to "The Poplars," which was the name of the cottage he sought. He pointed out an inn and said to the driver:

"Go there and feed your horses; but do it at once and take what you want yourself in a hurry, for I shall return soon with my sister, and you must take us back to Paris on the run."

Sans-Cravate followed the directions he had received, and soon discovered a pretty little cottage surrounded by tall poplar trees, whose topmost branches waved back and forth over the roof. It had the aspect of a bourgeois residence; the shutters were painted green, there was a pretty gate, and flowering plants were in profusion on all sides.

"He was bound to give her a pretty cage, the villain!" thought Sans-Cravate, as he drew near to the house, "hoping that she would like it and keep quiet. Ah! he forgot that she had a brother, and that that brother is Sans-Cravate!"

The messenger rang at the gate, and a peasant girl answered the bell.

"Where is my sister? take me to my sister!" cried Sans-Cravate, pushing the girl roughly before him. She stared at him with a terrified expression; she thought that she had to do with a robber, and she was on the point of shrieking and calling for help. But Adeline had already appeared in the doorway, for, whenever the bell rang, she flattered herself that Albert had returned; she ran forward when she saw that it was a man; then fell into Sans-Cravate's arms, murmuring in a voice stifled by joy and tears:

"It is my brother! Oh! he will not abandon me!"

Sans-Cravate gazed at his sister, whose pale, thin face had undergone so great a change in two months that he would have hesitated before recognizing her.

Adeline led him into a room on the ground floor, and there, gazing at him anew, with her eyes full of tears, she said:

"You are angry with me, of course; the last time I saw you, you made me promise to wait for you, and, in spite of that, I went away. But he came back—and when he learned that I had found you, and that you had gone to beg his father to forgive us, he cried out that that was ridiculous, that his father would be furious, that he would separate us or prevent him from seeing me, and that there was nothing for us to do but leave Paris at once; I believed him—he urged me so hard—and I went with him. We travelled a long time; I kept imploring him to write to you to find out if you had been successful with his father, but he told me we must wait. At last, about a week ago, he brought me here, to this house, told me that I should have everything I desired, left me a lot of money, and went away, saying that he would return soon; so I am always expecting him, and when you rang I thought it was he."

"Poor sister!" said Sans-Cravate, gazing mournfully at the girl, who tried to banish the traces of her tears with a smile; "you will wait for him in vain; he won't come back, the dastard! he has abandoned you, because he don't mean to repair his crime."

"O my God! can it be possible that Albert doesn't love me? It can't be true!"

"Oh! you had guessed it already, I am sure; your pale face, the terrible change in your features since our last meeting, your eyes all red from crying. Oh! you've been unhappy, you've been grieving a long time—that's easy to see."

"Well! yes, brother; I admit that I have noticed for some time that Albert was not so pleasant and loving with me; in fact, he no longer seemed happy, but I thought he was afraid of his father's anger."

"His father! why, he has consented to your marriage."

"Can that be true? what happiness!"

"No, no, my poor Liline, don't be happy too soon! for it is your seducer himself who refuses to wipe out his crime and make you his wife."

"He refuses—Albert! Oh! no, my dear brother, that is impossible; at all events, when he knows—and I haven't dared to tell him that yet—I hoped to make him very happy when he came back, with such a pleasant surprise—ah! brother, when he knows that I am going to be a mother, do you think he will refuse to give a name to his child?"

As she spoke, Adeline hid her face on her brother's shoulder, and he held her for a moment in his arms.

"A mother!" he murmured; "you, a mother! Ah! yes, he must be hard-hearted indeed to abandon you if that is so; and yet—the young men of these days care as little about leaving a poor girl in trouble as they do about changing a coat. Never mind; I'll see this gentleman, I'll speak to him, and, sacrebleu! if he has any decent feelings left, I'll rake 'em up from the bottom of his heart. But meanwhile you must go with me; we must start this very minute."

"I must leave here—but suppose Albert should come back?"

"Don't you be alarmed! he'll be in Paris before long, and Paris is where I'm going to take you. Remember that you must trust me, believe what I say, and obey me. You know perfectly well that I won't deceive you; you know that your happiness and the honor of our family are what I care most about."

"Oh! yes, I do know it, brother."

"Then do what I tell you. Make haste and get together what things belong to you. But leave all the money and jewels that man has given you; for we'll show him that he's mistaken if he thinks he can pay for your dishonor with them. If he deserts you, you will stay with me; I have strong arms, and I'm no longer the sot and loafer I used to be.

No, no; I've had troubles of my own, you see; and trouble is like lead—it makes your head heavy. I'll tell you about it some day; meanwhile, I'll work to support you—and your child—and what I give you won't make you blush, at any rate. Go and do what I say, and be quick; there's a carriage waiting for us."

Adeline made no reply, but hastened to do her brother's bidding; she very soon got her things together and made a package of them, which Sans-Cravate took under one arm; he supported his sister with the other and said to the peasant, who stared at them with a stupefied expression:

"If the gentleman comes back and asks for the young lady he brought here, tell him that she went away with her brother—her brother, do you hear? As for her money and jewelry, he'll find them upstairs;—for you haven't taken any of 'em, have you, Liline?"

"No, brother," replied the girl, putting her hand to her breast; "nothing, except this little souvenir, with some of his hair in it."

As she spoke, she showed him a small glass locket, set in gold, in which there was a lock of hair. But Sans-Cravate put out his hand to take it, crying:

"No, no; keep nothing that came from him! What do you want of this souvenir?"

"Oh! brother, let me keep it, I beg you!" faltered the girl, falling on her knees; "for if he casts me off, it will be the only thing I shall have to give my child; he will have nothing else that belongs to his father!"

Sans-Cravate raised his sister, and turned his head aside so that she might not see the tears which he wiped away with his sleeve.

"All right! keep it," he said; "but let us go," and he led his sister away.

They soon reached the place where the carriage awaited them. Sans-Cravate helped his sister in, took his place beside her, and said to the driver:

"Now for Paris, corner of Rue Saint-Lazare and Rue Saint-Georges; a magnificent house, between a fruiterer and a grocer. If you go fast, I'll pay for a good big drink for you."

It was dark, and the journey was melancholy enough; for the brother and sister, both of whom were suffering the same torments, did not choose to talk about them, each for fear of increasing the other's unhappiness.

They arrived at last; Sans-Cravate kept his promise to the driver, and would have given him money too; but he declined it, for he was paid in advance. He drove away with his carriage, and the messenger, taking his sister's hand, said to her:

"Follow me, and we'll climb up to my diggings. Look you: don't expect to find anything very fine, and you'll be less surprised."

Sans-Cravate's lodging would have made an excellent pendant for Bastringuette's: it was under the eaves, like hers, and consisted of a bedroom and a closet; there was just the same amount of furniture, not a piece more; yet there was a vast difference between them, and they had not the same aspect at all: Sans-Cravate's quarters were as dirty and disordered as the flower girl's were clean and neat.

Having procured a light, the messenger said to his sister, who was looking sadly about:

"*Dame!* this is pretty bad, eh? you don't find any nice furniture here, like what your seducer gave you. But you're in your brother's room, and you can give your address without blushing."

"Mon Dieu! dear brother," replied the girl, seizing the messenger's hand, "you are mistaken if you think that I regret the luxurious life I have been leading. What do I care whether my furniture is walnut or mahogany? I never placed any value on that. Ah! the most beautiful apartment is the one to which one brings a joyful heart!"

"You are right, Liline. When the heart is satisfied, everything seems beautiful! But, still, it didn't use to be so bad here—because it was neat and clean and well dusted; there was a person who undertook to take care of my room, but—that person don't come any more, and since then I haven't had the heart to look after it—so it ain't surprising that it looks the way it does!"

"Well! I'll take that person's place, my dear, and you will see that I too know something about keeping house."

Sans-Cravate kissed his sister and installed her in his room; he gave her his bed, reserving for himself the closet, where he meant to throw a few bundles of straw on the floor; he was not hard to suit, and, so long as his sister could sleep tranquilly, he would be comfortable anywhere.

After a night which seemed very long to them both, because grief and anxiety banished sleep from their eyelids, Sans-Cravate left his closet on tiptoe and listened: his sister had fallen into a doze. He walked softly, in order not to rouse her, and placed on the table beside the bed all the money he possessed.

"There's enough for a little while," he thought; "our expenses won't be very large. I've put a few pieces away, thank God! since I've stopped going to the wine shop, and with Jean Ficelle; I'm mighty proud to have 'em to give her to-day. I'm beginning to think that it ain't the drinking men that have the most fun, but that the pleasures that work affords a man are the best and last the longest."

Sans-Cravate went to his usual place, where he sat down and waited.

"She promised to send me word," he said to himself, "as soon as he's back in Paris, and I'm sure she'll keep her word; for that woman looks to me like a hussy who has thought a long while about what she intended to do, and who won't falter on the road."

The day passed, and brought no change in the situation of the messenger and his sister. After sawing a cord of wood and doing several errands, Sans-Cravate returned to his sister and gave her the money he had earned.

"Here," he said, "this is what I'll do every day, and you must look after the food."

"And Albert?" queried the girl, sadly.

"No news. Patience. We must wait."

"But his father—why haven't you been to see him?"

"I have no business with the father now, but with the son; the father ain't the one who's got to marry you! He's given his consent, that's all we can ask of him; he can't force the young man."

"Force him! Oh! I don't want him to be forced, if he no longer loves me; he would be unhappy after he married me."

"Don't you worry, and don't you bother your head any more about it. It's my business now."

Liline wept and held her peace. Sans-Cravate let her weep, because his own experience taught him that there are griefs which admit of no consolation.

The next day, Sans-Cravate had been at his stand less than an hour when he saw Madame Baldimer's maid coming toward him. His heart gave a leap under his waistcoat, because he felt that he was about to learn something of importance.

Rosa went up to him and handed him a folded paper.

"My mistress told me to give you this," she said.

"Thanks, mamzelle," replied Sans-Cravate, taking the paper with a trembling hand.

The maid walked away, while the messenger unfolded the paper and read these words:

"He arrived last night; he is at home."

"At last!" exclaimed Sans-Cravate, crumpling the paper in his fingers; then he sprang to his feet, folded his *crochets*, and strode away toward Albert's residence. He was intensely excited, although he exerted himself to the utmost to control his emotion. He felt that his sister's future was about to be decided, and it was for her that he trembled.

Under the porte cochère he stopped, uncertain whether he ought not to call first upon Monsieur Vermoncey. But he reflected that, if Albert's father were warned of his intention, he would have his son watched and would prevent him from giving him satisfaction; and the result of his reflections was that he ought now to deal with Albert alone.

Sans-Cravate went rapidly up to the young man's apartment. He rang, and a new servant opened the door.

"I wish to speak to Monsieur Albert," said Sans-Cravate.

"Monsieur Albert is not in," replied the servant, in an almost insolent tone.

"He must be, for me."

"But my master returned from travelling last night. He is tired, and cannot receive anyone."

"He will receive me, for I must speak to him. Go and tell him that Sans-Cravate is here, and that I won't leave the house without seeing him. He must know that we have got to have an interview, and it's better to have it now. Go, my boy. I know that there's two entrances, but I've got my eye on the courtyard; and if your master should try to skip, I'll jump through the window and land on his shoulders; that would interfere with his running."

The servant stared at Sans-Cravate in amazement, but went and told his master. He returned in a very short time, beckoned to Sans-Cravate to follow him, and ushered him into Albert's bedroom.

Young Vermoncey had just risen; he was dressed in a robe de chambre, and was lying back carelessly in a capacious easy-chair. His face was slightly pale when Sans-Cravate entered the room; but he seemed perfectly placid, and said, with an unembarrassed manner, and with something very like a smile:

"Is it you, Sans-Cravate? I expected a call from you. Come and sit down, and let us have a talk."

Surprised at this reception, which aroused the most cheering hopes in his heart, Sans-Cravate seated himself on the edge of the chair that the young man indicated, and stammered:

"Yes—yes, Monsieur Albert, it's me. You certainly had good reason to think I would come; for, you see, this thing's got to be settled! And I love my sister, my poor Liline, so dearly! But I hope that you still love her, too?"

Albert threw himself back in his chair and held his feet to the fire, as he replied:

"Yes, my dear Sans-Cravate; your sister is fascinating—and as gentle and sweet as an angel. I loved her dearly, and I still love her. So I mean her to be happy—that is my most earnest desire."

"Oh! then it's all right, monsieur!" cried the messenger, joyfully; "you mean to make my sister happy—that is to say, you will keep the promise you made to her when you took her away from Auvergne. Ah! you make me very happy, too, and you are an excellent young man."

"When I say that I want to see your sister happy, Sans-Cravate," rejoined Albert, balancing himself in his chair, "I mean that, to atone for my thoughtlessness, I propose to assure her comfort, her future. If I made promises, they were mere words, such as all young men say to pretty girls, which do not bind one to anything."

Sans-Cravate pushed his chair away; he turned pale, but fastened his eyes on Albert, and exclaimed, without a trace of his former hesitation:

"We have got to a point where we don't agree, but, *sacrédié!* we must settle on something. Monsieur Albert, didn't you seduce my sister, a simple, innocent maid, who had no idea of love? Will you deny that you abused her innocence, and that you induced her to leave her home and her patroness, only by swearing that you would marry her?"

"Mon Dieu! I won't deny anything! I have told you already that I admit all that. But, once more, every young man takes fifty such oaths; so much the worse for those who believe them!"

"Then you don't intend to marry my sister?"

Albert threw himself back in his chair again and began to laugh.

"Marry your sister!" he exclaimed. "Nonsense, Sans-Cravate! Why, you can't think of such a thing! Would such a marriage be well-assorted? Come, be reasonable; you are an excellent fellow—I have no doubt of that; but what would people say if I should make you my brother-in-law? They would say that I'd gone crazy!"

"Take care, monsieur!" said Sans-Cravate, struggling to control his anger. "Don't throw insults in my face. Messenger as I am, I'm a better man than you are at this moment!"

"But, for God's sake, Sans-Cravate, listen to me! Is it possible for a young man to marry all the women he makes love to? Since when have your morals been so severe? Haven't you been in the habit of carrying my love letters for me? haven't you been in the secret of all my intrigues? You knew that I had three or four mistresses at once, and, far from blaming me, you were the first to laugh about it."

"True—you are right, monsieur. I did your dirty work for you. I was wrong—and there was someone who told me

so at the time. And yet, that same someone deceived me."

"I tell you again, Sans-Cravate, that I am sorry I ever spoke to your sister, who was an innocent, virtuous girl. But still we must have mercy on all sinners. Once more, I will settle a handsome allowance on her, and——"

Sans-Cravate rose and stamped on the floor, crying:

"Ten thousand devils! Don't talk about money! You fine gentlemen think you have done everything, when you have undone the strings of your purse. I tell you that marriage, and nothing else, can undo the wrong you have done. Your father felt it, for he gave his consent to the marriage. So you see, monsieur, there's nothing to prevent it."

"Yes," said Albert, with some irritation, "I know that you have seen my father and extorted his consent; furthermore, I will not deny that, when I came home last night, after embracing me, he told me of the promise he had given you; but I told him what my intentions were, and swore that nothing would induce me to change them."

"Nothing!" muttered Sans-Cravate; "nothing! Not even if I should tell you that you are a father—that my sister is carrying a child—that she implores you to give it its father's name? and that is the truth!"

Albert lowered his eyes; he was deeply moved, and tried in vain to conceal his emotion. Sans-Cravate walked toward him.

"Well! will you cast off that innocent creature?"

Albert was silent for some moments. At last he replied, in a low voice:

"I will provide for the child as well as the mother. But I cannot—it is impossible for me to marry Adeline, for such a marriage would cover me with ridicule."

"That is your last word, monsieur?"

"Yes, Sans-Cravate."

The messenger took from his pocket the pistols Madame Baldimer had given him, and called Albert's attention to them.

"Then this is my last word," he said. "I am ready when you are."

The young man seemed more surprised than alarmed.

"What's this? do you want to fight me, Sans-Cravate?" he said, glancing at the weapons.

"That surprises you, does it? You thought that I would allow myself to be dishonored and say nothing; that I would be satisfied with your excuses? No, no, I must have something more than that. Come, I am waiting for you, monsieur."

"I am sorry, Sans-Cravate, that I cannot give you the satisfaction you ask; but it is out of the question. A young man in my position doesn't fight duels with a messenger!"

"Then a man of your position is content to be a coward and a blackguard. Then he prefers to be struck and beaten and strangled; and that's what I'll do to you, if you refuse to fight me."

As he spoke, Sans-Cravate, beside himself with rage, sprang at Albert, seized him by the collar, shook him violently, and struck him across the face with the butt of one of his pistols. The young man turned purple, and shouted:

"I will fight you, monsieur; yes, you are right; we must fight."

"Ah! that's very lucky!" said the messenger, relaxing his grasp. "Shall it be right away? I'm in a hurry, you see!"

"One always has some arrangements to make before fighting, monsieur."

"I haven't got any."

"I will be ready in two hours. It isn't nine o'clock yet; at eleven, at the latest, be——"

"Behind Romainville Forest, on the slope from Pantin; there are some quarries near there, and we shan't be disturbed."

"Very good; I will be there. Shall you have a second?"

"What for?"

"True; between us, seconds are unnecessary. I shall come in a carriage, with my servant only."

"As you choose. I will go and wait for you, monsieur, and I hope you won't let me take cold."

Sans-Cravate left the house and started at once for the rendezvous. He walked less quickly now, knowing that he had plenty of time before him. Moreover, he was less excited; the certainty that his vengeance was near at hand appeased his anger. He reflected profoundly. At the moment one is about to risk his life he remembers the persons whom it would be most painful to him to leave forever; and, in spite of himself, Sans-Cravate found that Bastringuette's face often forced its way in among his recollections.

It was hardly half-past ten when the messenger reached the spot agreed upon. He sat on the ground and waited. He was on the slope of Romainville Forest; at his feet were plaster kilns and a brick kiln; in front of him was the village of Pantin; but the road in that direction, bordered with high hedges enclosing gardens, was silent and deserted. To the right were the low hills upon which stands the fortress that commands the whole plain; and in the hollow at the left, four rows of poplar trees, forming a rectangle, seemed to indicate a private estate or a promenade: it was the Pantin cemetery.

Sans-Cravate let his eyes wander in all directions, but frequently turned them toward Pantin, for that was the only direction from which a carriage could reach the rendezvous; so he presumed that Albert would come that way. He took his pistols from his pocket, made sure that they were properly loaded, and heaved a profound sigh.

The weather was fine, but cold. The trees were without leaves, and few people passed through the wood; now and then, a peasant went down the hill toward Pantin, a quarryman appeared at the door of his hut, or a soldier on the fortifications; but none of them paid any attention to the messenger.

But as he looked about, Sans-Cravate saw a woman come out of the wood and walk slowly down toward the cemetery. She was a long distance from him, but he could tell by her dress and her bearing that she was not a peasant. A large hat, over which a veil was thrown, made it impossible to distinguish her features; and still Sans-Cravate said to himself as he looked after her:

"It seems to me that I know that woman."

While he was trying to think who it could be, he heard the sound of carriage wheels in the direction of Pantin; and

in a moment a cab appeared on the village street, and stopped as near as possible to the foot of the hill leading to the wood.

Sans-Cravate paid no further attention to the woman; he hurried down the slope and soon found himself face to face with Albert, who had left his carriage.

The young man greeted the messenger with a friendly nod, in which there was no trace of resentment or anger, and said, pointing to the cemetery:

"Let us go there; nobody but the men working in the brick kiln can see us, and they will not think of interfering with us; on the contrary, they will be grateful to us for affording them such an entertaining spectacle."

Sans-Cravate made no reply, but went with Albert; the servant walked behind, carrying a case of pistols.

When they reached the road that skirted the cemetery, Albert said:

"I see no reason why we should go any farther.—Give me my pistols, Joseph."

The servant opened the case and, trembling like a leaf, handed the pistols to his master. Meanwhile, the messenger, who had taken his from his pocket, offered them to his adversary, saying:

"Would you prefer to take one of these and give me one of yours? It shall be as you choose."

Albert glanced at Sans-Cravate's weapons, and exclaimed:

"The devil! you have some very handsome pistols there, Sans-Cravate! It's a strange thing, but the more I examine them, the more certain I feel that I know them, that I have seen them somewhere."

"It's quite possible, monsieur, for I got them from an acquaintance of yours. It was Madame Baldimer who gave them to me."

"Baldimer!" ejaculated Albert. "Ah! yes, it was in her hands that I saw them. I can remember her saying to me laughingly, more than once: 'I mean to kill you with these pistols.'—It seems that she did not say it in jest. Clearly that woman has a bitter grudge against me.—Keep your own weapons, and I will keep mine, and let us take our places."

Albert walked away some fifteen paces, then asked:

"Is this satisfactory to you?"

"Yes, monsieur," Sans-Cravate replied, in a trembling voice.

"Pull yourself together, my poor Sans-Cravate; you seem agitated."

"It's true, monsieur, I am trembling; though you may be sure that it ain't with fear. I've never fought with anything but fists, you see. A man gets hurt that way, but not killed. At all events, I never tried to fight unfair. And when I think that with this little steel tube I may kill you—— Look you, monsieur—if you would—it rests with you——"

"Enough! enough, Sans-Cravate! let's not continue our conversation of this morning. You are the insulted party—fire first."

"No, monsieur; I won't begin."

"It's your right."

"I insulted you this morning, by shaking you; it's your place to begin."

"Listen: my servant will clap his hands three times, and at the third we will fire together."

"That's all right."

Albert told his servant what he was to do. He clapped his hands, turning his head so that he could not see the combatants. At the third signal, Sans-Cravate fired; there was no second report, but Albert fell in the road.

Sans-Cravate ran to the young man, who had received the bullet in his side and was bleeding freely. He threw himself on his knees, weeping; but Albert held out his hand to him and tried to smile.

"You have done your duty—don't be cut up. If I die, you will see that I haven't forgotten your sister."

"Oh! you won't die, I hope. This wound may not be fatal——"

"Take me to the carriage, and tell them to take me back to my father."

Albert had no strength to say more; he lost consciousness. Sans-Cravate raised him from the ground, and two plasterers, attracted by the report of the pistol, helped him to carry the wounded man to the carriage. Sans-Cravate tried to stop the flow of blood by tying his handkerchief over the wound. Joseph entered the carriage, and seated himself so that he could support his master. Sans-Cravate thought of going with them, but he felt that he lacked courage to take Albert back to his father, so he allowed the carriage to drive away without him.

Two hours had passed since the duel, and Sans-Cravate was still wandering about the fields, uncertain what to do, and praying fervently that Albert would not die of his wound. At last, he decided to return to Paris. But when he reached the city, he dared not go to his sister; for he feared that when she saw him she would divine what had happened, and he did not wish to confess that he had fought with her seducer, until he had some definite information as to the wounded man's condition. To go to his usual stand and remain there quietly would have been impossible to him, so he wandered through the streets at random.

When it began to grow dark, Sans-Cravate could restrain his impatience no longer; he felt that he must know in what condition Albert was, so he bent his steps toward his house.

"The doctors must have given their opinions of his wound before now," he thought; "I'll ask someone, and I won't go back to my sister till I am satisfied about his condition."

Having determined upon this course, Sans-Cravate was soon in front of Monsieur Vermoncey's house on Rue Caumartin. The porte cochère was still open; he went in, and stopped at the concierge's lodge, but found nobody there; whereupon he decided to go upstairs and question the servants. When he came to the door of Albert's apartment, it was not closed, and he saw several lights in the anteroom; but he saw no person, although the other doors were open; that solitude and confusion froze his heart, for in it all there was a something silent and depressing which seemed to denote the presence of death.

The messenger did not know what to do, but he realized that he must decide upon something. He entered the apartment, but walked very softly and carefully, as if he were afraid of waking someone. He passed through the room adjoining the anteroom, and was about to enter another room, the door of which was open, when he heard a sound as of sobbing. He put his head forward and saw Monsieur Vermoncey sitting in a chair, with his face buried in his

hands, and apparently in the throes of utter despair.

Sans-Cravate had no strength either to go forward or to retreat; his legs gave way under him, he sank on a couch, and sat there, completely overwhelmed; for he divined only too readily the cause of that wretched father's grief.

At that moment another door leading into the room where Monsieur Vermoncey was, on the opposite side from Sans-Cravate, was suddenly thrown open, and a woman appeared. The messenger recognized the figure and the hat that had attracted his attention just before the duel. The woman walked up to Monsieur Vermoncey, with a haughty air, threw aside her hat and veil, and asked:

"Do you recognize me, monsieur?"

Sans-Cravate was petrified when he saw that it was Madame Baldimer. Monsieur Vermoncey raised his eyes, which were filled with tears, and seemed terror-stricken when they fell upon the person who stood before him.

"You are the woman, madame, who swore to accomplish my son's ruin, and you have come doubtless to gloat over my despair; for my poor Albert is dead! he breathed his last in my arms, only a moment after he was brought home. But what had that unhappy boy done to you that you should be so bent upon his destruction?"

"He, monsieur—he had done nothing. Indeed, I could have loved him well, if he had not been your son; but by depriving you of this last child, the remaining fruit of your marriage, I have avenged my sister—my poor Marie!"

"Marie!"

"Yes, monsieur; Marie Delbart, the young seamstress whom you seduced before your marriage. She had a sister, ten years younger than herself, whom a distant relative had taken with him to America."

"Yes—I think I remember."

"Marie must sometimes have spoken to you of that young sister, who loved her as a daughter loves her mother, and who wept bitterly when she was forced to leave her. Well, monsieur, before she died, Marie wrote me a letter in which she told me the story of her misfortunes, begging me, if I ever returned to France, to do my utmost to find her child and avenge her on her unworthy seducer. That letter was not delivered to me until I had attained my majority; that was in accordance with Marie's wish; but I was then married to a wealthy planter, Monsieur Baldimer, who was much older than I, but had raised me to a position I had never dared to hope for. I should have liked to return to France at once, to carry out my sister's wishes, but my husband was unwilling to take the journey, and I had to wait. About fifteen months ago, Monsieur Baldimer died; I turned all my property into cash and returned to France, my native land, having taken an oath to fulfil Marie's last wishes. But to find her child was almost impossible. She had remembered, however, the name of the midwife who attended her when she became a mother, and who must have aided you to carry out your shameful determination to send your son to the Foundling Hospital. By dint of careful searching, I succeeded some time ago in finding that woman, who is now very old."

Monsieur Vermoncey gazed at Madame Baldimer with an anxious expression, and faltered:

"You have found her! Ah! I have sought her in vain! Well, madame—go on—that unfortunate child?——"

"She remembered all the details of the affair. My sister was then living at Saint-Cloud. When she carried the child away, ostensibly to a nurse, but really in accordance with your orders, to Paris, to be brought up with all those unhappy creatures who have no family, that woman, thinking that there ought to be some way of recognizing the child, if you should ever want to see him again, burned a little cross on his left forearm, and wrote on a slip of paper: 'His name is Paul de Saint-Cloud.'"

At those words, Sans-Cravate started in surprise and muttered:

"Great God! is it possible?"

But his movement and his exclamation were not heard, and Madame Baldimer continued:

"Armed with this information, I went to the asylum. After many inquiries, I found out that the child who bore that name had been taken away, ten years before, by a respectable tradesman, who had adopted him. But the tradesman's name was half effaced, and it was impossible for me to learn anything more definite.—As for you, monsieur, it was easy enough for me to learn all about you. I learned that, after having a numerous family, you had lost your wife and three of your children, and that you had only one son left, on whom all your love was lavished; and I said to myself that divine justice, which had already taken away three of your children, ought not to leave you this last one, since you had cast off the one my poor sister gave you. You see, monsieur, I was justified in relying upon divine justice."

"Enough! enough, madame!" murmured Monsieur Vermoncey, covering his face with his hands. "Ah! I am severely punished for a fault of my youth. My Albert is no more. I am alone in the world, for I shall never succeed in finding the child that Marie gave me, whom I would be only too happy now to call my son! Ah! there is nothing left for me but to die, too."

Monsieur Vermoncey's voice grew fainter, and as he finished speaking he succumbed to his grief and swooned. Madame Baldimer pulled the bellrope and called for help; several servants hurried to the spot, and passed Sans-Cravate on their way to their master.

The messenger took advantage of the confusion to leave the room where he was; and he went forth from the apartment and the house without attracting attention. He walked slowly homeward; but as he was about to enter his sister's presence, he stopped, for he realized that what he had to tell her would deal her a cruel blow. He knew that he could conceal the fact of Albert's death from her for some time, but sooner or later she must be told, and Sans-Cravate reflected that it was never well to postpone the news of a disaster; for then one always has before one the prospect of a distressing scene to come; whereas, when once the tears are shed, one can at least hope that time will dry them.

Adeline was anxious about her brother, whom she had not seen since the morning. When she heard him come in, she uttered a little cry of joy, and would have run into his arms; but when she saw his pale, distressed face, she paused and began to tremble, for she saw tears in his eyes as well.

"What has happened, in heaven's name?" she asked. "Have you seen Albert? does he still refuse to see me?"

"Yes," murmured her brother, looking at the floor. "He cast you off, he spoke contemptuously of you—and I have punished him for it."

"O mon Dieu! what do you mean?"

"That you have no one but me to support you now; but I will never fail you."

Adeline was completely crushed; sobs choked her utterance; but at last the tears came in torrents.

"That is right," said her brother; "cry, my poor Liline, shed tears for the fate of that young man who had more courage than honorable feeling; and for me too, for I was compelled to punish him, and I shall always have that terrible sight before my eyes. But remember that you are a mother, and that you must live for your child."

Despite his profound sorrow over Albert's death, Sans-Cravate's mind constantly recurred to what he had learned concerning Paul, his former comrade.

"He's the man," he thought; "there's no doubt of it—he's Monsieur Vermoncey's son, and it rests with me to give him the name and rank and fortune that belong to him. But he deceived me shamefully; he took Bastringuette away from me—the woman I loved—yes, and love still! He's with her now, for I met him leaning on the faithless hussy's arm; and if I helped him to a fortune, he'd enjoy it with her! No, no! *sacrédié!* that shan't be. I ain't virtuous enough to return good for evil, and I'll keep my secret!"

XXIX

A REPUTATION

Monsieur Vermoncey, wholly absorbed by his grief, lived in strict retirement and saw no one; but, as he did not wish it known that his son had been killed by a messenger,—for the knowledge might have led to a disclosure of the duel, and would have reflected little credit on his son's memory,—Monsieur Vermoncey, knowing that Albert's servant was the only witness of that fatal event, had given Joseph a considerable sum and sent him back to his province, after causing him to spread the report through the neighborhood, and among his confrères, that his young master had fought with one of his friends, after a quarrel of which he did not know the subject. And no one had doubted the truth of the story, because it was much more probable than that Albert had fought a duel with a messenger.

Nearly a month had passed since the events that resulted in Albert's death, when a short, stout young man, dressed with ostentatious elegance, alighted from a cabriolet one morning in front of Monsieur Vermoncey's residence, and, having inserted his monocle in his eye to make sure that he had made no mistake, entered the house and called out to the concierge:

"I am going up to see my friend Monsieur Albert Vermoncey; I believe he has returned from his trip to Normandie, and I have a thousand things to say to him."

The concierge ran after Tobie Pigeonnier,—for it was he, transformed into a showy and self-confident *lion*,—and stopped him at the foot of the stairs, saying:

"Mon Dieu! monsieur, don't go so fast; it's no use. Don't you know what has happened?"

"What do you mean?"

"Poor Monsieur Albert is dead."

"Dead! Great God!"

"Yes, monsieur; he was killed in a duel."

"Killed in a duel?"

Tobie looked at the concierge with a doubtful expression, and tried to read in the man's eyes whether he was making fun of him.

"Look you, concierge," he continued; "are you quite sure of what you say? Once before, there was a report that Albert had been killed in a duel, and I know that was a lie."

"Alas! monsieur, I am only too sure."

"How long has he been dead?"

"A month, the day after to-morrow, monsieur. I remember that fatal day perfectly well; they brought the poor fellow home in a cab, with a bullet in his side; I went for the doctor; and when he tried to take out the bullet, the wounded man shut his eyes—and it was all over."

"Albert had returned to Paris, then?"

"Yes, monsieur; he came back first after he'd been gone quite a long while, but he only stayed about a week and then went off again. When he fought this duel, he'd only come home the night before."

"Whom did he fight with? what was it about?"

"Mon Dieu! monsieur, nobody knows; the poor young man died so soon; he wasn't able to say anything; he didn't take anybody with him for a second but Joseph, his servant, who told us that his master fought a duel with pistols near Pantin, with a young man he, Joseph, didn't know, and who didn't have any second. You see, he hadn't been in Monsieur Albert's service long. As to the cause of the quarrel, he didn't know anything about it. I remember seeing a messenger go up to Monsieur Albert's rooms that day; I suppose he came to bring the challenge. That's all I know."

"It's all very obscure. Where is this Joseph? I should like to talk with him."

"He's gone back to his province. As Monsieur Albert was dead, Monsieur Vermoncey didn't keep him. Ah! that poor man—he's terribly broken up; he don't go out, nor see anyone. But, if you'd like to try to see him, monsieur——"

"No, no, it's not necessary; I have no desire to disturb his grief.—Well, as poor Albert is dead, there's nothing for me to do but go away."

Tobie Pigeonnier returned to his cabriolet, reflecting profoundly on what he had learned. He alighted on Boulevard des Italiens, and stalked proudly into Tortoni's, where he found Mouillot and Balivan, the two loyal habitués.

The young men exclaimed in surprise when they saw Tobie smilingly draw near, take a seat at their table, and order chocolate, rolls and butter, with the air of a man who is not afraid to spend his money.

"Oh, heaven! oh, heaven! can I believe my eyes?" sang Mouillot; "'tis he! 'tis he in very truth! he has not gone to

Russia or the Marquesas, as we supposed!"

"And he is dressed like several milords," observed Balivan.

"And he has come to withdraw his olive from circulation."

"Yes, messieurs," rejoined Tobie; "I am rich—very rich; my aunt is dead—that respectable lady of whom I have often spoken to you, and with whom I expected to go into partnership. She is dead, and I am her heir; she left me a magnificent business."

"In what line?"

"In all lines. I may go on with the business; I have not decided yet. As for that unlucky olive, it isn't my fault that I haven't redeemed it sooner; I don't know Monsieur Varinet's address."

"You ought to have asked us."

"I never meet you anywhere."

"Bah! what a flimsy excuse! we are at this café every morning. But, never mind; if you are anxious to pay Varinet, he is to join us here soon."

"Oh! then I'll wait for him."

"And do you know that poor Albert——"

"Is dead; yes, I know it."

"Killed in a duel—and no one knows by whom! Isn't it a most extraordinary thing?"

Tobie pursed his lips, frowned, and gazed at the ceiling, murmuring:

"Ah! things happen sometimes in the world that one can't talk about; but people always end by discovering the truth! You surely can understand that the man who killed Albert is not likely to go about boasting of it, because he is probably much affected himself."

And Tobie took out his handkerchief and blew his nose several times, trying to make them think that he was weeping.

Mouillot and Balivan stared at each other in amazement; and the former muttered, under his breath:

"Nonsense! it isn't possible!"

Tobie was only at his fifth roll, when Monsieur Varinet arrived with Dupétrain. The first bowed very coolly to Pigeonnier, but that gentleman made haste to say to him:

"I owe you no end of apologies, monsieur, for remaining in your debt so long; but chance seemed to have determined to keep us apart; however, as I have found you at last, I will, with your permission, settle my account with you."

Varinet lost no time in taking out his purse, overjoyed to be rid of the olive stone, which he produced and handed to Tobie, saying:

"Here is your fetich, monsieur."

"I don't recognize it," said Tobie, scrutinizing the olive.

"You have left it in my hands so long, monsieur," retorted the young man with the white eyelashes, with some asperity, "that it has had ample time to change. If you had redeemed it the next day, as the custom is with gambling debts, it wouldn't have shrunk to its present size."

Tobie had nothing to say; he took out his wallet, and opened it in such a way that they could all see a number of banknotes, one of which he handed to Varinet, saying:

"One more or less doesn't make much show when you have plenty."

"That wallet of yours would put Célestin to rights just now," said Mouillot.

"Why so?"

"Because he's in prison for debt—yes, been there two months."

"No, really? in prison for debt! poor Célestin! I'll go and see him; and I'll see that he's released."

Having said this with a swagger of importance, Tobie bade his friends adieu and left the café; but he had not walked thirty yards on the boulevard, when he was overtaken by Monsieur Dupétrain, who passed his arm through his, saying:

"My dear Monsieur Pigeonnier, I have something very important to tell you—a warning—in fact, something that it is well you should know, so that you may be on your guard."

"What does this mean?" cried Tobie, taking alarm at once; "does anyone think of robbing me? Somebody has found out that I have come into my aunt's property, and means to rob me, I suppose?"

"It isn't that at all; in the first place, it's hardly probable that anyone who meant to rob you would have taken me into his confidence."

"No, that is true; but you tell me to be on my guard."

"You see, I take an interest in you, Monsieur Pigeonnier, for you believe in magnetism, and I remember that, the last time we dined together, I was going to tell you a very interesting anecdote concerning the extraordinary effects of somnambulism; it was this: A lady, whose husband was travelling, desired to know whether——"

Tobie abruptly dropped Monsieur Dupétrain's arm, and exclaimed impatiently:

"Was it because you proposed to tell me that, that you warned me to be on my guard?"

"Oh! I beg your pardon—I didn't tell you, did I? This is what it is: I met Monsieur Plays not long ago, at an evening party; you know Monsieur Plays, Madame Plays's husband?"

"Yes," Tobie replied, with a fatuous air, "an excellent sort of man; but I know his wife much better. Well! what did our dear Plays say to you?"

"Our dear Plays—as it pleases you to call him so—asked me, in the course of conversation, if I knew you; and, on my replying in the affirmative, urged me, if I should happen to see you, to beg you to avoid him, inasmuch as his wife has ordered him to kill you, because, it seems, you insulted and deceived her shamefully; that is all Plays chose to tell me."

Tobie roared with laughter.

"Gad! that is charming! delicious! Ah! she employs her husband to kill me, now! I can guess why. Poor husband! luckily, he is good enough to warn me. I thank you for your warning, my dear Monsieur Dupétrain, but I assure you that Monsieur Plays doesn't worry me at all; he's no duellist, and, besides, I shall only have to say a single word to him to—— Alas! I would to God I had no duel to reproach myself for!"

Again Tobie drew his handkerchief, as if deeply moved.

"I am delighted that this affair doesn't worry you," rejoined Dupétrain; "in that case, we can return to that anecdote that I didn't have time to finish: A young lady, whose husband——"

"Excuse me, Monsieur Dupétrain, but I have an important appointment; I will listen to it some other time, by your leave."

Two days after this conversation, Tobie, who had become a constant attendant at balls, receptions, concerts, and the theatre, since he had inherited his Aunt Abraham's property, found himself face to face with Monsieur Plays and his wife in the foyer of the Opéra.

Madame Plays stopped, cast a withering glance at Tobie, and nudged her husband.

"There he is," she said.

"Who?" queried Monsieur Plays.

"The insolent wretch who amused himself at my expense, and whom you must punish!"

Monsieur Plays turned pale as death, and clung to his wife's arm, muttering:

"My corns hurt me terribly! the weather will change to-morrow; it's a sure sign of rain!"

"I'm not talking about your corns, monsieur; there's the young man who was responsible for my carrying a cigar in my bosom two months, and I must have satisfaction, monsieur. I will sit here on this bench, and I shan't lose sight of you. Go and challenge Monsieur Pigeonnier; if you don't, never hope to enter my boudoir again! you understand, monsieur; now, go!"

The superb Herminie seated herself at one end of the foyer, sustaining with much self-possession the glances bestowed upon her by the men who were walking back and forth there during the entr'acte. As for Monsieur Plays, who was compelled to go and pick a quarrel with a fellow creature—he would have preferred, at that moment, to be at Algiers, or on the railroad.

Tobie had recognized the happy couple; and he continued to stroll about the foyer, looking at himself in the mirrors, and trying to keep his monocle in his eye. Suddenly a timid voice addressed him; he turned, and saw Monsieur Plays, whose manner was anything but provocative, and who saluted him very courteously, saying:

"Have I the honor of speaking to Monsieur Tobie Pigeonnier?"

"Why, it's Monsieur Plays! Delighted to meet you! How's your health, Monsieur Plays?"

"Very good, thanks; but I am suffering a good deal with my corns. My boots hurt me. Have you any?"

"Boots?"

"No, corns."

"That species of discomfort is entirely unknown to me."

"Ah! you are very lucky!"

At this point, Monsieur Plays turned, and saw his wife looking daggers at him; he remembered what she demanded of him, and continued in an undertone:

"My dear Monsieur Pigeonnier, I must tell you that my wife has sent me to you, because she thinks you—you made sport of her when you told her that you had killed Monsieur Albert Vermoncey in a duel. Women take offence at trifles, you know; and Herminie is very sensitive. You gave her a cigar, too. In short, she's furious with you. So far as I am concerned, I am sure that you had no intention to be disrespectful to her, but she insists that I shall demand satisfaction. It's perfect nonsense; we must arrange it somehow——"

Tobie assumed a most solemn air, and interrupted Monsieur Plays.

"Your excellent wife is right, perfectly right, and I am not surprised that she has told you to kill me. Indeed, I agree with her."

Monsieur Plays shifted from one leg to the other, and looked uneasily at the little man, faltering:

"What! you—you want—to fight?"

"Hush, and listen to me! I tell you again that I should deserve all her anger and yours, if I had acted as she thinks. But it is not so; and now she is only too thoroughly revenged on poor Albert! In our first affair, I thought I had killed him, but I was mistaken. Later, I had my revenge. When I learned of Albert's return to Paris, a month ago, I instantly sent him a challenge by a messenger, and he accepted it. Ah! he was a man of the nicest honor. We fought with pistols, near Pantin. I wounded Albert in the side, and he breathed his last the same day. Tell me, monsieur, if your good wife has any reason now to complain of me, when I have fought twice for her, when to avenge her I have killed one of my most intimate friends?"

"You are a brave fellow!" said Monsieur Plays, shaking Tobie's hand; "I never doubted it. So poor Albert is really dead this time?"

"Yes, unfortunately; for I will confess to you that it grieves me deeply."

"I believe it, oh! I believe it. Adieu, Monsieur Pigeonnier! It is my turn now to apologize to you."

"Your obedient servant, Monsieur Plays!"

Tobie sauntered away, and Herminie's spouse returned to his better half and repeated all that the young man had just told him. Madame Plays listened impatiently, then exclaimed:

"It isn't true. He has made a fool of you again. Albert isn't dead."

"But, my dear love, he seemed to be deeply moved, and then he gave me all those details."

"Lies! However, we will soon know the truth; and woe to you, monsieur, if you have allowed yourself to be hoodwinked! Come! Come!"

"Where, madame?"

"To Monsieur Vermoncey's house. Oh! I won't be deceived this time."

Herminie seized her husband's arm, dragged him away from the Opéra, made him take a cab with her, and soon arrived at the house in which Albert formerly lived. There she questioned the concierge and learned that young Vermoncey had, in fact, been killed in a duel a month before; and all the details of the melancholy event that were given her agreed perfectly with what Tobie had said.

Thereupon Madame Plays made a great outcry, sobbed, wept, tore her handkerchief, had an attack of hysteria, writhed on the floor of the concierge's lodge, and called Tobie a monster and an assassin.

Monsieur Plays succeeded, not without difficulty, in taking his wife home, and all the way she kept asking him if he knew what she had done with the piece of a cigar that had belonged to Albert; she declared that she would give a thousand francs to anybody who would find it for her.

During the next few days, Madame Plays told everybody she saw that it was Monsieur Tobie Pigeonnier who had killed young Albert Vermoncey in a duel; and as nobody contradicted the story, and as he who was reported to be the victor was the first to confirm it, it soon came to be regarded as authentic; and in society little Tobie was looked upon as a duellist whom it was not prudent to provoke.

XXX

AN OLD LADY

Adeline was still as melancholy as ever, but she had ceased to weep, before her brother at all events, for she realized that it added to his sorrow and regret that, for her sake, he had been obliged to do something which filled his heart with remorse, even while he told himself that he could not have acted differently.

Sans-Cravate worked with the greatest zeal and courage; he was not the same man as before. Since his duel he had become as gentle as a child, and, far from seeking a quarrel with anyone, he was always the first to try to compose the disputes that arose in his presence. Instead of getting tipsy, as he used frequently to do, he avoided the temptation to drink, never entered a wine shop, and ate all his meals with his sister, to whom he carried faithfully each day all the money he had earned.

In accordance with her brother's advice, Adeline had written to her father, confessing her fault and telling him frankly the whole story of her conduct, as well as the events that had resulted from it. She had not long to wait for a reply; old Père Renaud wrote his daughter that he forgave her, and that his arms would always be open to her whenever she chose to come back to him.

"When your child is born," said Sans-Cravate, "and you are strong enough to stand the journey, we will go back to the province; I will settle down there, too; I won't leave you any more, for a strong man with plenty of courage can work anywhere, and I've had quite enough of Paris! When you no longer have a friend or a woman you care for in a place, you leave it without regret."

A few days after Albert's death, a messenger from Monsieur Vermoncey came to the humble apartment occupied by the brother and sister. He brought a letter addressed to Adeline, which contained these words:

"Mademoiselle:

"My unfortunate son did not forget you before he died; as he was going out to fight, he wrote a few lines leaving you the unexpended portion of the property he inherited from his mother, and recommending you to my generosity. It is my purpose to carry out my poor son's last wishes. He had less than twelve hundred francs a year remaining; but from this day I settle an income of six thousand francs upon you, as a charge upon my own estate; the first year's will be paid to you at any time.

"Vermoncey."

After reading the letter, Adeline handed it to Sans-Cravate, who read it in his turn, then looked his sister in the eye. They understood each other without a word, and Adeline immediately wrote to Albert's father the following reply:

"I am grateful for your kindness, monsieur, but I do not desire nor can I accept anything from you. What I desired was Albert's love, and his name for my child. Heaven has denied me these, and the money you offer me now would seem to be the price of my dishonor."

Adeline gave the letter to her brother to read.

"Well done!" he cried; "sacrebleu! I couldn't have done it better myself."

Monsieur Vermoncey's messenger went away with the letter, and since then they had heard nothing more from him.

Sans-Cravate did his utmost to cheer his sister, to bring an occasional smile to her lips; but his task was the more difficult because he himself was oppressed by a burden of grief which he could not succeed in dislodging.

At night, when he went home to Adeline, and sat down with her, intending to divert her by describing some incidents that he had witnessed during the day, his thoughts would go back to the past; after he had said a few words, he would fall into a profound reverie, and seem to forget that his sister was by his side.

One evening, when he had been for a long time lost in thought, Adeline went to him, laid her hand gently on his shoulder, and said:

"You too have troubles, my dear, besides those I have caused you. I remember what you said to me, coming from Lagny: 'I have troubles of my own, and I'll tell you about them some day.'—Has not that day come? I can't promise to comfort you, but I shall understand your suffering, and it is something to have a friend who understands what we feel."

Sans-Cravate gazed sadly at his sister, kissed her on the forehead, ran his hands through his hair, and said:

"*Sacrédié!* you are right. I will tell you the story. It's a very simple story, however, and won't take long.—I loved a woman, and my love was returned, at least I thought so. At all events, Bastringuette was mine, as you were Monsieur Albert's—except that I did not seduce her; because, you see, in Paris, a girl knows well enough what she's doing when she gives her heart away; you may please her, but you don't seduce her. Bastringuette was a good girl, a little free in her manners, and a little bold in her talk; but I loved her as she was, and she—she loved me as I was, and yet I must admit that I didn't live the kind of life then that I do now. I gambled and drank and got drunk, and fought for a word, for nothing at all; and I spent in one day all I'd earn in a week; but she forgave my foolishness, and she took care of my room, and my linen—and all without a trace of selfishness, for sometimes she had to give me money for my dinner, although she had none too much for herself; she was a *marchande des quatre saisons*, and didn't always earn in a week as much as I'd spend in one evening with Jean Ficelle and other tipplers."

"Poor girl!" said Adeline; "she loved you dearly!"

"You think so! and I thought so too. But you'll see in a minute that I was mistaken. I had a friend too, a comrade, younger than me; his name was Paul, he was a messenger, like me, and his stand was alongside of mine. This Paul had such a sweet, gentle way with him—and such manners—something that attracted you right away. And with it all, a hard worker—never loafed, never got drunk, and never gave me anything but good advice. So I looked on him as my brother; I'd have fought for him or jumped into the fire for him! Well, Bastringuette left me, to go with Paul; and he, swearing all the time that he never saw her, that he loved another woman, made assignations with Bastringuette—met her in a different quarter, where they didn't think they'd be seen."

"Are you quite sure of that, brother?"

"Ah! if anyone had told me, I wouldn't have believed it! but I saw 'em—saw 'em with my own eyes! and then I couldn't doubt it any longer. I intended at first to be content with despising 'em, but one day—I had been off with Jean Ficelle, and I was a little light-headed—I saw Paul on a street corner with my faithless wench. Gad! I couldn't hold myself back; I insisted on fighting; I jumped at him, and he didn't defend himself——"

"O mon Dieu! did you kill him?"

"No, no; he was only wounded, and that by a mere chance: he fell on a paving stone. But he's been well a long while. Luckily, I never see him now; he's taken another stand, near Rue Taitbout, I think."

"But if you should see him, my dear, you wouldn't fight with him again, I hope; once is quite enough—ah! sometimes it's too much."

Adeline put her handkerchief to her eyes, and Sans-Cravate replied:

"Oh, no, no! I'm done with him! I shall never speak to him again. But heaven has—oh! it's a very strange thing!"

"What is, my dear brother?"

"Just imagine that, by the merest chance, I discovered, not long ago, a secret which would give this Paul a name, a father, and a great fortune, if he knew it; for he's a foundling, who don't know anything about his family; and it's only me that knows it; I should only have to say a word to make him happy and rich and distinguished."

"Well, brother?"

"Well! I won't say it!"

"Ah! that is very wrong, my dear, to deprive anyone of his rightful fortune, and, what is much worse, of his father's caresses! Look you, brother; I am sure that in the bottom of your heart this troubles you, because you feel that you are doing wrong!"

"That may be; but that don't prevent me from keeping my secret. He'd give Bastringuette hats and shawls and jewelry; he'd take her about in a carriage, and they'd play the swell at restaurants, and she'd be all the more pleased that she threw me over for him. No, sacrebleu! no! I won't have that!"

"But, brother——"

"That's enough; don't say anything more about it, don't ever mention it again! you can't change my determination, and you would simply make me furious with myself and them and everybody else, that's all!"

More than three weeks had passed since this conversation, and had brought about no change in the condition of the brother and sister, when, on a fine winter's morning, Sans-Cravate—who was alone at his stand, Jean Ficelle having failed to appear there for more than a week—saw an elderly woman coming toward him, looking from side to side as if she were not perfectly sure where she wanted to go.

She was a small, thin, pale-faced woman, somewhat over sixty, evidently in feeble health. Her dress was very simple and modest, but of bourgeois cut; it did not denote poverty, but pointed to an economical habit not far removed therefrom. Despite that, she carried herself with distinction; and the amiability of her expression and manner imparted to her person that general aspect of gentility which is apparent beneath the humblest garments, and which the most fashionable and gorgeous costume cannot give to those who have not received it from nature or by education.

This lady, having at last decided to address Sans-Cravate, walked up to him and said:

"I wonder if you could tell me, monsieur? You see, I am not quite sure—I don't quite know how to explain it to you."

"Are you looking for somebody, or for some address in this quarter, madame? I have had my stand here for a long time, and I can probably tell you what you want to know."

"It isn't an address, but a certain person whom I would like to obtain some information about; in fact, to find out something that interests me very deeply. First of all, monsieur, tell me this: are you the only messenger on this street?"

"No, madame; there's Jean Ficelle—but he don't happen to be here now; in fact, he hasn't been to work for several days; I suppose he's tippling somewhere."

"What sort of looking man is this Jean Ficelle?"

"Oh! he ain't handsome—a little, short, thin man, near thirty years old."

"He's not the man I want. The one I am looking for is only twenty-three, and looks less than that; you would hardly think he was twenty; he has a graceful figure and a fine face, and his voice is as sweet as his eyes."

Sans-Cravate frowned slightly as he replied:

"Ah! you are talking about a man named Paul."

"Paul!" cried the old woman; "that's the name. Do you know him?"

"I should say so! as he used to stand here alongside of me. It ain't so very long since he went somewhere else to stand."

"He is a messenger! it is all true, then! poor boy! he did it for me, I am sure of it!"

Tears prevented the old lady from going on. Sans-Cravate was obliged to support her until her emotion had subsided. At last, having recovered herself to some extent, she grasped Sans-Cravate's hand and said:

"Thanks, monsieur, thanks. If you knew what a fine fellow you had for your comrade, if you knew what a noble heart he has, and of all he has done for me! But I must tell you, monsieur, for I want everybody to know it; such noble conduct deserves to be known, if for nothing else than to lead others to imitate it.—My name is Desroches; my husband was a tradesman, deservedly esteemed as well for his kindly nature as for his strict probity in business. One day—we were well off, then—my husband, happening to see the procession of the poor children who had been abandoned by their families, was deeply touched and interested by the face of one of them; it was young Paul, who was then ten years old at most. We had no children; our happiness was perfect but for that fact; my husband offered to take charge of that child, and his offer was readily accepted."

"I knew all this, madame," said Sans-Cravate; "Paul has told me how he was taken into Monsieur Desroches's family, and became his clerk; and then how your husband was crushed by misfortunes and bankruptcies, and died—of grief, perhaps, because he was obliged to break his engagements."

"Yes, monsieur; yes, that is all true, still it isn't all; but it's all you know, I am sure; for Paul would not have told you of his noble conduct."

"No; I have told you all I know."

"Well, monsieur, Paul, who was eighteen and a half when I lost my husband, said to me then: 'Don't be distressed, my dear mother; not only will I take care of you, but I propose that my benefactor's memory shall be respected; I propose to pay all that he owed, and by working hard I can do it.'—And, sure enough, the poor boy called my husband's creditors together, and promised to pay them if they would give him time. They were so moved by his self-sacrificing spirit, that they told him to arrange his own terms. The debts amounted to only eight thousand francs. Paul asked for five years in which to pay the whole; then he told me not to worry about myself, that he would provide for all my needs—and he left me, to seek employment. I didn't see him for several days; at last he came and told me that he was employed in a business house in Faubourg Saint-Honoré, and that he was obliged to live near by, but that he would come to see me at least twice a week, and would keep his agreement with my husband's creditors. And from that time on, monsieur, every three months he paid the amount he had promised, and brought me the receipts. 'Take these, my dear mother,' he would say; 'I am as happy as can be, because through me my benefactor's name is respected;'—and I, monsieur, never had a suspicion that the poor boy hadn't found any employment, but had become a messenger in order to fulfil his engagements; and that he worked without rest, and took no pleasure at all, so that he could put aside for me, for my husband's honor, all the money he earned!"

Again Madame Desroches could not hold back her tears; she drew her handkerchief, and paused a moment to wipe her eyes.

Sans-Cravate, for his part, tried in vain to avoid being moved; despite his grimaces, despite the churlish manner which he struggled to maintain, and although he twisted his mouth and bit his lips, two great tears escaped from his eyes, while he muttered between his teeth:

"By all that's good! It was well done of him, all the same! that's what I call honor! And to think that a man will get ugly and lose a friend, just for a wink of a woman's eye, for an infernal petticoat and what's underneath it! Bah! what a fool! Well, I can't stand it, I must let the cat out of the bag!—How did you find out that Paul was a messenger?" he asked aloud, after pretending to blow his nose in order to wipe his eyes unobserved.

"In this way, monsieur. Four or five months ago, I was sick, and Paul stayed with me and nursed me; he did not go to work at all. 'Don't you worry,' he'd say; 'there's another clerk, who has promised to take my place and do my work.'—I must tell you, monsieur, that I live on Vieille Rue du Temple, near Rue Barbette——"

"Near Rue Barbette!" cried Sans-Cravate; "a very high house, with a passageway, and a grocery on the street floor?"

"Yes, monsieur; that's the house."

"Go on, madame, go on."

"Well! one morning, when I had been getting better for some days, Paul, who had gone back to his office,—at least, so he told me,—came to make sure that I was still improving. He had been with me a little while, when a tall girl came in with some fruit I had ordered of my regular fruit dealer, on Rue Barbette.—But what's the matter, monsieur? you seem agitated."

"It's nothing, madame; I'll tell you in a minute. Go on, please, and finish your story."

"This tall girl gave a cry of surprise when she saw Paul; I saw that she knew him and that she was astonished to find him dressed so well. I noticed that Paul whispered a few words to her, but I found out nothing then. But when Bastringuette—that was the girl's name—came again to bring something from the fruit woman, who is her cousin, she cried out: 'Ah! madame, that's a mighty fine fellow, that Monsieur Paul!' And—but why are you weeping, monsieur?"

"Go on—pray go on, madame."

"Well, monsieur, some little time ago, Paul ceased to come as usual; I was anxious and worried, when Bastringuette appeared and brought me the money Paul was to pay that day to one of the creditors; she told me that he had been obliged to take a short journey, and would come to see me when he returned. To cut the story short, monsieur, time passed and Paul did not come, but Bastringuette continued to bring me money from him. I questioned her; she was embarrassed and confused in her answers, and I thought that I understood that Paul no longer owned his good clothes, and that he would not come to see me in his jacket for fear I should discover his occupation. I caught the word *messenger*, and several times she mentioned the name of this street——"

"Enough, enough, madame!—Ah! Paul! my poor Paul! So it is true, after all! You never deceived me; it wasn't to

see Bastringuette that you went to that house!"

"What do you mean, monsieur?"

"What do I mean: that I am a beggarly brute—a cur! that I struck Paul and wounded him, because I thought he was living with my mistress, when he was thinking of nobody but you and of his benefactor's good name! Damnation! but I will make up for it all; I will make him as happy as he deserves to be."

"What do you mean, monsieur?"

"Oh! let us go and find him first; I long to embrace him—if only he'll forgive me. Come, my good woman, come along; if you can't run, I'll carry you; but let's make haste, for I can't hold in any longer!"

Sans-Cravate seized Madame Desroches's arm and dragged her away. To keep pace with the messenger, who said that it was in his power to make her adopted son happy, the old lady seemed to have recovered the strength and agility of youth.

They reached Paul's new stand, and found him seated on a stone bench, lost in thought. Sans-Cravate dropped Madame Desroches's arm, ran to Paul, threw his arms about him, and kissed him again and again, shedding tears, and saying in a broken voice:

"Do you forgive me—my poor Paul? I know all—I was in the wrong, and I struck you. If you don't forgive me, I'll jump into the water! Take care of my sister."

Paul was utterly at a loss to understand what had happened, until he saw Madame Desroches and divined that his conduct was known. The old lady likewise embraced the young man, weeping freely. Thereupon the passers-by and idlers began to gather about them, wondering what that young messenger had done to be embraced thus effusively; and Sans-Cravate took Madame Desroches's arm and Paul's, and led them away.

"Come away," he said; "I have something important to tell you; and all these people, who probably think that we're going to show them some tricks, are beginning to make me mad."

These three persons, who were so overjoyed to be together, soon reached Sans-Cravate's humble lodging, where poor Liline, taken by surprise by that visit, strove to do the honors of her bedroom as best she could. He presented Paul to her, saying:

"This is the man I was jealous of, sister; I have found out to-day that he never deceived me. So you can imagine how happy I shall be to put him in the way of recovering his father, his name, and his fortune!"

Paul stared at Sans-Cravate with an exclamation of surprise; he feared that he had not heard aright. Madame Desroches begged the messenger to explain himself. He asked nothing better, and, in order to make his story clearer, he began by telling of the relations of Albert with his sister, his visit to Monsieur Vermoncey, his duel with Adeline's seducer, and, lastly, what he had heard Madame Baldimer say to the elder Vermoncey—the names, the cross on the forearm, and all the corroborative circumstances.

"But my heart seems to have divined the truth," said Paul, joyfully; "and Monsieur Vermoncey himself—he showed so much friendship and interest."

"Does he know you?" asked Sans-Cravate.

Paul gave the particulars of his visit to Monsieur Vermoncey; whereupon Sans-Cravate clapped his hands, jumped up and down, swore, wept, and shouted:

"Let us go, my friends, let us go at once to Monsieur Vermoncey; he has suffered and groaned long enough; we must hurry up and give him a son to comfort him a little for the loss of his other children. Madame Desroches must come with us; it will be better for her to be there, to confirm what I say.—You stay here, sister, and wait for me. I shall soon be back, and with good news, I am sure."

Sans-Cravate whispered to his sister, who smiled and promised to obey; then he ran out to fetch a cab, into which he put Madame Desroches and Paul, got in after them, and ordered the driver to take them to Monsieur Vermoncey's house.

"You must let me speak first," he said to them on the way; "the sight of me will be painful to him at the outset, but afterward, I trust, he won't be sorry that he's seen me again."

When they reached the house, Sans-Cravate took the servant by storm, and compelled him to usher him into his master's study.

Monsieur Vermoncey started back in surprise; his eyes assumed an expression of hopeless melancholy when he saw Sans-Cravate, but he motioned to him to come forward.

"Your sister has reflected on my offer, no doubt," he said. "I am still prepared to abide by it, for I should be very glad to repair my son's wrong-doing."

"Let us say nothing about that, monsieur," replied Sans-Cravate; "if your son did wrong, heaven has attended to the expiation, and that—event made me as wretched as it did you. But I have come to-day to make you happy, and it is the least I can do after causing you so much sorrow."

Monsieur Vermoncey stared at the messenger in amazement, but Sans-Cravate went on:

"Monsieur, chance made me acquainted with the whole story of a misstep of your younger days, for which that Madame Baldimer was so bent on punishing you. Well! the child you had at that time by a poor girl named Marie Delbart, that—abandoned child I have found, and I have brought him back to you!"

"Is it possible?" faltered Monsieur Vermoncey, rising and going to Sans-Cravate's side. "Oh! monsieur, is this true? are you quite sure of what you say?"

"Sacrebleu! yes, I am sure of my facts, sure of what I say!"

"You are aware of his existence—where is he?"

"Oh! he ain't far away!"

And Sans-Cravate opened the door behind him, took Paul by the hand, and pushed him into his father's arms.

"I robbed you of one son," he said, "but I give you back another. That goes a little way toward reconciling me to myself."

Monsieur Vermoncey strained Paul to his heart, then gazed affectionately into his face, crying:

"I am not mistaken—it is the same young man who aroused such a deep interest in my heart. Yes, yes, he is my

son, my heart divined it long ago; and the more I look at him, the more clearly I recognize the unhappy Marie's features in his."

"Yes, but we want you to be certain of the fact," said Sans-Cravate. "Here is Madame Desroches, the widow of the excellent man who took Paul away from—where he was; she will tell you what paper he had about him when they—and then you will see the cross on his left arm. You'll find that it's all just as that beautiful lady—who is so vindictive—told you the other day; and you'll find out, too, that you not only have recovered your son, but that he's the finest fellow on earth; and if they gave the cross to everyone that deserves it, it would have been shining on his breast long ago."

Monsieur Vermoncey needed no further proofs to convince him that Paul was his son; however, he listened with profound interest to good Madame Desroches, who did not fail to tell of the young messenger's noble conduct toward herself.

When the old lady had finished, Monsieur Vermoncey took his son's hand and gazed proudly at him. But in a moment he said, in a faltering tone:

"My dear son, you will not be so proud of your father as he is of you; you have every right to reproach him for his desertion of you. But I was very young, I was poor, I did not know what it is to be a father—and I have blamed myself so bitterly for that sin!"

Paul threw himself into his father's arms, begging him to say no more, and Sans-Cravate added:

"You must forget the past, and think of nothing but your present happiness."

"Yes," said Paul, pressing his former comrade's hand. "But since I am taking Albert's place here, your sister must accept now what he and my father have done for her.—Am I not carrying out your wishes in this, father?"

"Yes, my son," was the reply; "indeed, from this time forth I shall approve whatever you do."

"Shake!" said Sans-Cravate to Paul; "I will accept anything from you; if you should offer me a million, I'd take it—I must make up for my infernal stupidity with regard to you. But my sister's waiting for us—and—and——"

Sans-Cravate whispered the name of Elina. Paul instantly asked his father's permission to leave him a moment; and Monsieur Vermoncey gave it, on the condition that he would bring Adeline to him, whom he desired to embrace, and that Madame Desroches would remain and talk with him at greater length about his son. The old lady asked nothing better.

In a very few minutes, Sans-Cravate and Paul were with Adeline, who, in accordance with her brother's suggestion, had gone to see little Elina and had told her of the great change in Paul's position. When the two friends arrived, they found the little dressmaker weeping bitterly, because she was persuaded that her lover, now that he had become rich, would no longer think of marrying her.

Paul hastened to console Elina, and Sans-Cravate said:

"You must strike while the iron's hot, and present your sweetheart to your father right away; at this moment, he can't refuse you anything—later, nobody knows."

Paul approved this suggestion; but Elina was afraid to go to Monsieur Vermoncey's; she trembled at the thought, and refused; it required all her lover's eloquence, all the entreaties of Adeline and her brother, to induce her to accompany them. They succeeded at last in allaying her terror, and ere long the two girls stood before Monsieur Vermoncey.

Sans-Cravate presented his sister, whose sad, sweet face and lovely eyes brimming with tears aroused Monsieur Vermoncey's most affectionate interest; he embraced her and called her his daughter. Then he fixed his eyes on little Elina, who was trying to hide behind a curtain, and said, with a smile:

"But who is this other young lady?"

Paul stepped forward, blushing, and told his father of his love for Elina; he dwelt upon the delicacy of the girl, who loved him when he had nothing and offered to give him her little fortune; then he told of the care she had lavished on him during his illness.

Monsieur Vermoncey went behind the curtains and led her forth, as red as a cherry, into the middle of the room; he kissed her on the forehead, and said to her:

"You desired to make my son happy when he had nothing; now that he is rich, it is only fair that he should do as much for you."

"Ah! that is what I call talking!" cried Sans-Cravate. "Look you, monsieur, do you know what this comes to? why, that you've recovered all your children to-day!"

On returning home with his sister, Sans-Cravate was very gay and happy; but he glanced constantly from side to side, as if he hoped to meet someone. Adeline noticed it and smiled to herself, but said nothing. Early in the evening, someone knocked softly at the door of their room.

"Hark! who can have come to see us?" said Sans-Cravate, looking at his sister; "I don't know of any visitor we expect."

Adeline made no reply, but went to open the door, and Bastringuette stood before them.

Sans-Cravate was so agitated that he could not speak; his first impulse was to throw his arms about the tall girl's neck; but he checked himself, because he reflected that the fact that Paul was not her lover did not prove that she was not attached to somebody else.

Bastringuette remained standing in front of him; she glanced coyly at him, and finally, as if she divined his thoughts, she held out her hand, saying:

"I was a flirt—you were ugly—but I love you still, and after this you needn't be afraid, because, you see, a woman's like a saucepan: when it has once been on the fire, it's better than a new one."

Sans-Cravate threw his arms about her.

"To make sure you don't change again, I'll marry you!" he said.

"That ain't always the safest way," rejoined Bastringuette, with a smile; "but as I've been a little free before marriage, I promise you I won't be afterward."

"And I'll take you to Auvergne, to live with my father; how does that strike you?"

"To Auvergne—I should say so! I'm so fond of chestnuts."

A few weeks later, Paul led pretty Elina to the altar; she had ceased to be a dressmaker at the same time that her lover had ceased to be a messenger. And good Madame Desroches consented to live with the young couple, who treated her as their mother.

As for Madame Baldimer, she had left Paris for America immediately after Albert's death.

Albert's friends continue to stroll on the boulevards, cigar in mouth. Mouillot is still a high liver, Balivan as distraught as ever, and Dupétrain still insists on putting people to sleep. Monsieur Varinet no longer lends five hundred francs on an olive, because he is afraid of having to keep it too long in his purse, and Monsieur Célestin de Valnoir, having obtained his release from Sainte-Pélagie, bends his energies to piling up other debts.

Madame Plays continues to disregard her husband's rights; but she cannot endure the sight of Tobie; she holds him in horror, because she believes that he killed Albert. Young Pigeonnier consoles himself for the rigor of the superb Herminie with Aunt Abraham's fortune and his reputation for valor.

On the day before his departure for Auvergne with his sister and Bastringuette, Sans-Cravate saw two men in the street, handcuffed together, on their way to the Préfecture, escorted by gendarmes. He recognized Laboussole and Jean Ficelle. The latter seemed a little abashed to be seen with such an escort; but Monsieur Laboussole kept up a continual outcry of:

"It's a mistake of the gendarmes; they take us for somebody else! That trick's been played on me seven or eight times before!"

"That's how I should have ended, perhaps," thought Sans-Cravate, as he looked after them, "if I'd listened to that ne'er-do-well's advice! for there's no mistake about it, when a man keeps going on sprees, and never works, he seldom comes to a good end."

LITTLE STREAMS

I

FOUR AT THE RENDEZVOUS

It was just five o'clock in the afternoon, when a fashionably dressed young man, of comely aspect, and possessed of an attractive countenance, although his large blue eyes sometimes expressed a decided penchant for raillery, entered the café which stands, or stood, at the corner of Faubourg Poissonnière and the boulevard, on the right as you turn into the latter.

The young man looked into the first room, then into the others in succession, and at last said to himself:

"No one! not a single one of them has come! Probably not a single one of them will come! Five years is quite long enough to forget an appointment. However, I remembered it. I am sure that they are not all dead, for I met Dodichet within two months, and I saw Dubotté at the theatre less than a week ago. Lucien is the only one I haven't heard of for some time. Well, I'll wait a while. Everyone is entitled to the fifteen minutes' grace."

And the young man, whose name was Adhémar Monbrun, seated himself at a table, took up a newspaper, ordered a *petit verre* of chartreuse, and read a review of the play which had had a successful first performance the night before, but which the newspaper critic abused because the author was not a friend of his. Which fact, luckily, was not likely to prevent the play from making its way and achieving a long run, because the public was beginning to take at their true value the articles of those aristarchs of the press, who took for their motto, generally speaking: "No one shall be allowed to have any cleverness except ourselves and our friends."

Adhémar had not been reading the paper two minutes, when a man, who had just entered the café, walked straight to the table at which he was seated, and tapped him on the shoulder, saying:

"Well, my boy, here I am, too; as prompt as the sun in pleasant weather. I didn't forget our appointment, you see. Good-afternoon, Adhémar, I am delighted to see you once more! You're well, I trust? So am I, as you see. Everybody says that I have a prosperous face. Indeed, sometimes it irritates me to hear it, because I have noticed that prosperity often has a stupid look. But I hope that mine isn't so bad as that!"

This second individual was a man of about thirty years, who looked fully as old as he was, because he was a little inclined to corpulency; rather below than above medium height, with a full, high-colored face, always wreathed in smiles, a forest of light hair which curled naturally, china-blue eyes, as round as a cat's, and large mutton-chop whiskers—such was Philémon Dubotté, who considered himself a very good-looking fellow, and paid court to all the ladies except his own wife, whom he neglected shamefully, but who, on the contrary, adored him, and was always lavishing caresses on him. But the ladies are often like that: the colder you are with them, the more ardent they are with you; perhaps I shall be told that it is because they want to warm you.

Adhémar shook hands with the new-comer.

"How are you, Philémon! come and sit down. Yes, you have a look of robust health which does one good to see!"

"I haven't the look of it only, I beg you to believe. I'm as rugged as Porte Saint-Denis. By the way, is Porte Saint-Denis still standing?"

"Yes, to be sure!"

"I didn't know; so many things are being demolished in these days! Well, then, I repeat: I'm as rugged as Porte Saint-Denis."

"I see that you remembered."

"Why in the devil shouldn't I?"

"In five years one forgets so many things, my friend!"

"In love, that may be; but not in friendship."

"Men forget in friendship, as well as in love. Memory is a rare thing in this world, especially memory of the heart."

"Ah! there you are! the same as ever—no confidence in anything or anybody!"

"Is it my fault, my dear fellow, if my confidence has always been betrayed? Time destroys all our illusions, and in the last five years I have lost an infernal lot of them."

"Well, I haven't lost anything at all. I still adore the fair sex, which, I venture to say, repays my adoration with interest—too earnestly, in fact. For I have a wife—you don't know my wife, I believe? I'll introduce you to her; my dear fellow, she adores me, she idolizes me! It's a genuine passion. When she goes half a day without seeing me, she's as good as dead: she doesn't eat, she pines and languishes, sometimes she weeps even. When I come home, I have to scold her. 'Éléonore,' I say—her name's Éléonore—'why, Nonore, what does this mean? What! can't I stay out a little late with friends, without finding you in tears when I come home?' And she throws her arms round my neck, and says: 'I thought you'd fallen off the top of an omnibus! I beg you, my love, don't ride in the three-sou seats. Go inside, Philémon, I implore you; ride inside; you'll make me so much happier!'—That's the kind of a woman my wife is, and I assure you it's an infernal bore to be loved like that!"

"You complain because the bride is too fair, but it won't always be so."

"I trust not—poor Nonore! If she knew how unworthy I am of such adoration—for I am a double-dyed villain: I can't see a pretty face without ogling it. Ah! I see Lucien yonder. Well, well! I really believe we shall have the whole party."

The individual who was approaching the table at which the two friends were seated was a young man of twenty-six, tall and slight, and extremely thin; his face was pale, but his features were rather fine; the expression of the eyes was very sweet, and his manners as well as his speech were calculated to inspire interest. His dress was extremely neat, but did not denote affluence; his black frock-coat, buttoned to the chin, had evidently been brushed frequently, and you would hardly have dared to detain him by grasping one of its skirts, lest it should remain in your hand. His black cravat showed only a tiny bit of collar, and his hat seemed to have been scrubbed with water; but his gray trousers were spotlessly clean; and his shoes, albeit not of patent leather, were carefully polished. The young man's name was Lucien Grischard.

As soon as he caught sight of him, Adhémar rose and extended his hand, crying out:

"How are you, Lucien, dear old Lucien! how glad I am to see you! for it's a long while—nearly two years—since I laid eyes on you."

"That is true, Monsieur Adhémar, and I am very glad to see you, too. I have been waiting impatiently for this day, which was to bring us together."

"Why on earth do you call me *monsieur*, and not Adhémar, as you used to? Am I not still your old boarding-school comrade?"

"Forgive me! but that was so long ago, and for the last five years you have had nothing but success in literary and dramatic work; you have become a celebrity! while I have remained in obscurity."

"My dear Lucien, if celebrity is to result in separating us from our friends, we ought to shrink from it instead of longing for it. I fancy that mine hasn't yet acquired such dimensions as to make me a subject of envy."

"Oh! pray don't think that I ever had a suspicion of that sentiment when I heard of your triumphs. On the contrary, I was always overjoyed, and said to myself: 'He, at least, is making his way!'"

While this third member of the party was talking with Adhémar, the sandy-haired Philémon scrutinized him with unremitting attention, and the aspect of the threadbare coat and the cleaned hat did not seem to add great zest to his friendship; however, he too shook hands with Lucien, and said to him in an almost patronizing tone:

"Good-afternoon, Lucien! how are you, my boy? Sapristi! you haven't put on much flesh since I saw you last!"

"I can't say the same for you, Philémon, for you are almost the shape of a barrel."

"Oh! a barrel; that's putting it a little strong; but, after all, I would rather resemble a barrel than the barrel of a gun."

Instead of losing his temper at this comparison, Lucien laughed heartily, while Adhémar interposed with:

"Well, well, messieurs, how's this? old schoolfellows meeting after five years, and making unkind remarks to each other! is that the way to meet after a lustrum has passed over our heads, and have you become so sensitive that you lose your tempers over a jest?"

"Oh! I am not angry in the least," replied Lucien; "far from it; Philémon's remark made me laugh, as you see."

"For my part," said Dubotté, "I confess that I can't endure being compared to a barrel; any sobriquet you please, except that. But I don't bear Lucien any ill will. Come, sit down here with us, my dear fellow, and take something."

"Thanks; but we're not all here yet: someone is missing—Dodichet."

"Oh! we can't count on him. Was Dodichet ever a man of his word? Why, he doesn't know what it is to keep a promise! He's a good fellow enough, but an erratic, rattle-brained creature, who always has a thousand schemes on hand, but never carries out one of them, and never remembers one day what he said the day before."

"The devil! you judge him rather harshly, Philémon!"

"I am simply telling the truth. However, I've seen very little of him for five years; he may have mended his ways."

"No," said Adhémar; "Dodichet is just the same; I have happened to meet him several times, and I have been sorry to see that our old friend has not grown any more sensible. He was in a position to succeed, for he's not a fool, and he inherited some money from his parents; but he thinks of nothing but enjoying life, of making *bonnes blagues*, as he expresses it; and they don't always succeed; some of them have cost him dear. I believe that he is almost ruined now; and, unfortunately, he hasn't yet decided upon any profession."

"Poor Dodichet!" said Lucien; "he must be very unhappy, then."

"He, unhappy! oh! he'll never be that. He laughs at everything, everything is *couleur de rose* with him; and he is convinced that he will have a fine house, horses and carriages, and a hundred thousand francs a year, some day. He has a very happy disposition."

"Why, here he is, on my word!" cried Philémon; "yes, it's really he—he has remembered our appointment. Well, he has a better memory than I supposed."

Another person had, in fact, entered the café. It was a man of twenty-six or twenty-seven years, of medium height, well set up, with dark brown hair, a slightly flushed face, sharp eyes, turned-up nose, and a huge mouth—everything, in short, which denotes a jovial companion. His costume was a little eccentric: his trousers were unconscionably full in the legs and very tight at the hips; his waistcoat was of Scotch plaid with enormous squares, and his coat was so short that it barely covered half of his posterior. On his head was a gray hat of an indescribable shape, but remotely resembling a snail's shell. Lastly, he carried in his hand a light cane with an ivory head, which head he was forever stuffing into his mouth or his nose, and at times he scratched his ear with it. Such was Monsieur Fanfan Dodichet, who, on entering the café, swung his cane in such a way as to strike a newspaper out of the hands of an old habitué of the place, who was reading it as he sipped his glass of beer.

The old gentleman looked up and cast an angry glance at the person who had torn his newspaper into strips; and Dodichet, instead of apologizing for his awkwardness, laughed in his face, and remarked:

"They'll bring you the *Tintamarre*; it's much more entertaining. I am sure that you were bored by what you were reading; I saw that when I came in, and I said to myself: 'There's a man who longs to change his paper; I'll give him an opportunity.'"

Without waiting for a reply, Dodichet examined all the occupied tables; and discovering at last the persons he sought, shouted, as if he were in his own house:

"Ah! there they are! those are they! O happy fate!"

Then he began to sing:

"'Les montagnards, les montagnards,
Les montagnards sont réunis!'"

"For heaven's sake, hold your tongue, Dodichet!" said Dubotté, affecting not to see the hand which the new-comer held out to him; "you will compromise us. The idea of singing like that in a café! What do you look like, anyway? These people will be giving you a sou!"

"Well! if everybody here gives me a sou, that will make a very tidy little sum; but our handsome blond is always afraid of compromising himself! He is truly superb, this Dubotté!—Do you know, Dubotté, you make me think of the sun, on my word! I can't look at you without squinting. But aren't we all here? Good-evening, messieurs! I haven't forgotten our appointment of five years ago, you see. That surprises you, doesn't it? well, it surprises me too, on my honor! Ah! there's Lucien, dear old Lucien, whom I haven't seen, I believe, since our agreement.—Give us your hand, Lucien—

"'Cette main, cette main si jolie!'"

"Good God! is he going to sing again? I'm going away, then."

"No, Phœbus, don't be alarmed, I won't sing any more—not to please you, but because I want to talk with Adhémar and Lucien.—Ah! Adhémar—there's a friend that is a friend; you can always find him when you want him. But Dubotté! his scent tells him when anyone's going to ask a favor of him, and he runs away like a stag. I said, like a stag; the simile is a little *risquée* perhaps, as our friend is married; but, never mind! I have said it, and I won't take it back."

"Oh! I'm not offended, Dodichet. When a man has a wife like mine, he is above such jests."

"You're content with your wife, eh? so much the better, I'm glad of it.—But I say, messieurs, is that all you're going to take? For my part, the weather makes me thirsty."

"Very well! order some beer."

"Beer! oh, no! that's too vulgar; punch, rather."

"Who ever heard of drinking punch just before dinner?"

"Why not? all hours are alike to good fellows!—Punch, waiter! rum punch—and see that it's good; say it's for a connoisseur.—Won't you have a glass of punch, too, my dear Lucien? it warms you up and makes you lively!"

"No, thanks; I won't take anything; I don't need anything."

"Oh! yes, you do; pardieu! you'll take some punch with us; just remember that it is I who invite you!"

"But I'll answer for it that it won't be he who will pay," said Adhémar, in an undertone.

However, when the punch was brought, they all concluded to partake. Dodichet immediately poured out a second glass for himself, humming:

"'J'en veux goûter encore, pour en être certain.'"

But Adhémar silenced him by saying:

"Messieurs, we four, born at Troyes——"

"The home of hashed veal," said Dodichet.

"Oh! Dodichet, you are not going to keep interrupting Adhémar, are you?"

"Not I; I simply desired to confirm his statement that we were all born at Troyes.—Go on, Adhémar."

"Five years ago, we four happened to meet in this same café. I was then twenty-four years old, and I had been in Paris for some time; but Philémon Dubotté and Lucien had just arrived, and Dodichet had run through the inheritance of only one of his uncles. We were old schoolfellows. Do you know what we said when we met here?"

"Perfectly. Each one of us declared: 'I intend to succeed; to make a name and station for myself; and I ask only five years to do it in.'"

"Exactly; and we agreed then to meet again here at the end of five years, in order to find out whether we had succeeded and had reached our respective goals."

"Very good."

"Now, let each of us in turn tell where he stands, and whether he has arrived at the goal which he had in view.—Begin, Philémon."

"Oh, yes! it's Dubotté's place to begin, because he's the dean in years. Go on, fascinating blond."

"Dean in years! I'm not so sure of that."

"Pshaw! between ourselves, there's no use in prevaricating; we all knew one another's ages at school."

"True; but we're not at school now."

"Ha! ha! that's good, that is; it ought to be framed. Dubotté, you are well over thirty-one."

"Not very much; only three months."

"That makes you thirty-one and a quarter."

"You're at least twenty-eight yourself, Dodichet."

"I don't conceal my age: I am twenty-seven and a half, Adhémar twenty-nine, and Lucien twenty-six; he's the youngest of the lot. So far, so good. I move that Phœbus proceed."

"All right.—Messieurs, I have no reason to complain of destiny. Having obtained a position in the Interior Department, where my assiduity, my zeal, and my fine handwriting procured me rapid promotion, I soon married; I found a very attractive young lady, who had a good-sized dowry; I was introduced to her; she liked me and declared that she would be happy to marry a man employed in the Interior Department. Our nuptials were celebrated. I have every reason to congratulate myself: my wife adores me, she sees only through my eyes. My emoluments are respectable; I am able to live pleasantly; so that I might fairly say that I have arrived, that my position is assured; but no, messieurs, I have not yet reached the height to which I aspire. For I am ambitious: I want to be a sub-prefect, or at least the head of a bureau; but I hope to arrive before long. *Dixi.*"

"Heard and noted. Now it is Adhémar's turn."

"I will be brief, messieurs: I was determined to write; I wrote novels, I wrote for the stage; my plays have had more success than I dared hope; in that respect, fortune has constantly favored me, and I earn a good deal of money. But I have been less fortunate in love; I have loved women ardently; and when they told me that they loved me alone, I believed it until I had proof to the contrary; but I have had that proof so often that I am completely disillusioned. Thereupon I set about studying the sex; I discovered that all women are coquettes, and consequently that there is no dependence to be placed on their fidelity; that made me a misanthrope, or rather a misogynist, for some time; but then I said to myself that I must take the world as it is, and content myself with forming liaisons with women which have no other end than mere sensual pleasure. However, I am sure that I was born to love truly, and that it would have made me perfectly happy to be loved truly in return. That is where I stand: I have succeeded, so far as vanity and wealth are concerned, but I have not succeeded according to the longing of my heart; and, in my opinion, a man has not arrived when he is not happy."

"Very good!" cried Dodichet; "now it's my turn. I am very different from Adhémar, messieurs, in that I am very happy; for I pass my life enjoying myself. However, I must agree that I have not as yet a well-defined position; I have followed so many trades that you might call me an all-around man. I have had places, in the government service and elsewhere; but I have kept none of them—I don't know why; yes, I ought to say, I do know why. Impelled by my irresistible tendency to jest, I was forever trying to invent some amusing trick to play. When I was a clerk in a fancy goods shop, I succeeded in mixing up all the different things, putting on one shelf what should have been put on another, so that, when customers came, nothing was ever in its place; my employers shouted and swore, and I roared with laughter. As clerk in one of the government bureaux, I had for chief a gentleman who never sat down except on one of those round leather cushions which facilitate respiration. One day, I abstracted that well-padded cushion, and substituted for it one that contained nothing but air; when my chief sank luxuriously into his easy-chair, the cushion burst and flattened out, with a very compromising explosion. This trifling peccadillo caused me to lose that place; there are people whose minds—I should say, whose behinds—are so ill-fashioned! I must confess that, during these various adventures, instead of earning money, I spent all my inheritances little by little. But I still have some wealthy kinsmen; I am going to reform; I have found my real vocation: the stage. Yes, messieurs; I am destined to shine some day on the stage. I have not yet reached that point, it is true; but you will see me there; and I propose that you come to this café, a year hence, to congratulate me on my talent and my triumphs."

"So be it," said Adhémar; "and now it is Lucien's turn to speak."

"I begin, messieurs, by telling you frankly that I have not succeeded at all; and yet I have not been enjoying myself—I have worked, worked hard, I have tried several branches of business in a small way, but I have not been successful; often, too, I have been deceived, *worked*, as they say, by persons who were supposed to be my partners, but who pocketed all the profits. But still I have not lost courage; I have just invented a new kind of pin for ladies' use; something tells me that it will be popular. I must tell you, too, that I am in love, and that the father of the woman I love will not give his daughter to any man who is not well settled in life."

"What's that! you are in love, my poor Lucien, really in love?" said Adhémar. "Ah! that is what prevents you from succeeding! I pray you, do not take that sentiment seriously, or you will be its victim in the end; it will make you sad and unhappy, and then you will be laughed at."

"I beg your pardon, Adhémar; but I don't agree with you. On the contrary, my love, far from making me unhappy, is my only comfort, my only hope; it supports me in adversity; for the woman I love loves me, and a word, a smile, from her makes me forget a whole week of gloom."

"The rascal is loved, you see," said Philémon; "he has won the girl's heart to her father's beard; I know what that is, myself!"

"Shall I kidnap your charmer for you, Lucien? shall I think up some trick to play on her daddy? Don't distress yourself—I am on hand!"

"No, Dodichet, I thank you; she is not one of the kind who allow themselves to be kidnapped. She is virtuous and well brought up. She will never give herself to anyone but her husband; and if she were different, I should not love her."

"Very good. But who is this barbarous father who refuses to approve his daughter's choice?"

"Oh! he is a miser, a curmudgeon, a man who has no regard for anything but money. You will understand, from

that, that he will not give his daughter any dowry; on the contrary, he would be more likely to demand one from his son-in-law."

"What does the old skinflint do?"

"Nothing, so he says; but, between ourselves, I think that he lends money at usurious rates. He is rich, but he is always complaining of the hard times; unluckily for him, he married a second time—a woman much younger than himself, who is supposed to have brought him some money; he wouldn't have married her otherwise. But she likes to enjoy herself, to receive company now and then; and that drives Monsieur Mirotaine to despair, for he wants to avoid any expense that can possibly be avoided."

"Mirotaine, did you say, Lucien? Why, I know him; Mirotaine, formerly a bailiff, who lives now on Rue Saint-Louis, in the Marais?"

"That's the very man. So you know him, do you, Philémon? Well, is my portrait of him overdrawn?"

"No, indeed, not at all; he's an old hunks of the first order. He asked me to come to his evenings, but I learned that for refreshments, in summer, he gave cocoa."

"Delightful! And in winter?"

"In winter, it's much worse—hot cocoa. As you can imagine, that didn't attract me; so I have never been."

"Cold cocoa and hot cocoa!" cried Dodichet; "it's hard to believe that. Does the fellow deal in licorice root?"

"It's a pity, for his second wife isn't half bad; I would willingly have flirted a little with her; but I didn't feel that I had the courage to defy the cocoa!"

"And his daughter Juliette—isn't she charming?"

"I don't know her; I have never seen her."

"Her stepmother is determined to marry her. As she is a good deal of a flirt, I think that she's jealous of her stepdaughter's beauty; she is looking everywhere for a husband for her; I heard that she had gone so far as to apply to a second-hand clothes woman, who arranges marriages."

"I say! I say! What's that! Do second-hand clothes women make matches?"

"A great many, my dear Dodichet, a great many! The business pays well, as you can imagine; they stipulate that they are to furnish the presents that the groom always gives the bride. If the groom has no money to pay for them, they offer to advance it, being certain of getting their pay out of the bride's dowry."

"Do you know, that's a shrewd game! I have a mind to go into the matchmaking business myself. Do you know the name of this hymeneal procuress?"

"Madame Putiphar."

"The devil! the name is promising. I must see her and tell her to find me a millionairess, and I'll share the dowry with her.—All the same, he's a miserable old crow, is your Monsieur Miroton[P]—Mirotaine. He must smell of onions. I really must play some good practical joke on him."

"I beg you, Dodichet, do nothing of the sort; you would simply get Juliette into trouble, and that wouldn't help my business any."

"Your business! Do you really flatter yourself, Lucien, that your pins will enable you to marry the young woman?"

"If I make money, yes; but it will take a long time, and meanwhile Madame Putiphar will find some man who, fascinated by Juliette's attractions, will agree to marry her without a dowry."

"Poor Lucien! Give me your address; I'll come and see your pins, and try to give them a puff."

"I live very modestly, on the sixth floor, on Quai Jemmapes, facing the bridge, at the corner of Faubourg du Temple."

"Well, messieurs, I see that we are about to part without being able to say, any one of us, that we have reached the goal for which we set out."

"I ask a reprieve for one year, messieurs. In a year, I shall have made a name for myself on the stage. I shall have succeeded——"

"And I," said Lucien, "may have been successful in my new undertaking; in a year's time, perhaps, I shall have started a little business of my own."

"I shall be chief of a bureau or sub-prefect."

"Very good, messieurs," said Adhémar; "the reprieve for a year is granted; as for myself, I don't imagine that it will change my position at all."

Philémon Dubotté rose and left the table, saying:

"You are very pleasant companions, messieurs; but my wife expects me to dinner, and if I should be late again I should find her weeping in her soup. Au revoir, and may destiny be propitious to you!"

And the handsome blond departed.

"He goes off without paying," said Dodichet; "our friend doesn't stand on ceremony."

"He probably forgot it," said Lucien; "but we three will pay."

"Sapristi! I find that I forgot to bring my purse!" said Dodichet, feeling in his pockets.

Adhémar smiled and made haste to pay the waiter, saying:

"Allow me to be your host, messieurs; it will give me great pleasure. I believe you know my address, my dear Lucien; do come to see me sometimes."

"Thanks, my dear Adhémar; I shall not forget your invitation.—Adieu, Dodichet!"

Lucien Grischard also took his leave.

"He is proud," said Adhémar, as he and Dodichet left the café together. "He doesn't come to see me, because he is poor and doesn't choose that anyone shall help him."

"Well, then, he's wrong. I am not like that, thank you," rejoined Dodichet; "a man shouldn't be proud with his friends. And so, Adhémar, d'ye see, I don't hesitate to say to you: I have left my purse at home; pray lend me a hundred sous. I will pay you the next time I see you."

"My dear Dodichet, I like above all things to oblige my friends, but you abuse your privilege. I have lent you many

hundred-sou pieces, which you are always going to repay—but you never do."

"Very good! listen: lend me ten francs, and I'll pay back a hundred sous right away."

Adhémar could not help laughing, and, on the strength of the jest, lent Dodichet a hundred sous.

II

A BURNING DRESS

Let us leave Philémon Dubotté to return to his wife, casting languishing glances at all the passably pretty women he meets on his way; let us leave Lucien Grischard to muse upon possible methods of earning money without departing from the pathway of honor; and Fanfan Dodichet to cudgel his brains to invent a practical joke to play on Monsieur Mirotaine, who regaled his company with cocoa; and let us follow Adhémar, who had no schemes in his head except that of a comedy of which he was just planning the dénouement.

Our author followed the boulevard; he walked rather slowly, paying no attention to the passers-by; but suddenly he stopped short, or rather turned and flew toward a lady a few yards away, whose dress had taken fire as she walked over a burning match which one of those gentlemen who have the noble habit of smoking while they walk had thrown away, after lighting his cigar or his pipe, without even taking the trouble to step on it and extinguish it. If our friends would do so much, they would at least relieve women from the risk of such dangerous accidents; but what does a smoker care if a dress does burn, and its wearer too? He has his smoke, and the rest is all right. In very truth, we have good reason to exclaim: *O tempora! O mores!*

The lady's dress was of some thin material; the flame rose quickly to her waist, and she had not discovered that she was on fire; but when she was suddenly conscious of being seized by two strong arms, which arrested and stifled the flames at the risk of burning themselves, the lady uttered a shriek, and demanded of the man in whose embrace she was by what right he presumed to take her in his arms. Adhémar replied by pointing to her dress, one side of which was badly burned.

"Mon Dieu! monsieur, I understand now," she exclaimed. "Pray forgive me! Was I really on fire?"

"Yes, madame; you must have walked over a lighted match; I happened, luckily, to be within a few steps; and although I do not always see what is taking place beside me, I did see the flame just as it was beginning to make rather rapid progress; and I hastened to your assistance without stopping to ask your permission; I thought that you would not take it ill of me."

"Ah! monsieur, I am so grateful to you! But you have burned yourself!"

"Only a little, on the left hand. It's a mere trifle."

Meanwhile, the idlers and other inquisitive folk, who always come up when the danger is over, began to collect around the lady and Adhémar.

"What is it?"

"What has happened?"

"A lady burned——"

"Throw water on her!"

"It's all out. Her dress is baked a little, that's all."

"She can buy another."

"What about the gentleman who is so close to her?"

"It was probably he who burned her—with his cigar."

"Then he ought to be arrested and taken to the police station."

"Why, no; he's the one who extinguished the lady; and got a pretty burn on his left wrist into the bargain."

"The deuce! if he plays the fiddle, that will bother him."

The hero and heroine of the adventure hastened to force their way through the crowd and to go into a pharmacy, which, luckily, was only a few steps away.

The lady sat down, and asked for a glass of orange water, to restore her strength after the shock she had received. Adhémar showed the druggist his burned wrist, which was first bathed in cold water, then covered with something guaranteed to heal the burn in a short time. But he had to submit to have his arm bandaged and to carry it in a sling for a while, for the wound was of considerable size.

While all this was being done, our two friends had time to look at each other, and—which was natural enough—tried to make out each other's individuality. The person who had nearly been burned to death was about twenty-five years of age, tall and slender and well built; her face, which usually wore a grave expression, became very attractive when she smiled; her black eyes were beautiful and very expressive, and the eyebrows which surmounted them were thin, but perfectly arched. Her hair was black, her Niobe-like nose but slightly prominent. Taken all in all, she was a very comely person; she was stylishly dressed, and her manners denoted high social position.

Adhémar discovered all this while his arm was being dressed. On her side, the lady had scrutinized the man who had rendered her such a signal service, and we know that the scrutiny could not be unfavorable to him.

"Mon Dieu! monsieur, I am terribly distressed. You are really badly burned," she said, while Adhémar's wrist was being bandaged.

"Oh! no, madame; it will very soon be all right."

"Yes," said the druggist, "very soon; but you will probably carry the mark of this burn to your dying day."

"Well, it will be an honorable scar!—Pray consider, madame, that you might have been seriously burned; what does this amount to, compared with the danger by which you were threatened?"

She made no direct reply, but looked down at her dress and cried:

"It is impossible for me to go out in this condition; the whole skirt of my dress is burned. Is there no way of getting

a cab?"

"Surely, madame," the druggist replied; "I will send for one for you."

"I shall be greatly obliged to you, monsieur."

Adhémar, the bandaging being completed, seemed to hesitate as to what he should do; but at last he bowed, and said to his companion:

"As you have no further need of my services, madame, I will take my leave of you."

The lady blushed slightly, but she detained Adhémar, saying with some hesitation:

"Excuse me, monsieur, for keeping you longer; but I should be very glad to know the name of the gentleman who risked his—who was badly burned in my service?—Mon Dieu! I am too presumptuous—I beg your pardon."

"There is nothing presumptuous in your request, madame; on the contrary, it is most flattering to me."

And, as he spoke, Adhémar took his card from his pocket and handed it to her. She took it, looked at it eagerly, and her face assumed an expression of satisfaction.

"I know you already by name and reputation," she said, looking up at Adhémar with a smile; "I have had the pleasure of seeing most of your plays, and I congratulate myself upon this opportunity of telling the author how many pleasant moments I owe to his talent."

Adhémar could not control a feeling of pride, which showed itself on his face. What dramatic author, poet, or novelist would be entirely insensible to such praise, especially when it is uttered with a charming smile by an intelligent mouth? From the mouth of a fool a compliment sometimes has a foolish sound, and sometimes produces an absurd effect.

"I am very fortunate, madame," Adhémar replied, "if my works have afforded you any diversion; your praise almost makes me vain of my success. Do you like the theatre, madame?"

"Very much, monsieur."

"And you go often?"

"Why, yes, as often as a woman can go who is all alone in the world and must always find some friend who is willing to go with her; for a lady cannot go to the theatre alone; it is neither amusing nor proper."

"Ah! madame is—madame has no——"

"I am a widow, monsieur."

"That is what I meant to say, madame. Forgive me—I am the presumptuous one—but I should be very happy to know——"

"For whom you have risked your life and burned yourself, and whether the person was worth the trouble?"

"Oh! madame, pray believe that that is not what I was about to say. In the first place, it seems to me that every person who is in danger deserves to be assisted, whatever her appearance or her rank. But with you, madame, I could not be otherwise than flattered to have had this adventure. I see that my question was indiscreet, and I withdraw it."

"And I, monsieur, on the contrary, am determined that you shall know whom you rescued so unselfishly; I like to believe that you will not regret your action."

"It is enough to see you and talk with you, madame, to form a most favorable opinion of you, and——"

"Oh! you know that it is not safe to trust to appearances, monsieur. They are very deceitful, especially in Paris. Take this—take it, I beg you!"

As she was speaking, she had taken from a dainty little reticule the card which she offered to Adhémar; he took it at last, and put it in his pocket without glancing at it.

The messenger returned and informed the lady that her carriage was waiting. She thanked him, and was about to go, after bowing to Adhémar, when he offered her his hand, saying:

"Will you not allow me to escort you to your carriage, madame?"

"With great pleasure, monsieur."

They went out of the druggist's shop together, the lady having passed her arm through her escort's, because the sight of a gentleman leading a lady by the hand, on the boulevard, in broad daylight, would have caused all the loiterers to stop and stare; less than that is enough to attract the attention and arouse the curiosity of the Parisian, who is excessively prone to loiter, and seizes on the wing every possible opportunity to kill time.

They soon reached the carriage, which the lady entered; then she said to Adhémar:

"It may be that your injured arm will pain you if you walk, monsieur. Will you not allow me to take you home, or wherever you wish to go?"

"You are a thousand times too kind, madame; but I do not desire to cause you so much trouble, and I assure you that my hand doesn't pain me at all."

She did not insist, but pursed her lips as one does when one is annoyed. Then she bowed low to Adhémar, and said to the cabman:

"No. 40, Rue de Paradis-Poissonnière."

The cabman closed the door, mounted his box, and drove away; and Adhémar, standing on the same spot, looked after it, muttering:

"Why on earth did I refuse to let her drive me home? What a fool a man is, sometimes! You long for a thing—for it would have given me great pleasure to spend a longer time with her—and you refuse it! Why? I haven't any good reason to give myself, even. But, yes, I have one! She is good-looking, I feel certain that she would attract me, that I should speedily fall in love with her; and I do not propose to fall in love again! But does that purpose involve a resolution not to form an agreeable intimacy? And then, what right have I to assume that this lady would have listened to me?—Let us see what her name is. As for her address, I remember that; she told the cabman loud enough."

He took the card from his pocket and read:

"Nathalie Dermont—nothing more; and there's no *widow* on the card. Why is that omitted? But still, if her husband has been dead some time, she's not bound to go on styling herself *widow*. She's an exceedingly attractive woman! A

pretty face and figure, and nothing stupid about her! Ah! that is the principal thing to guard against; for a stupid woman is deadly! However, I haven't wasted my day, at all events."

III

A DEALER IN SECOND-HAND CLOTHES

Dodichet had as his mistress for the moment—or, rather, as his companion in pleasure, for, as he had money only occasionally and by chance, he rarely indulged in the luxury of a mistress—he had, we will say, for an intimate acquaintance a young woman who danced in the ballet at one of the smaller theatres, and who was always ready to accept an invitation to dinner or supper, when he was sufficiently in funds to allow him to extend such an invitation.

Dodichet betook himself to the abode of this stage artist, whose name was Boulotte, and who lived on the fifth floor of a house on Faubourg du Temple. Mademoiselle Boulotte, who was in the act of compounding a new kind of mineral rouge, with bricks pounded up in flour, uttered a cry of joy when Dodichet appeared.

"Have you come to take me to dine at the restaurant?" she said. "My word! but it comes just at the right time; I've had nothing but a sausage to-day, and that's too light."

"No, Boulotte; no, dear angel of my dreams,—when they are golden,—I have not come to invite you to dinner; because the tide is low, and I don't propose to take such a woman as you to any cheap place."

"Oh! that wouldn't make any difference to me! there are cheap places where they give you very good stewed rabbit. But still, if you haven't any money, I'll give you half of my black radish and fried potatoes, which I'm just going out to buy."

"You are a dear, good child; you share with a friend all that you possess. That isn't very much, to be sure; but it's all the more creditable of you to give away half of it. Thanks, my dear love, but I cannot accept the feast you offer me. I am on the lookout for a certain person; I saw him two days ago, but at sight of me he ran like a thief; I couldn't catch him, but I shall sooner or later!"

"Is it somebody who owes you money?"

"No; he doesn't owe me any, but he'll give me some, all the same. Oh! I'll worm it out of him, and without remorse too, as he's very rich. Then, I'll give you a regular Belshazzar, with truffles and champagne!"

"Why will this man give you money?"

"Because I know his secret."

"What sort of a secret?"

"If I should tell you, it wouldn't be a secret any longer."

"So you think I am very leaky, do you?"

"My dear little Boulotte, when I know a secret, which may be the goose with the golden eggs to me, I should be a great fool if I gave it away. But let's drop the subject; that wasn't what I came here for. Boulotte, you must do me a favor."

"One, two, three! go on, don't hesitate; for I'm quite sure you don't want to borrow money of me."

"What do you take me for? You probably know some of the women who sell second-hand clothes and such things, don't you?"

"Yes, I know several of 'em; but they have pretty poor stuff. Do you want to buy me a shawl?"

"Nonsense! do you know one named Madame Putiphar?"

"Madame Putiphar? No, I don't know her; do you want to make her acquaintance?"

"Yes, and I counted on you to find her for me."

"Oh! that's easy enough! I'll ask Sara and Clara and Cora—they know so many of those women. In two days I shall be able to give you all the information you want concerning this honest tradeswoman."

"Very well. To assist you in your investigations, you can say that she arranges marriages."

"That's very definite! they all do."

"Really! I fancy that they disarrange a good many too. No matter—do my errand; I leave you to your radish and your fried potatoes; don't eat too much. You will see me again in three days; and if I have found my man, we will have, not stewed rabbit, but a salmi of truffled partridges together."

Three days later, Dodichet called again on Mademoiselle Boulotte, and found her still at work on her mineral rouge, for which she hoped to obtain a patent. Dodichet was radiant; he waltzed into the room, and began by taking the *figurante* in his arms and whirling her about without giving her time to put down her brick and her hammer, despite her cries:

"Let go, I say! or, at any rate, let me put down my brick!"

"Do you know the waltz from *L'Auberge des Adrets*, Boulotte—the one Frédérick used to dance so well in his picturesque costume as Robert Macaire? I can dance that waltz just a little."

"Let me put down my brick. Pshaw! there it goes, and it's all smashed!"

"Well! as long as you were going to smash it with a hammer anyway, you have so much less to do."

"That's different. I shall lose half of it on the floor! What in the world's the matter with you to-day that makes you so gay?"

"Parbleu! I have found my man—my Sicilian."

"Ah! the man with a secret?"

"Just so."

"And he's a Sicilian?"

"Yes, a Sicilian from Pontoise. Ah! what a fool I am! what did I say that for? Don't repeat that, Boulotte, I beg you. If you ever see me anywhere with a man you don't know, don't let the word Pontoise escape you—or everything's

over between us!"

"What silly nonsense is this you are giving me? You act like a crazy man!"

"Let's drop that. Have you done my errand?"

"Yes, monsieur; I have done your errand. I was sure that Rosa, who knows all the second-hand clothes women in Paris, would know her; she sold her not long ago a steel comb, which she owed to the munificence of an Englishman, with two teeth broken——"

"The Englishman?"

"No, the comb!"

"Very good. Rosa's one of your companions at the theatre, isn't she? a brunette with yellow eyes, and complexion to match?"

"Yes, but never mind about her; you promised me a salmi of partridges if you found your man with the secret—you see—I didn't say, your man from Pontoise."

"Hush! imprudent girl! I was coming to the salmi in a minute, when I spoke about Rosa. Our feast will take place at her room—day after to-morrow, at noon, to give her time to tell Putiphar to come there that day about one; I shall be there, you understand, and I shall have told you and Rosa what to say to her so that my plan may succeed."

"Are you going to play a joke on someone?"

"To be sure."

"Never fear, then! we'll tell her all the foolish stuff you want."

"I have never doubted it. It's understood, then—day after to-morrow, at twelve o'clock, at Rosa's.—Does she still live on Rue de Lancry?"

"Yes."

"I promise you a breakfast of swallows' nests, like the Chinese."

"No, no, I don't want that! The idea of eating birds' nests! what a horror!"

"Then we will transform them into charlotte russe."

"All right! Order the breakfast at Lecomte's, corner of Rue de Lancry and the boulevard; that's a nice restaurant."

"Never you fear; I know the good places."

Mademoiselle Rosa, Boulotte's fellow *figurante*, occupied a small fourth-floor apartment on Rue de Lancry, very daintily furnished; for, although she had yellow eyes and complexion, she always had richer protectors than several of her companions who were far prettier than she. Why was that? I decline to tell you.

On the appointed day, about half-past twelve, Dodichet was seated at the table, between Boulotte and Rosa, in the tiny dining-room of the latter's apartment. The table was covered with dishes, upon which they had already made savage attacks, and with bottles embellished with divers seals and containing wines of different colors.

They were in very high spirits, laughing while they ate, and drinking while they laughed.

"Mesdemoiselles," said Dodichet, uncorking a bottle of champagne, "I have told you the joke—the jest—the trick, in fact, which I want to play. You have promised to help me."

"We promise again."

"I swear it by my lover's hair!" said Rosa.

"Oho! but I believe your lover's bald, isn't he?—However, never mind—you know what you're to say to Madame Putiphar when she comes?"

"Oh! we know our rôles; you'll be content with us."

"But the woman doesn't come! suppose she should go back on us?"

"No danger! I told her I wanted a brooch."

"For your kitchen?"[Q]

"Why, no; to wear at my neck. Hark—someone is ringing—I'll bet that's she!"

And, in a moment, the maid came in and said to Rosa:

"Madame Putiphar is here."

"Well, show her in; she won't keep us from eating."

Almost on the instant there appeared a short but enormously stout woman, apparently somewhat between forty and fifty years of age; who had been, perhaps, in her prime, a piquant brunette, but was now simply a brunette without the piquancy, or rather a black; for her hair, whose thick plaits almost covered her cheeks, was of such a glossy ebon blackness that, at first sight, taken with her face, which was flushed and pimply, it made her head look as if it had been varnished. She was well supplied with clothes, too well supplied, in fact, for she wore two shawls,—a large one, with a smaller one over it,—a high collarette, with a cravat twisted round it; a cap, and over it a bonnet decorated with a lot of frippery; in addition, she carried a flat box under her arm, which led Dodichet to observe:

"This woman evidently carries a large part of her stock in trade about with her."

"Good-day, Putiphar!"

"Hail, Madame Putiphar!"

"Sit down, Putiphar. When I wrote you to come, I didn't know that Monsieur Dodichet, a commission merchant in sugar, would treat Boulotte and me to this impromptu feast of champagne and truffles mixed, this morning.—But that doesn't make any difference; for you're in no hurry, I take it?"

The corpulent dame replied by repeated courtesies, accompanied by loving glances at the table, mumbling:

"Oh! mesdames, don't let me disturb you at all! It smells good here, and I'm in no hurry; I'll watch you eat."

"Won't you take a glass of champagne with us, madame?"

"Oh! monsieur is very polite——"

"Accept, Putiphar, accept; nobody ever refuses a glass of champagne!"

"I am tempted——"

"With a biscuit in it, eh?"

"I should prefer, if it's all the same to you, the chicken wing I see on that dish."

"That's all right. Draw up to the table.—Manette, a plate for Madame Putiphar.—Will you have some pâté de foie gras too?"

"You tempt me—but, really, I am ashamed of myself. Monsieur will think I'm a great glutton."

"That's not a failing, madame; it's a good quality."

Madame Putiphar took her place at the table, stuffed herself with chicken, pâté, and truffles, partook freely of claret, madeira, and champagne, and never paused for breath until the dessert was being brought on. Then she wiped her mouth, saying:

"A very pretty little feast; monsieur knows how to treat the ladies."

"Oh! Dodichet's very polite," said Boulotte; "he's eaten up a lot of money with women."

"Mon Dieu! mesdames, what is the good of money, if not to give you pleasure?"

"Ah! what a sweet sentiment! Monsieur deserves to be embalmed."

"What's that! embalmed?"

"I meant to say, turned into a statuette."

"Unfortunately, you've become very rare lately, Dodichet," said Rosa; "we hardly ever see you."

"It isn't my fault! I am not my own master since my intimate friend Count Miflorès came to Paris."

"Oh, yes! that Sicilian, who's so rich!"

"He doesn't know the amount of his fortune."

"Is he a relation of yours?"

"No; but I rendered him an important service in Sicily; he was on the point of falling into a volcano; did you know there were volcanoes in Sicily?"

"Yes, mountains that spit fire; I saw one in a play, at La Gaieté."

"My Sicilian, who is very inquisitive and very brave, had ascended Mount Ætna, and was looking into the mouth of the crater; suddenly he dropped his cane, and it fell into the fiery gulf. Count Miflorès thought a great deal of that cane, which he had inherited from his mother; he was going down into the crater to try to recover it, which would have been to go to certain destruction! Luckily, I was there—with my dog, a magnificent Newfoundland. I pointed to the hole, and to the cane, of which we could see one end, and said: 'Go, seek! go, seek!'—My dog understood me; he rushed down into the crater, and soon returned with the cane between his teeth and laid it at my feet. I gave it to the count, who was overjoyed, and who swore everlasting friendship to me from that day."

"Ah! the brave count! no, I mean the brave dog! You ought to have given him a good dinner when you got home!"

"Alas! the poor beast never got home; after a minute or two, he fell dead at my feet; he was roasted, the heat of the crater had cooked him!"

"Oh! what an idea! And still he brought back the cane, roasted as he was?"

"His devotion sustained him.—But it seems to me, mesdames, that it is high time to attack this nougat and water it with a little alicante."

"Yes, yes; let's attack it and water it!—Take some nougat, Putiphar."

"You tempt me. I would make a fool of myself for this alicante!"

"What has your Sicilian come to Paris for?"

"In the first place, to see this wonderful city, which everybody aspires to know, and which no one ever wants to leave when he has once tasted its joys. Secondly, the devil of a fellow has a curious whimsey in his head: he wants to marry."

"You call that a whimsey, monsieur? why, it's a most prevalent idea."

"Look here, you'd better not talk against marriage before Putiphar, Dodichet; she'll never forgive you."

"Oh! I'll forgive monsieur for anything—he treats the ladies so handsomely; but I would like to convert him."

"Mon Dieu! madame, although I am not thinking of marriage for myself, I assure you that I have no wish to disgust others with it; and the proof is that I'm looking for a wife for my rich Sicilian."

"A wife? You're looking for a wife for him, monsieur? Oh! in that case—I beg your pardon, a sip of alicante, if you please—I may have what you want."

"Faith! madame, if you can find me somebody suited to my friend, you would give me great pleasure; for I haven't much time to give to it. I have more orders for sugar than I can handle; I am obliged to neglect my business, and I don't like it."

"I must ask you one important question first of all, monsieur: is your count rich?"

"I think I have already told you that he doesn't know the amount of his fortune."

"Then I suppose he wants his wife to be rich, too?"

"Not at all; he cares nothing at all for money; he has enough for two."

"Really! he won't ask for any dowry?"

"A dowry! why, if the woman's father should be so ill-advised as to mention such a thing, he would be quite capable of knocking him down! He would consider it an insult."

"Phew! what a noble-minded man!—A little more alicante, please."

"And some chartreuse?"

"In a minute, Monsieur Godichet."

"Dodichet."

"That don't make any difference. For heaven's sake, what does your count want in his wife?"

"This: in the first place, he wants her to be young."

"That goes without saying."

"Good figure, pretty——"

"Those are mere trifles."

"And—she must be really unmarried; do you understand?"

"Perfectly. I have what he wants, monsieur; I have it, and everybody can't say as much!"

"Are you sure? will you guarantee it?"

"Yes, monsieur; as I'm an honest woman!—A young lady, brought up in the best way by strict parents, who never goes out alone——"

"This seems to me to fit the case to perfection.—By the way, there's one other condition: my Sicilian is particular that she shall be a Parisian; he insists on that; he thinks that no women but the Parisians can wear hoopskirts gracefully."

"My young lady is a Parisian, monsieur; born, I believe, on Rue du Pont-aux-Choux, the very centre of Paris."

"The centre of the Marais, you mean, Putiphar."

"That's all the same."

"Yes; Miflorès doesn't insist that his future wife must have been born in the Chaussée d'Antin, especially as he never heard of it. Is the family respectable? We are particular about that, you see. A Sicilian count wouldn't want to ally himself with a dealer in rabbit skins—you can understand that."

"Oh! it's a most respectable family, monsieur. Monsieur Mirotaine, the father, is an ex-bailiff."

"You are quite sure?"

"Positive, monsieur. He don't do anything now—he lives on his income. Juliette's mother—mademoiselle's name is Juliette—is dead; Monsieur Mirotaine is married again, to a woman much younger than he is; from which you can conclude that the stepmother is in a hurry to marry off her stepdaughter."

"Very good! things seem to run as smoothly as if they were on wheels."

"Now, will you allow me to take my turn and ask you a few questions, monsieur?"

"I should say so! all the questions you please, Madame Joseph—I should say, Madame Putiphar! Have some chartreuse—to drink with these damsels!"

"Yes, yes, let's take a drink!—Do you like chartreuse, Putiphar?"

"If it's green, I'm afraid of it; it's too strong."

"This is yellow, and that other green."

"In that case, I'll let you tempt me. My word! but Monsieur Godichet can brag of knowing how to do things in good shape!"

Madame Putiphar sipped the yellow chartreuse, but it did not make her forget the great stroke of business of which she had caught a glimpse.

"Will you be good enough to tell me your count's age first of all, monsieur?"

"Thirty-six; he looks forty, but it's his own doing."

"The age is all right; how about his physique?"

"That corresponds with his age: a fine figure, noble carriage, fresh as a rose; his nose is a little large, but he will fix that all right by blowing it!"

"Faith! monsieur, everything seems to harmonize on both sides. Allow me to mention your friend to the Mirotaine family to-day; and as soon as he chooses to call——"

"One moment, my dear woman; we can't go so fast as that with Miflorès. He's a peculiar fellow; he is timid and, furthermore, extremely sensitive."

"Do you want Monsieur Mirotaine to call on him?"

"No, indeed! that would spoil everything."

"What are we to do, then? Look you, I believe I'll risk a little green chartreuse; we must get accustomed to everything."

"You are quite right. I drink to the fair sex, of which you are a part, Madame Putiphar."

"I have always hoped so, monsieur. Here's to yours! Hum! this is strong, and very penetrating! Well, monsieur, how are we to go to work to arrange a match between your count and my young and innocent Juliette?"

"Listen to me carefully: I'll set you the pace. In the first place, Miflorès will never consent to present himself right away in any family, as a marrying man; he wishes to study, to examine the young lady at his ease—to know her, in short—and I shall be very careful not to tell him that she knows that it is his intention to marry her; moreover, as my friend is very timid, he always insists on my going with him. I will invent some pretext for calling on your Mirotaines; I will tell the count that I am negotiating an important transaction with the papa, and that I need a guarantor. Then he will be perfectly willing to go with me."

"All that is simple enough, monsieur; I will tell Monsieur Mirotaine that you have a great deal of influence over his prospective son-in-law."

"And you will tell no falsehood, I beg you to believe. By the way, there's another matter: my friend is in the habit of dining wherever he goes; it's a noble habit, contracted in Sicily. If he isn't asked to dinner, he has the worst possible opinion of the people to whose house I have taken him. Moreover, he's a great gourmand; an excellent dinner, with plenty of good wine and dainty dishes, will dispose him favorably."

"The deuce! that makes the thing rather harder, monsieur; for I must tell you that Monsieur Mirotaine is a little close in the matter of spending money—a little miserly, I may as well say it. He never gives a dinner party. If, by any chance, he does invite anyone, it's always on condition that he brings his own dishes."

"I can assure you that we won't bring anything at all! If that's the case, there's nothing to be done!"

"It seems to me," said Rosa, "that a man can well afford to put out a little money for once, to catch a rich noble for a son-in-law, who takes his daughter without a sou."

"I should think so!" cried Boulotte; "such a husband as that is a treasure!"

"Yes, my dear loves, you are right. We won't give it up, Monsieur Godichet; I'll just speak to the stepmother; she'll back me up, for she'll be delighted to be allied to a count. She will make her husband listen to reason, and he'll give the dinner."

"All right!"

"And if Monsieur Godichet cared to go and see Monsieur Mirotaine in the meantime?"

"There's no sort of need of it; I won't go till the day we're invited to dinner, and if it wasn't for the sake of obliging my friend I wouldn't go at all; but a man must sacrifice himself for his friends."

"I must leave you, mesdames; I can't go about this business too soon."

"Go, Putiphar, go; it's worth your while."

"As soon as I've had a day fixed for the dinner, I'll write to you, Monsieur Godichet."

"Dodichet, I tell you!"

"I beg your pardon—Dodichet. By the way, your address, if you please?"

"I live at the Grand Hôtel; but I'm never to be found there; it's so grand! Come and give these young ladies your message, and they'll send it to me at once."

"Agreed. It may take two or three days, perhaps, to bring Monsieur Mirotaine to the point of giving a dinner party; but we'll succeed. Au revoir, Monsieur—Dodichet!—I got it right that time, eh? By the way, if the marriage comes off, as I hope, I stipulate that I am to furnish the trousseau and all the presents the bridegroom gives his bride."

"You shall furnish everything, Madame Putiphar, everything; even the husband's suspenders, if he wears any that day."

"Ah! Monsieur Dodichet, you're a very agreeable man!"

"Have another little glass of the green before you go?"

"You tempt me.—Mademoiselle Rosa, we'll talk about that brooch some other day."

"Yes, yes, Putiphar; there's no hurry."

Whereupon the wardrobe dealer, whose complexion had changed to purple as a result of all that she had drunk, executed a graceful courtesy, none the less, and withdrew.

IV

TWO FRIENDS

Mademoiselle Juliette, Monsieur Mirotaine's daughter, was nearly nineteen years of age, but was such a gentle and timid young woman that one would readily have mistaken her for a schoolgirl of twelve. She trembled before her father, who always treated her harshly; and ever since she had had a stepmother, her life had been passed in doing the will of one or the other. Let us hasten to say, however, that Madame Mirotaine II was no tyrant; indeed, she was not unkind at heart; but she was anxious to get rid of her stepdaughter, because she herself was inclined to be coquettish, and Juliette was exceedingly pretty. Although her timidity made her seem like a child, physically speaking she was a lovely girl of nineteen, with a graceful figure, clear white skin, and brown hair; her mouth was beautiful, her teeth small and even, her almond-shaped eyes were charming in the softness of their expression; but she kept them almost always on the ground, at least before her parents; I like to think that she raised them sometimes when she was talking with Lucien.

Juliette was very easily moved; that could be divined from her eyes and the tones of her voice; she had listened at first with pleasure, then with love, to the declarations of young Lucien, who had long been in the habit of calling at Monsieur Mirotaine's, whose commissions and errands he was always ready to undertake. But he was not welcomed there so cordially since he had dared to ask Monsieur Mirotaine for his daughter's hand.

"My daughter has no dowry," the father had replied; "you haven't a sou, nor any place, nor any trade; so you can't marry her. Earn some money, work up a flourishing business, and I'll give you my daughter."

"Then, monsieur, promise to keep her for me till I have succeeded."

"No, indeed; that might be altogether too long. I shall marry Juliette as soon as I have found a good match for her; meanwhile I am perfectly willing that you should come to my house and do my errands when I have any, but on condition that you are never to be alone with my daughter, and that you never mention the subject of love to her."

Lucien promised; indeed, he had to promise, in order to be allowed to continue his visits to the house; but, as will be seen, the lovers were in a very melancholy plight, and they could hardly find a minute to exchange a word of love in secret.

Luckily for Juliette, she had a friend upon whose bosom she could pour out her heart, to whom she told all her troubles and her hopes—in short, everything that took place in her heart and in her mind.

She was a boarding-school friend, but was six years older than Juliette; they were in perfect accord, however, in their views, their feelings, and their sentiments. The friend had married immediately upon leaving school; she had not been able to obtain permission for Juliette, who was then only fourteen, to come to her wedding; but Juliette's father had consented to her receiving her friend's visits. Knowing that she was rich, Monsieur Mirotaine thought that she could not be an undesirable acquaintance for his daughter.

It is needless to say that when Juliette fell in love with Lucien her passion was confided to her tender-hearted friend, as well as the disappointments of the lovers, their hopes, and their plans for the future. Meanwhile, the friend had lost her husband; but as she had not married for love, it is probable that she shed very few tears on her young friend's breast.

It was two o'clock in the afternoon; Juliette was alone in her chamber and even more melancholy than usual; we shall soon know the reason. She had at least the satisfaction of having a chamber to herself, where she could weep at her ease; a narrow corridor led to it from the reception-room, so that to reach it one was not obliged to pass the whole suite. Hence, the girl might, in an emergency, have received a secret visit from Lucien; he might have slipped into her room from the dining-room. But Juliette would not allow it; she felt that it would be wrong to receive a young man secretly in her bedroom; she did not wish to expose herself to her stepmother's remonstrances and her father's anger. But Juliette was unhappy; she sighed, and sometimes wept a large part of the day.

It was with a cry of joy, therefore, and a feeling of the utmost satisfaction that she saw that friend enter her room, to whom alone she could pour out her heart.

"Ah! Nathalie, at last!" said Juliette, running to meet the young widow, who began by kissing her. "What a long time since you came to see me! fie, madame! it is wicked of you to neglect me so, when I have no other friend, no other consolation, but you! Come, sit down here with me this minute. Oh! how happy it makes me to see you!"

"Don't scold me, my dear Juliette; the reason that I haven't been to see you for some time is that I haven't been very well."

"Oh, dear! that was all that was wanting—that you should be sick! You ought to have written to me; I would have shown father your letter, and he couldn't have refused to let me go to see you and nurse you."

"It wasn't worth while; it's all over now, as you see."

"Why, no—no, you are a little pale."

"I always am. But you have a pair of red eyes; what does that mean? You have been crying; is there anything new? doesn't Lucien love you any more?"

"Oh, yes! poor boy—I see in his eyes that he still loves me; he can't tell me so except with his eyes, but I can understand what they say."

"What is the matter, then?"

"Oh! mon Dieu! the matter is that they are still bent on marrying me, especially my stepmother, who wants to get rid of me; and this time it seems that they have found a husband for me. It's that infernal second-hand dealer, Madame Putiphar, who has planned it all. She promised my stepmother to bear me in mind. And now they say she's found a superb match for me: a Neapolitan or Sicilian count—or some kind of an Italian nobleman, immensely rich, who doesn't want a dowry!—do you hear? no dowry! That is what captivates father."

"Have you seen this count?"

"No, not yet, thank God! but it appears that I am to see him soon; we're to give a dinner for him and one of his friends, who always accompanies him."

"Your father is going to give a dinner party? it isn't possible!"

"Oh! he didn't want to; but it seems that this count is in the habit of dining in every house he goes to—he and his friend; my stepmother Aldegonde brought my father to the point. 'You must give this dinner,' she said, 'and let it be a handsome one; a rich and noble son-in-law is well worth going to some little expense.'—Father swore, but he yielded—and the day is fixed: the day after to-morrow, my prospective husband is to dine with us. And that is why I am crying! why I am so unhappy! And I saw in Lucien's eyes that he knew all about it; Aldegonde probably told him, just to be nasty."

"Come, come, my poor Juliette, don't get so excited; this marriage hasn't come off yet. You are very pretty, but perhaps your style of beauty won't please this Italian."

"Oh! I'll make faces at him."

"A thousand things may happen to prevent it. Has your father made any inquiries about the man?"

"I don't think so; he relies on Madame Putiphar's word, and she praises him in the highest terms, as well as his friend, who's a commission merchant in something or other."

"A commission merchant in marriages, I should say! However, I prefer to believe that your father wouldn't marry you to a man without knowing something about him. And, do you know, there's one thing in all this that seems so perfectly absurd to me—that is, the idea of this rich nobleman absolutely insisting on being invited out to dinner—he and his friend! That has every appearance of a joke, do you know!"

"That is so. You are right! It doesn't seem altogether natural."

"I don't know why, but I suspect some sort of a scheme in all this. There are so many schemers in Paris! Look you, my dear, this marriage isn't made yet, and something tells me that it never will be."

"Bless you, my dear Nathalie! you renew my hopes, you bring back joy to my heart! Ah! how good it was of you to come!"

"Yes, and you have no idea that you came very near never seeing me again; that I have been in great danger."

"Mon Dieu! how you frighten me! what has happened, in heaven's name?"

"My dress caught fire, my love; it was all ablaze, and I never suspected it!"

"Oh! heaven!"

"Don't be alarmed; the danger must have passed, as I am here."

"Was it long ago?"

"Not more than a week.—I was walking on the boulevard; it seems that my dress came in contact with a lighted match, which our gentlemanly friends are in the habit of strewing along their path, presumably to gratify themselves by roasting us alive! My dress was on fire, and I had no idea of it, when suddenly I felt two strong arms surround me—yes, hug me; I started to cry out, I thought that it was an insult—my dear, my life had been saved! A young man, at the risk of burning himself to death, had sacrificed himself in order to extinguish the fire, and he did it very adroitly, but at the cost of quite a bad burn on his wrist."

"Oh! the poor fellow! I wish I could thank him. Was he a workingman?"

"No; a very elegant young man—and very good-looking. We were surrounded in a moment; you know how inquisitive everybody is in Paris. Luckily, there was a druggist's shop within a few steps, and we took refuge there; and while my rescuer's arm was being dressed, we talked a little. You can understand that I was anxious to know who it was to whom I was so deeply indebted; I asked him his name, and he gave me his card; he was Monsieur Adhémar Monbrun—a dramatist who writes delightful plays. You don't know him, poor darling, for they never take you to the theatre!"

"No, but I know the name through Lucien. This Adhémar Monbrun is a friend of his; he has often spoken to me about him, and he speaks very highly of him."

"Really? Monsieur Lucien knows him, and speaks very highly of him?"

"Yes; he says that he is a very generous man, always ready to help his friends. Indeed, he has said to me more than

once: 'If I wanted money, I am very sure that Adhémar would lend me some; but, in my opinion, a man ought not to borrow when he doesn't know how he can repay the loan.'—But finish your story."

"Oh! it's almost finished.—When he gave me his card, I thought it best to give him mine; for I didn't want him to think he had rescued a lorette, or a bitch—as they call prostitutes now. Then I sent for a cab, for I couldn't walk home with my dress all burned. The cab came, and Monsieur Adhémar escorted me to it; I offered to drive him home, for he had to carry his arm in a sling. That was natural enough, wasn't it?"

"Surely. Poor fellow! is he badly burned?"

"Yes, on the wrist; it will not be serious; but he will probably retain the mark. He declined my offer, and left me."

"Ah! and was that all?"

"Yes."

"It's a pity!"

"What a child you are! Oh! there was something else, though."

"What was it? what was it? I had a shrewd idea that it wasn't finished."

"I thought that it would be discourteous of me, knowing his address, not to send to inquire how his burn was getting along; for, you see, it was for me, it was in assisting me, that he was injured."

"Why, of course; and it was your duty to inquire."

"Still, I hesitated a long while."

"Why so?"

"Oh! because—I don't know—I was afraid it would seem as if I wanted to force that young man to think about me."

"Really? was that the reason?"

"Dear me! how spiteful you are this morning!—At last, I concluded to do it; and three days ago I sent my servant to inquire about the burn. She saw him, and he told her that it was almost well, that he thanked me very much for the interest I was good enough to take in him, and that he should have the honor of coming himself to thank me."

"Oho! so he has been to see you, has he?"

"No; that was three days ago, and he hasn't been yet. He probably said it to be polite; he won't come."

"I'll bet that he will."

"He may come or not, as he pleases; after all, it makes no difference to me."

"Oh! what a lie!"

"Juliette!"

"Yes, that's a lie; it does make a difference to you! Tell me, Nathalie, am I not to be your confidante, as you are mine? You have often said to me: 'I made a marriage of reason; I have never known what it is to love; but it must be a very pleasant thing. I am bored sometimes when I am alone; if I loved somebody, it seems to me that I should never be bored.'"

"Yes, I have said all that to you; what then?"

"Well—let me look into your eyes. Come, I'll bet that you are never bored now."

"What an idea, Juliette! You will have it that I am in love with a man whom I hardly know, who has never spoken to me but once, and who has no desire to see me again—as you see!"

"Mon Dieu! I don't say that you love him; but I think that he attracted you—that you might have fallen in love with him."

"Well, yes! yes, my dear friend; yes, he did attract me; yes—— I don't know whether it is gratitude for the great service he rendered me, or—— Oh! I won't conceal anything from you! Ever since that day, I don't know what has been the matter with me: I have been nervous and sad; everything irritates me; I keep wanting to cry; I think of him all the time; I tell myself that I am a fool, that I lack common sense. But I am not bored any more—no, no, I am never bored now!"

And Nathalie threw her arms about her friend; her heart had longed for a vent, and it was relieved as of a burden. Then she continued:

"And Lucien knows him? Oh! how I would like to see Lucien! I would ask him a thousand questions. But you say he speaks highly of him?"

"Yes, very.—By the way, I remember——"

"What?"

"No, I won't tell you that."

"Is it something concerning Monsieur Adhémar? I insist upon your telling me, and telling me instantly!"

"Well, Lucien said: 'It's a pity that Adhémar will never believe that anyone loves him; it is true that he has been deceived so often by his mistresses that it may well have made him distrustful; but he carries it too far now; he has sworn never to love any woman again.'"

"That's a drunken man's oath, my dear love," said Nathalie, with a smile; "and that young man isn't old enough to keep it."

"But tell me, my dear, is there anything new? Have you had no news?"

"Of whom?"

"You know to whom I refer."

"Oh! yes, I understand; but, really, my adventure with Monsieur Adhémar has made me entirely forget the person you speak of. No, thank heaven, I haven't seen him again!"

"I am so glad! when I think of him, do you know, I am always afraid for you."

"What a child you are!"

At that moment, Madame Mirotaine II entered the room.

"Your father's asking for you, Juliette," she said.—"Ah! your servant, madame! excuse me for disturbing you."

"Not at all, madame; I was just going when you came in; in any event, I would not keep Juliette from obeying her

father's summons.—Au revoir, dear girl!"

As Nathalie kissed her, Juliette whispered in her ear:

"Come to see me after the famous dinner; I will tell you the result."

"Very well; and I will tell you if—I have seen him again."

"Madame, I have the honor to salute you."

"Present my compliments to Monsieur Mirotaine, if you please!"

"I will not fail, madame."

V

SMALL DISHES IN LARGE ONES

The day of the famous dinner party had arrived, and everything was in confusion at Monsieur Mirotaine's, where the entertainment of strangers was a most extraordinary thing. From ten o'clock in the morning, the master of the house had been parading his apartments, going constantly from the dining-room to the kitchen and back, and heaving profound sighs at sight of the preparations for the repast. Seeing Goth, his young maid-servant, take something from the sideboard, he stopped her, saying:

"What's that you're taking?"

"Pepper, monsieur."

"What for?"

"To put in the sauce piquante I am making."

"What's the use of a sauce piquante?"

"Why, it's to eat with your joint, monsieur,—your rib of beef. A fillet would have been tenderer, but monsieur wouldn't have that."

"Why not ortolans, and have done with it? You people have sworn to ruin me to-day! Mon Dieu! such profusion, such waste! Leave the pepper there—you don't need it."

At this point, Madame Mirotaine appeared on the scene.

"What's the matter with you, my dear?" she asked.

"Monsieur won't let me have the pepper," said Goth; "but I must have some for my sauces."

"What are you thinking about, my dear? Don't you want anything to be good?"

"I want—I want you to stop throwing my money out of the window. Every minute this girl has to have something new—salt or pepper. It's enough to break a man's heart!"

"Well, monsieur, I'd like to know why I don't have a supply of such things in my kitchen, like the cooks do in all decent houses?—And, madame, I must have some pickles too, and some capers for the white sauce for the fish."

"We must send out for some."

"Not by any means; it's all unnecessary. What's the good of capers? You have plenty of mustard here."

"But, monsieur, you don't put mustard in a white sauce."

"Make it red, then."

"My dear, if you don't let us have what we need for dinner, everything will be horrid; and then you will certainly have spent money uselessly, instead of doing yourself credit."

Monsieur Mirotaine took an old bandanna handkerchief from his pocket and wiped his eyes, muttering:

"You make me do crazy things, Aldegonde!—What are you going to have for dinner, anyhow?"

"In the first place, we have a julienne soup."

"What does *julienne* mean?"

"Vegetables cut fine."

"Oho! vegetables at the very beginning! What next?"

"There will be butter and radishes on the table."

"That makes two courses."

"No, those are hors-d'œuvre; they don't count."

"*Don't count* is good! they have to be paid for, all the same!"

"The next course to the soup is always fish."

"Are you sure that you couldn't possibly have the soup without it?"

"It's customary. We have a pike; salmon would have been better, but as the very smallest ones are worth from fifteen to twenty francs——"

"What an outrage! And to think that there are people who eat salmon!"

"So I had a pike instead, and for that we must have a caper sauce."

"Why can't it be eaten without sauce?"

"It wouldn't be good.—Flanking the fish we shall have cutlets with peas and a *tourte aux boulettes*."

"The twenty-four-sou kind, I trust?"

"For eleven people! the idea! The two-franc size, and that will be very scant!"

"Well, I hope that that's all."

"I should think not! that's only the first course. Now we come to the second."

"Great God!"

"For your joint, you have ribs of beef; then, for vegetables, on one side string beans, on the other spinach."

"Why need you have more vegetables? You have served them already with your julienne, you told me, so you don't want them again."

"Julienne is a soup, not a meat course. Then——"

"What! is there something more?"

"Macaroni; and as it is always necessary to have sweets——"

"Take my head at once!"

"No, my dear; that wouldn't be good. We shall have a *crême à la vanille*. You must give me some sugar; I haven't any left."

"Nor I, either!"

"Well, there's plenty at the grocer's."

"No, I still have a few pieces of candied sugar."

"Give them to Goth.—For dessert, such fruit as is in season."

"Prunes?"

"This is summer time, and you don't give your guests dried fruit. Then cheese——"

"Marolles—that's the best."

"Nonsense! your marolles smells up the whole room. Roquefort, and biscuit."

"Enough! enough! you may as well kill me!"

"Oh! you forgot the salad, madame."

Monsieur Mirotaine, in a rage, aimed a kick at Goth, shouting:

"There's salad for you! That will teach you to ask for something else!"

Goth began to cry, and demanded her wages. Madame Mirotaine succeeded in pacifying her, and sent her off to her kitchen; then she berated her husband for giving way so to his temper, and told him that she would leave him if he interfered again in the details of housekeeping. Monsieur Mirotaine, who set great store by his wife for the very reason that she led him by the nose, begged her pardon and added, with a sigh:

"It's this dinner that irritates me, and makes a brute of me!"

"Just remember that you are going to get rid of your daughter—to marry her to a millionaire Italian count, Count Miflorès, who will give us some superb presents, I am sure, when he gives her her wedding gift."

"You think that he'll give us something?"

"Madame Putiphar feels sure of it."

"Then it's all right!"

"It is well worth a dinner.—By the way, monsieur, have you thought about the wine?"

"The wine! why, I have some in the cellar."

"Yes, our regular table wine, which is very bad."

"The more water you put in it, the better it is."

"But we must have claret with the second course, and champagne at dessert; everybody does."

"That's it: everybody does! Luckily, I know a man who makes champagne at one franc twenty-five the bottle."

"It must be perfectly awful stuff!"

"He assured me that it was delicious and foamed like beer."

"As for claret, somebody sent you a basket of twenty-five bottles, either in payment of a debt, or as a present; but I know that it's excellent."

"Yes; but I am keeping it for some time when I may be sick."

"You will give me two bottles of it, monsieur; you must."

"Two bottles! isn't one enough?"

"No; we shall be eleven at table."

"As many as that?"

"When you entertain strangers, you don't give them just a family dinner; that's too informal. I have invited all the Brid'oisons; we have dined there several times, and this was a good opportunity to return their courtesy; besides, you have business relations with Monsieur Brid'oison."

"Oh! he finds me a borrower now and then. Will they bring their son?"

"Of course; they are mad over him, as you know. Naturally, we shall have Madame Putiphar; it is she who is arranging the match; and then, she knows the count's intimate friend, a very jovial young man, so it seems. Then I have invited your sister, Madame Trichon; she's an excellent woman."

"Yes, and a widow, without any children, whose heir I should be, if she should happen to die. But she's very hearty—she eats a lot!"

"To offset her, I have invited Monsieur Callé; he's a very distinguished young man, and he eats almost nothing."

"Do you really mean it? But what is the explanation of your inviting him?"

Aldegonde bit her lips for a second, trying to think of a reply. At last she found one:

"He is a very good musician; he sings well, and plays the flageolet. In the evening it will be pleasant to have a little music."

"Does the young man accompany himself on the flageolet when he sings?"

"No, but he can play for the dancing; I have invited several more people to come in in the evening; and if they want to dance——"

"Whom have you invited?"

"The Boulard ladies, your friend Dubotté and his wife——"

"Oh! he never comes!"

"He said that he would try to come this time. Then the brothers Bridoux. There'll be quite a lot of us. But we shall

have to pass round refreshments during the evening."

"Very well; you can give them cocoa."

"No, monsieur, no! Cocoa does well enough when we have nobody but your sister and Monsieur Callé, who is very abstemious; but for this Italian count we must have something else."

"Well, lemonade, then. Squeeze a lemon in two or three quarts of water; it's very refreshing."

"That's my affair, monsieur; I will think it over, and find a way to provide what is right. You will dress, monsieur, I trust?"

"Ain't I all right as I am?"

"No, certainly not; your linen is soiled, and your waistcoat all covered with spots. You must put on a black coat."

"I don't own such a thing."

"You don't own a black coat?"

"What's the use, when I never wear one? But I have a black overcoat that I've only had five years; it's the same as new."

"Well, monsieur, dress as well as you can. I have told your daughter to beautify herself, too; she must make a favorable impression on this Monsieur Miflorès!"

"Oh! young girls are always coquettish enough."

"As for myself, I shall try to make myself presentable and to do you credit. I must now see how things are going in the kitchen."

Monsieur Mirotaine, being left alone, heaved a prodigious sigh; then, after reflecting for some time, he went hastily down into his cellar with a pitcher full of water; he took several bottles of wine and drew the corks, then filled some empty bottles with two parts of wine, and one of water from his pitcher. Having thus manipulated four bottles, he took them upstairs, chuckling over what he had done. Then he took two bottles of the Château-Léoville which had been given him, and was about to doctor them in the same way; but he heard footsteps; it was Aldegonde returning; she took possession of the two bottles which she saw on the table, and the generous wine escaped the baptism which awaited it.

While Monsieur Mirotaine was making up his mind to dress, and madame was devoting all her attention to her toilet, Juliette, who had been dressed for a long time, and who would gladly have disfigured herself in order to create an unfavorable impression on this guest in search of a wife, but who was as pretty as ever, because, even when a woman wants to make herself look ugly, she always dresses so that she does not look so—Juliette was busy setting the table, the cook having too much to do about her saucepans to find time to lay the cloth. The girl sighed as she arranged the plates, and said to herself:

"If this dinner were to celebrate my engagement to Lucien, what a difference it would make! how happy I should be! But they haven't even invited poor Lucien; and yet, only last night, father sent him from the Barrière du Trône to Passy, and didn't even pay for a seat on top of an omnibus!"

Madame Mirotaine came to look at the table; she held in her hand divers small slips of paper, on which the names of the guests were written.

"We must arrange these carefully," said Aldegonde.

"What are you going to do with those slips of paper, madame?"

"They are to show each person the seat he or she is to take at table."

"Why, can't they sit wherever they choose?"

"No; it is good form to put each guest's name at his place beforehand; that makes it more convenient about taking seats."

"Then I beg you, madame, not to put me beside this stranger, this Italian count."

"On the contrary, Juliette, you must sit beside him. As he is coming here for the purpose of meeting you, he must be able to talk with you."

"You know that I never talk, madame; put him beside you, he will be much better pleased."

"But, Juliette, I am not the one whom this gentleman wants to marry."

"That's a great pity!"

"What a child it is! The best I can do is to place the count between us, at my left; at my right, I shall put the man who deals in sugar, who is very agreeable, so Madame Putiphar assures me. Whom shall I put next to him? It's very embarrassing! It's a regular science to arrange your company right."

"Put Monsieur Brid'oison there."

"No, we must have a lady next to a man; the sexes should be mingled as much as possible. Ah! Madame Putiphar; this gentleman knows her, and he will be very glad to talk with her. And then—great heavens! what a puzzle! Ah! Monsieur Callé—that will do; Monsieur Callé, then Madame Brid'oison, Monsieur Mirotaine, Madame Trichon, and Monsieur Brid'oison. There! it's all done."

"But that makes only ten, and there are eleven plates. You have forgotten to write a slip for one guest."

"Pshaw! whom have I forgotten?"

"Artaban—young Brid'oison."

"Oh! to be sure; he's not a pleasant neighbor, that urchin; his father makes him do gymnastic exercises, and he's always thrashing about to show his limberness and strength; he keeps kicking you if you're near him."

"Put him next to me; I don't care."

"No; we'll put him between his father and Madame Trichon; they will make him keep quiet. Now, it's arranged as well as possible. I must run and finish dressing; for it's after four o'clock. And you, Juliette?"

"I am all ready, madame."

"But your hair is done very badly; and not an ornament in it—not a flower!"

"What's the use?"

"What do you say? what's the use? when it's a matter of marrying a millionaire count!"

"You know perfectly well that I love Lucien."

"Oh! bless my soul! love your Lucien all you please, but marry the count; that's all we ask of you."

Aldegonde returned to her room to finish dressing; and Juliette to hers, still cursing the second-hand clothes woman; while Monsieur Mirotaine, who had completed his toilet, appeared in the dining-room and walked around the table, carefully scrutinizing everything that was on it.

"What an array! what a feast! what fuss and feathers! Three glasses at each plate!—why three glasses? Are they supposed to drink three times at once? Ah! these are champagne glasses! How lucky I was to find some champagne for one franc twenty-five! What are all these things? radishes, butter, little onions! What profusion!"

Monsieur Mirotaine began to count the pickles:

"Nine, ten, twelve pickles! and they're big ones, too! That's much too many."

He took away four and put them in his pocket.

"That leaves quite enough. Now for the onions! there are too many of them too."

He took a handful of pickled onions, which he also stuffed into his coat pocket. Then it was the radishes' turn; as there were a great many of them in the dish, he took out two large handfuls, which went to join the onions and pickles. The only thing left for him to reckon with was the butter; he stopped in front of it and reflected as to how much he could safely put aside; but at that moment the bell rang, and Monsieur Mirotaine had barely time to lick his fingers, with which he had seized the butter.

VI

YOUNG ARTABAN'S GYMNASTICS

The Brid'oison family arrived first of the guests. Monsieur Brid'oison: a tall, gaunt man, with the face of a fox, somewhat softened in outline by frequent use of the juice of the grape; but still austere in manner when he was sober. Madame: a tall, yellow-skinned woman, with a face like an axe, red-eyed, and addicted to long, corkscrew curls which hung down to her shoulders. And, lastly, their son Artaban, eight years of age, with curly hair, a flat nose, a long, pointed chin, hands always black with dirt, and an impudent manner; he constantly walked with his head near the ground and his legs in the air, and made his father's bosom swell with pride by so doing.

"Here we are!" said Monsieur Brid'oison; "we have come early, but I don't like to keep people waiting; there are those who claim that it's good form, but I call it the worst kind of form. How are you, Mirotaine! where are the ladies?"

"Still at their toilet, I presume; women are never done, you know, when they set out to dress."

"Oh! for my part, it don't take me long," said Madame Brid'oison; "five minutes is enough for me."

"Yes, I started my wife right. 'Égilde,' I said to her, 'if you are not dressed in five minutes, I warn you that I won't wait; I'll start without you.'—I tell you, I'm a martinet for being on time!"

"That made me awfully unhappy at first. One day, we were going to dine out; Brid'oison called up to me: 'I'm all ready' and I hadn't put on my garters! I went without 'em, but it bothered me all the time."

"Here's my son Artaban, who's as good a gymnast as Auriol already.—Walk on your head, Artaban, to show what you can do."

The little fellow instantly put his hands on the floor, with his head down and his legs in the air, and made the circuit of the salon in that fashion; but when he put his feet down, he struck the legs of a small table on which the coffee cups had been set out; the shock knocked two of them to the floor, and they were broken. Monsieur Mirotaine made a great outcry:

"The devil take you with your gymnastics! There's two cups smashed! What sort of a crazy idea is it—to make a child walk on his head; and in a salon, too!"

"Bless my soul! don't lose your temper over two cups; and see, here's one of them that has only the handle broken."

"It takes away all its value, none the less."

"I'll give you two others."

"Oh, yes! people say that, but no one ever replaces anything. Do you propose sending your son to the circus, that you make him do such tricks as that?"

"No; I am going to make a lawyer of him."

"Do you expect him to try cases, walking on his hands?"

"My dear friend, gymnastics is always a good thing, in every station of life. A lawyer may have occasion to show how a thief went to work to climb into a window; he'll make a poor fist at it if he doesn't know anything about gymnastics."

The ladies appeared in the salon, accompanied by Madame Trichon.

"What has happened?" inquired Aldegonde; "I heard my husband shouting."

"Nothing, dear madame, a trifle!"

"He calls two handsome cups nothing, which his son broke while he was walking on his head."

"Does your son walk on his head? Dear me! I should have liked to see that."

"He can do it again."

"No, no, I don't want him to do it again—he'll smash all the china we've got!"

"Very well; something else, then—to show you how strong the lad is already.—Artaban, hold out a chair at arm's length.—That won't endanger your cups, Mirotaine.—Come, Artaban, pick out a chair."

The boy took one of the salon chairs, and, although he did not actually hold it at arm's length, kept it in the air for some time; and then, as he felt tired, instead of putting it down on the floor, he suddenly threw it over his shoulder,

so that the legs struck Madame Trichon, who was standing behind him, in the face.

"Oh! I am wounded!" she cried, putting her hand to her face; "my nose is broken!"

"No, no, madame; it's nothing at all!" said Monsieur Brid'oison; "your nose is still in place; just a little scratch, that's all!"

"Water! cold water, I entreat you! so that I can bathe my face."

"Your son's gymnastics is very pretty, indeed; I congratulate you!" said Monsieur Mirotaine; "but I hope that he won't give us any more of it!"

"It was because you were in his way; if it hadn't been for that, he'd have put the chair down in front of him. Never mind, he's going to be a fine, strong man; I'm very glad I named him Artaban; he'll have a right to be proud."

Madame Putiphar was the next to arrive, then Monsieur Callé. The latter was a young man of twenty-five, who resembled the heads that hair dressers put in their windows; he was combed and perfumed like a waiter; his chestnut hair was divided by a parting that started from the nape of the neck. He was an exceedingly stupid youth in appearance, and his language accorded perfectly with the expression of his face, which always wore a surprised look; he never entered a salon except sidewise, and never knew what to do with his hat.

This young man glanced furtively at Aldegonde and turned crimson as he shook hands with her husband. Madame hastened to put him at his ease by relieving him of his hat. Monsieur Callé bowed to everyone, including little Artaban, who acknowledged his courtesy by executing a handspring. As for Madame Putiphar—she made herself quite at home at the Mirotaines', and, after making a courtesy, she lost no time in asking:

"Haven't they come yet?"

"No, not yet."

"Well, it's only half-past five, and I said that you didn't dine till six; they're not late."

"Do you expect other guests?" Monsieur Brid'oison asked the host.

"Yes, two gentlemen—whom I don't know."

"What! you ask people to dinner whom you don't know?"

"They come on some—family business."

"And, you see, I know the gentlemen," interposed Madame Putiphar, "and I answer for them. First, there's Monsieur Dodichet, a commission merchant in sugar, a delightful young man, of the best tone, and as gallant as any knight; and his intimate friend, Count Miflorès, an Italian, rich as an English lord, who is looking for a young lady to marry—without any dowry."

"Ah! very good; I see—we understand.—You understand, Égilde, don't you?"

Madame Brid'oison was intent on fastening back one of the corkscrew curls, which persisted in trying to get into her mouth; so she contented herself with an affirmative smile. The dealer in wardrobes added, in an undertone, taking care to move away from Juliette:

"We mustn't act as if we knew the count's intentions, for he wouldn't like it. He thinks that we don't know them, and that he is invited solely because he's Monsieur Dodichet's friend; in that way, you see, he can talk with Juliette and not be embarrassed."

"Very well; still, you did well to warn us. I wouldn't mind a drop of absinthe while we're waiting for dinner—in some water; that opens up the appetite."

"My dear friend, if you want to drink absinthe, you may go down to the café at the corner of the street; don't hesitate."

"Why? haven't you any here?"

"What! absinthe?—a rank poison!"

"Poison when you take it pure; but with plenty of water——"

"There's no doubt but what it's the fashion nowadays," said Madame Putiphar.

"And the count may ask for it, you think?" queried Aldegonde.

"He or his friend Dodichet."

"Then we must send out for some."

Monsieur Mirotaine stamped the floor angrily, as he cried:

"Plague take Brid'oison with his absinthe! Why need he have asked for it? I refuse to buy any! If these gentlemen ask for it, you must say that we've just broken the bottle.—Do you drink absinthe, Monsieur Callé?"

"Oh! no, indeed! never, monsieur."

"Good! that proves that you have a good stomach, which does not need any stimulants to help digestion."

"All right! everyone to his own opinion! When Artaban's twelve years old, I shall have him drink absinthe before his gymnastics."

"That will cap the climax!"

VII

A MIXED DINNER PARTY

At five minutes to six, the bell rang loudly.

"Here they are!" said Madame Putiphar.

Thereupon each one of the company assumed an air worthy of the occasion. Aldegonde's face took on an amiable expression, Monsieur Mirotaine did his best to smile, Madame Trichon wiped her nose, and the others looked exceedingly curious. Juliette alone did not put herself out; she was depressed; she had hoped that they would not come.

Goth announced: "Monsieur le Comte Mimiflorès and Monsieur Beaubrochet." Maid-servants almost always have the knack of murdering the names that are given them. Dodichet entered the room as jauntily as if it were a tavern, leading his intimate friend by the hand. The friend in question was a man of about thirty-five, of medium height, rather stout than thin, who strove to conceal his utter nullity and stupidity beneath an imposing manner; he had one of those faces which tell absolutely nothing; but he tried so hard to impart some expression to his eyes that he almost made them haggard. His dress was irreproachable, even stylish; but he wore his clothes awkwardly, and carried himself in a way to make people think that he was uncomfortable in them.

Dodichet saluted on all sides, almost laughing outright; he took Monsieur Mirotaine's hand, shook it violently before that worthy had had time to respond to his salutation, and hastened to say in a loud tone:

"Delighted to make your acquaintance, Monsieur Mirotaine; I have long desired an opportunity, and when it presented itself I grasped it. We shall do some business together, Monsieur Miroton—I beg pardon, Mirotaine—and I am a sharp customer and never meddle with anything that isn't sure."

"Monsieur—I certainly——"

"Allow me to introduce my intimate friend, Count Miflorès, a wealthy Italian, who would stand behind me if necessary.—He is anxious to marry, you know," continued Dodichet, in an undertone, "and doesn't want any dowry."

"Yes, monsieur; I was told——"

"Sh! enough! you mustn't seem to know.—Come, Miflorès, and let me present you to these ladies. You are bashful, I know, but that shouldn't keep you from offering the fair sex all the homage that is due them."

Dodichet's assurance, his loquacity and his fine phrases, had the effect that they usually have upon people with little or no wit; everybody considered him delightful, and especially Juliette, to whom he whispered, as he introduced Miflorès:

"Don't be alarmed; he won't marry you. I am a friend of Lucien!"

Juliette could not restrain a faint cry of delight.

"What's the matter?" Aldegonde inquired.

"Nothing!" Dodichet replied; "my foot involuntarily struck mademoiselle's.—I didn't hurt you, I trust?"

"Oh, no! monsieur, you didn't hurt me."

"Then all is for the best, as Voltaire says in *Candide*. But is it in *Candide*? Faith! I am not sure; I have read so much in my life that I am all mixed up; I confuse my authors. Somebody asked me lately who wrote *Le Mariage de Figaro*, and I said Monsieur d'Ennery. I was wrong."

"My friend Brid'oison here bears the name of one of the characters in that play," said Monsieur Mirotaine.

"Ah! monsieur's name is Brid'oison? A fine name! a pretty name! which recalls a very—intellectual character."

"I try to be worthy of my name," said Monsieur Brid'oison, with dignity.

"You are quite capable of it, monsieur. Do you stutter?"

"No, indeed."

"That's a pity; but it may come in time."

"And this is my son Artaban, who is already very strong in gymnastics."

"Is that so? Well, I am not surprised; the little fellow has Hercules written all over his face."

"Do you think so?"

And Monsieur Brid'oison, pleased beyond words, patted his son on the cheek and said to him:

"Do you hear? you resemble Hercules!"

"In what way, papa?"

"I don't know, but in some way."

The supposititious marrying man stood perfectly stiff in the middle of the salon, at a loss what attitude to assume, but scratching his nose very often to keep himself in countenance. He had not said a word as yet, but had contented himself with bowing.

"Monsieur le comte doesn't say anything," whispered Madame Putiphar to Dodichet. "Why on earth doesn't he open his mouth?"

"Never you fear; he'll open it at dinner time."

"He seems very proud."

"That will pass away at the table."

"Ask him what he thinks of Juliette."

"Fascinating! he told me when he came in."

"How did he know which was she?"

"What a question! she's the only girl here; all the other women have worn breeches—have seen fire, I mean."

Goth announced dinner, whereupon Monsieur Miflorès exclaimed:

"Good enough!"

"It would seem that the count is hungry!" muttered Monsieur Mirotaine.

"I agree with him perfectly," said Monsieur Brid'oison.

Dodichet nudged his friend, to signify that he must offer his arm to the hostess. Meanwhile, he offered his own to Juliette, and on the way to the dining-room found time to say a few words in her ear which caused her face to glow with happiness.

They took their seats. Madame Trichon grumbled and made a wry face when she found herself beside little Artaban. Monsieur Brid'oison, offended because she dreaded his son's proximity, insisted that her seat should be changed; but Aldegonde objected, and Madame Trichon held her peace. The soup was served. While it was being passed to her guests, Aldegonde happened to glance at the dishes of hors-d'œuvre, and called to her servant:

"Goth, didn't you put on the table all the pickles and pickled onions I gave you?"

"Why, yes, madame, every one."

"Well, I certainly had many more than that; it's very strange!"

"Does madame think I ate any of 'em? Madame knows very well that I never take anything—especially as everything's kept locked up in this house!"

"Enough! enough!"

"This soup is delicious!" cried young Callé, who had his programme by heart, and knew that he must find everything excellent.

"And the radishes too!" muttered Aldegonde; "my servant has certainly been helping herself!"

"We must all live," said Dodichet. "May I ask you to drink a glass of wine with me?"

After drinking, Dodichet made a wry face.

"Excellent burgundy!" cried Callé.

"But terribly weak!" rejoined Dodichet. "However, perhaps this bottle wasn't well corked."

Monsieur Miflorès ate and drank, and still did not say a word. Meanwhile Juliette, whose fears were all done away with by Dodichet's confidential communication, spoke to her neighbor occasionally, as she offered him something. The soi-disant count contented himself with bowing as he took what she offered, but did not speak.

"Your friend is very silent," Aldegonde observed to Dodichet; "he hasn't a word to say to my stepdaughter, although she seems to be very amiable to him—which is a great surprise to me, I must confess."

"She probably finds monsieur le comte to her liking," said Madame Putiphar; "he's a very fine-looking man, and no mistake."

"I venture to hope that he will talk at dessert."

Dodichet leaned back and struck his friend on the shoulder.

"Well, Miflorès," he said, "haven't you anything to say to your neighbors? they're surprised at your silence."

"I don't like to talk when I'm eating," replied the person addressed, whose mouth was, in fact, full.

"Oh! what exquisite fish!" cried Callé, who had just been served with pike.

"It's a pity it has so many bones," said Dodichet.

At that moment, Madame Brid'oison began to cough as if she were strangling.

"Well! well! my wife has swallowed a bone!" said Brid'oison.

But Égilde informed him by signs that it was not that which made her cough, but one of her corkscrew curls which had got into her mouth.

"Oh! in that case, I've no sympathy for you. What an absurd idea it is for women to wear their hair so long!"

Monsieur Mirotaine passed his time offering everybody water. Monsieur Callé was the only man who accepted it, the result being that the host looked kindly upon him. Young Artaban, who had been very quiet thus far, began to toss his knife and fork in the air, to the great displeasure of Madame Trichon, who said to him:

"That's not the way to behave in company, my boy; at the table you should sit very still, and not play with the knives and forks."

Monsieur Brid'oison, who admired his son's skill, answered for him:

"Artaban isn't playing, madame; he is juggling at this moment like the East Indians; they call it juggling. They have balls which they toss in the air with great dexterity; having no balls, Artaban uses his knife and fork; it's harder, and more dangerous. But don't be alarmed; Artaban is too skilful to hurt himself."

"That may be, but he'll hurt me! he'll throw his fork in my face, and the chair was quite enough for me!"

"But, madame, I will answer for my son. He's as light-fingered as a monkey!"

Monsieur Brid'oison had hardly finished the sentence, when the fork, badly aimed by Artaban, struck Madame Trichon on the chin, just on a level with her teeth. She gave a loud shriek and sprang to her feet in a rage.

"It's outrageous! it's shameful!" she cried; "he has sworn to disfigure me! I insist on sitting at a small table; I will not sit by this little blackguard any longer!"

Monsieur Brid'oison turned scarlet when he heard his son called a blackguard; he mumbled something between his teeth, which, luckily, was drowned by the crash of several plates which the maid dropped, thereby driving Monsieur Mirotaine to despair. Meanwhile, at a sign from Aldegonde, Monsieur Callé had risen and changed seats with Madame Trichon. Thereupon peace was restored, albeit Monsieur Brid'oison continued to mutter:

"Blackguard! call my son Artaban a blackguard! If that woman was a man, she'd have had to give me satisfaction for that!"

The two bottles of Château-Léoville were brought, and Dodichet, having tasted it, exclaimed with the liveliest satisfaction:

"Good! this can fairly be called wine; and it's delicious, too! an intoxicating bouquet!"

"Will you have some water in it?" said Monsieur Mirotaine, offering him a carafe.

"Water in such wine as this? why, it would be downright profanation! I most earnestly hope that no one will think of spoiling it with water.—Miflorès, my dear count, just taste this wine! It will make you eloquent."

"If it does make him eloquent, it will surprise me greatly," said Monsieur Brid'oison to Callé, who was ogling Aldegonde, who was scrutinizing Miflorès, who was gazing in admiration at his brimming glass.

"How they do eat and drink!" thought Monsieur Mirotaine, stifling a sigh; "but I don't see that this supposed marrying man tries to get acquainted with my daughter. To make up for it, the commission merchant in sugar is very loquacious; he impresses me more or less as a *blagueur*. Mon Dieu! suppose that my dinner is thrown away!"

Dodichet kept the claret in circulation, but was always careful to help himself first. Monsieur Miflorès succeeded at last in saying:

"Yes, it's a very good wine."

Callé outdid all the rest by exclaiming:

"This wine is perfect nectar!"

The two bottles were soon emptied.

"Give us some more, Monsieur Mirotaine," said Dodichet; "you see how we honor it."

"I haven't any more," Mirotaine replied, "those were my last two bottles."

"Oh! what a pity!"

"But you will have some champagne in a moment."

"If it's as good in its way as the claret, it will be ambrosia."

The champagne arrived with a *crême à la vanille*, which Goth proudly placed on the table.

"Ah! now for the sweets!" cried Dodichet.

"It's a *crême à la vanille*," said Aldegonde.

Whereupon Miflorès spoke for the second time.

"So much the better!" he cried.

"He has spoken!" said Madame Putiphar.

"Yes, but not to Juliette."

"That will come with the champagne, no doubt."

Aldegonde served everybody with cream, and everybody made haste to taste it; but, in a moment, exclamations rose on all sides:

"Bah! what on earth is this?"

"What an extraordinary taste!"

"Mon Dieu! how nasty it is!"

"In the first place, it isn't sweetened at all!"

"If that was all! But the taste and the smell! I know that taste, but I can't remember what it is."

Aldegonde summoned the cook, who appeared at once.

"What did you put in your cream, Goth? it has a most peculiar taste."

"I put in what I always do, madame: milk, whites of eggs, a little of vanilla—I didn't have much of that to put in, my word!"

"And sugar?"

"Yes, the candied sugar monsieur gave me wrapped up in paper; I put it all in."

"Ah! I know what it smells of!" cried Dodichet; "it's camphor; your cream is flavored with camphor!"

"What does this mean, Monsieur Mirotaine?" said Aldegonde, looking sternly at her husband; "was it camphor you gave Goth, instead of sugar?"

"If it was, I must have taken the wrong package," said Mirotaine, slightly embarrassed. "As a matter of fact, I have several packages of camphor in my desk—and I must have mixed them with the sugar."

"There is no further doubt, monsieur, that it was camphor you gave the servant."

"Luckily, we know that it isn't injurious," said Dodichet. "Come on! let's open the champagne; that will help us to forget the camphor."

One and all eagerly held out their glasses; the champagne foamed—but only for a moment; and when everybody had tasted it, there was a profound silence; a silence that was most unpleasant, under such circumstances, and was equivalent to a general "Sh!" as on the stage. At last, Dodichet, who was always outspoken, exclaimed:

"Sapristi! this champagne isn't as good as your claret! The man who sold this to you, Monsieur Mirotaine, sold you too."

"What do you say? Sold me! Why, it's Cliquot, Cliquot *crémant*."

"That stuff, *crémant!* as much as I'm a bishop! I'll get you to give me your dealer's address, so that I may avoid him."

The champagne having proved a flat failure, and Aldegonde having no other wine to offer, the dessert came to grief; and they soon left the table, to take their coffee in the salon.

VIII

DRAMATIC SCENES

The guests were not in that vivacious frame of mind which generally signalizes the end of a dinner. To be sure, they had not had much to warm them up; the vin ordinaire was watered, the champagne resembled vinegar; the claret alone had made a success, but two bottles were a very small allowance for eleven people, especially when one of them appropriated half of it.

Madame Trichon was still brooding over the blow from a fork on her chin, and from a chair on her head. Monsieur Brid'oison was sulking because his son had been called a blackguard; his wife continued to swallow her hair; Madame Putiphar and Aldegonde were disturbed by the Italian count's silence with Juliette; the last-named alone was in a charming mood, and was ably seconded by Dodichet, who, from time to time, hid his face in order to laugh at Miflorès.

The coffee had just been brought, and Aldegonde was filling the cups, when Monsieur Brid'oison offered Monsieur Mirotaine his snuffbox, saying:

"Try this, and tell me what you think of it."

"Why, you know perfectly well that I don't take snuff."

"This brand is well worth departing from your habit."

Monsieur Mirotaine took a pinch and stuffed it into his nose, with a sign of approbation. But the pungent powder soon produced its inevitable effect upon one who was unaccustomed to its use: Monsieur Mirotaine sneezed twice in rapid succession, and the second time the effect was of such a nature that he was obliged to resort to his

handkerchief in hot haste, in order to wipe his nose. So he thrust his hand hurriedly into his pocket, and pulled out his handkerchief so quickly that with it he sent pickles, radishes, and onions flying about the room.

Everybody was dumfounded; they gazed in amazement at the hors-d'œuvre strewn about the floor and on the furniture. Madame Trichon alone uttered a cry of pain; the poor woman had no luck; she had received an onion in the eye, and, as it was pickled, it caused the delicate spot it had struck to smart vigorously.

"How is this, monsieur? is it possible that you put some of the hors-d'œuvre in your pocket?" said Aldegonde. "And to think that I suspected poor Goth! Fie, monsieur, for shame! that is unpardonable!"

Instead of asking his wife's forgiveness, Monsieur Mirotaine was on his hands and knees, picking up the delicacies he had unwittingly taken from his pocket. As for Madame Trichon, she went off to weep by herself in a corner, declaring that there was a conspiracy to disfigure her.

While they were taking their coffee, Dodichet said to his friend:

"Come, Miflorès, for heaven's sake talk a little! try to make yourself agreeable to the ladies. You act like an oyster, my dear fellow."

"I didn't ask you to bring me here; it was you who insisted on my coming, saying that it would inspire confidence in the master of the house, with whom you hoped to do a big business."

"That is true, perfectly true; that is why I passed you off for an Italian count."

"Oh! I don't care about that."

"Lying a little more or less doesn't matter; and you are lying by calling yourself Miflorès, when your real name is Seringat; a pretty name, by the way, which reminds one of a canary [*serin*], a flower [*syringa*], and a syringe [*seringue*]. Miflorès isn't your name."

"It was my mother's, so I have a right to take it."

"At all events, you don't want these people to know your real name, and what happened to you, do you?"

"No, no! never! I would rather—I—don't know what."

"Well, I know the whole story."

"But you promised to keep it secret, my good, kind friend."

"Yes; but on condition that you'll be obliging, that you'll do everything for me that I ask you to do."

"That's agreed. Do you want more money? Tell me."

"Not now; but try to be amiable, amusing, polite, while you are here; that's all I ask of you at present."

"I will try right away."

Whereupon my gentleman went to the hostess, took her hand, and kissed it several times.

"What does that mean; does he expect to marry my wife?" thought Monsieur Mirotaine.

But Aldegonde did not find that pantomime unpleasant; she smiled at Miflorès, thinking that he was about to ask for her stepdaughter's hand; but he simply bowed and said:

"There's another pickle under that chair."

Monsieur Callé hastened to pick it up and carry it to Mirotaine, who put it in his pocket, saying to Monsieur Callé:

"You don't let things lie round; you'll make your way."

Dodichet tried hard to enliven the company, and to that end resorted frequently to the decanter containing brandy, the only liqueur that was offered the guests; he helped himself to several glasses, and even went so far as to offer some to the others. Monsieur Mirotaine witnessed this procedure with impatience.

"That fellow makes too free with my brandy," he muttered; "that's the third time he's gone back to it; he pours it out as if he were in his own house! Very bad manners, I call it! I must try to take the decanter away without my wife's seeing me."

The arrival of several of the guests invited for the evening enabled Monsieur Mirotaine to carry out his plan.

Goth announced "Mesdames Boulard," and three middle-aged women appeared, dressed with much coquetry, with little caps that hardly covered the tops of their heads, from beneath which escaped *chignons* resembling muffs. Their hoopskirts were so vast that the upper part of their bodies seemed to be poised on balloons; the door of the salon was scarcely wide enough to allow them to pass through.

At sight of this trio, who promised to occupy so much space in the salon, Dodichet said to Brid'oison:

"Your young Artaban ought to perform some of his gymnastics on those balloons, to flatten them out a little."

"You are right. The fact is that women are getting to be ridiculous! before long, one woman alone will fill a whole room! Just look at my wife—what a difference! I have forbidden her to wear hoops; so that she can go anywhere; she's a regular knitting needle."

After the Boulards came the brothers Bridoux. They did not assume to fill much space. They were blowing their noses when they came in, they continued to hold their noses when they bowed; and when they decided to release their hold, exhibited faces of that inane, expressionless type which we see everywhere, and with which we are not tempted to enter into conversation.

One of the Bridoux concealed himself behind the balloon of one of the Boulards. The other exclaimed:

"Why, I don't see Mirotaine; where in the world is our dear Mirotaine?"

Dear Mirotaine had gone to put his decanter of brandy in a safe place. Meanwhile, Madame Putiphar took Dodichet aside and said to him:

"Well, monsieur, how's our business coming on? How does monsieur le comte like our Juliette? he hasn't said a single pleasant word to her. What does it mean? don't she take his fancy? We must know what to expect, you see."

"Don't you be alarmed, Madame de la Toilette; my friend is delighted with your young lady; he finds her full of intellect and altogether to his taste."

"How can he judge her intellect? he hasn't opened his mouth to her!"

"No; but he has heard her talk, which amounts to the same thing. Indeed, she passed him a dish several times and said: 'Will you have some of this, monsieur?'—And the way she said those simple words enabled him to detect her merit."

"Well, when will your count make his proposal?"

"To-morrow, probably; you can understand that he isn't likely to do it to-night, before all these people."

"Then I can tell Monsieur Mirotaine that, and begin to look after the wedding presents?"

"You must look after them at the earliest possible moment, and see that they are worthy of a sultan."

The Putiphar woman walked away, delighted, and was on the point of repeating this conversation to Aldegonde, when Monsieur Dubotté and his wife were announced.

Madame Éléonore Dubotté was a short, plump woman of twenty-five, fair-haired and white-skinned, with a round, fresh face, and exceedingly tender blue eyes, which were fixed upon her husband almost all the time. You will remember that he complained of being loved too well by his wife.

Dubotté went to pay his respects to Aldegonde, having with much difficulty induced his wife to release his arm. Then he shook hands with Mirotaine, who had reappeared without his decanter, and who seemed much flattered because Dubotté had at last accepted an invitation to his house.

But, at sight of Dubotté, Dodichet had made a most amusing grimace.

"The deuce!" he murmured; "here's a contretemps I didn't expect. But, damn the odds! Phœbus has a very nice little wife; I must pay my court to her. Let's get over the recognition."

He went straight up to Dubotté, who was already making eyes at Aldegonde, and cried:

"Halloo! Dubotté, my dear old friend! By Jove! what a pleasant surprise! How are you, Dubotté? is this your good wife you have brought with you? Pray present me to her, my dear friend, so that I may congratulate her on her husband."

Philémon Dubotté uttered an exclamation of surprise when he recognized Dodichet, who had already seized his hand and was shaking it violently.

"By what chance are you here?" he asked.—"How did you ever come to know this scamp of a Dodichet, my dear Mirotaine?"

"What's that? Scamp? I advise you to talk, my fair-haired Phœbus! If your wife wasn't here, I could tell some fine tales about you!"

Monsieur Mirotaine glanced from one to the other of the two friends with a disturbed expression, and seemed to be waiting for Dubotté to explain himself more definitely concerning the so-called commission merchant in sugar, whose free and easy manners were not at all agreeable to him. But Philémon suddenly spied between two hoopskirts the gentleman who had been introduced as a wealthy Italian count. He rushed up to him, crying:

"Well, well! I seem to be in a land of old acquaintances! Here's Monsieur Seringat the druggist, too, whom I had the pleasure of seeing at Pontoise a year ago.—Good-evening, Monsieur Seringat! how is your charming wife?"

When he heard himself called by his real name, Seringat turned pale, then purple; he put his hand to his head with a despairing gesture, and said in a faltering voice:

"No, that isn't true. I am Miflorès; I don't want to be anything but Miflorès! Let me alone; I don't know you!"

With that, he pushed aside the two balloons that encompassed him, as well as all the people who happened to be in his path, hurried from the salon, seized the first hat he saw in the reception-room, and disappeared, leaving the whole party speechless with surprise, except Dodichet, who dropped into a chair and laughed heartily at the effect of that recognition.

Monsieur Mirotaine was the first who recovered the use of his tongue.

"What does this mean?" he cried. "What! this man who was introduced to me as a wealthy Italian count, who was looking for a young lady without a dowry to marry, is a druggist from Pontoise, and married already? Why, then, I have been made a fool of! There has been an attempt to cheat me!—Answer, monsieur the commission merchant in sugar, and you, Madame Putiphar, who undertake to arrange marriages! What have you to say?"

The wardrobe dealer was sorely confused; she pointed to Dodichet, muttering:

"Why, it was monsieur who told me that he had a friend—who was very rich—who wanted a wife.—Come, monsieur, didn't you tell me that?"

"Yes, I did," Dodichet replied; "I told you so because I thought so. That rascal of a Miflorès deceived me too, and I am in despair.—But, after all, Monsieur Mirotaine, I don't see that there's any occasion for you to fly into such a rage. This mistake has afforded you an opportunity to give your friends a dinner party; you certainly can't be sorry for that. And as for myself, it has given me the pleasure of making your acquaintance, which I hope to cultivate. I will bring you some specimens of sugar and molasses, first quality. Meanwhile, I must run after this Miflorès, who has deceived me shamefully. He will have my life, or I his; but I prefer to have his.—Mesdames, I lay my homage at your feet!"

And Dodichet disappeared almost as abruptly as Seringat.

"Do you suppose that he will really fight with that pretended count?" Monsieur Mirotaine asked Dubotté.

"He, fight with the other one! It's easy to see that you don't know Dodichet! He's a *blagueur* of the first order, and all this is only a practical joke that he undertook to play on you."

Monsieur Mirotaine fell into a chair, utterly overwhelmed.

"A dinner of eleven covers!" he murmured. "Oh! my fine claret!"

"And your pretended count has carried off my hat!" shouted Monsieur Brid'oison, prowling around the dining-room.

"Cheer up, my dear," said his wife; "the one he has left behind is much newer than yours!"

IX

HOW IT BEGAN

Madame Dermont occupied a pretty little apartment on Rue de Paradis-Poissonnière; she had only one servant, but that was enough for a woman who lived alone, received little company, and was happier in her own home than at the most fashionable social assemblages. She had about eight thousand francs a year; that would have been very little for one who desired to follow all the fashions and to live a life of luxury and dissipation; it was quite sufficient for one who, like her, did not seek to cut a figure in the world, and who loved to think.

Nathalie was in her salon, seated at her piano and looking at the music. But her fingers were motionless on the keys; it is probable, therefore, that the young woman was thinking of something different from what was before her. It was two hours after her visit to her young friend Juliette.

She was roused from her reverie by the bell. The sound made her start; and yet, she no longer expected anyone—at least, she no longer expected the person of whom she was thinking.

The servant announced Monsieur Adhémar Monbrun. At that name, Nathalie trembled and the blood rose to her cheeks; she struggled to conceal her emotion, cast a glance at her dress, and told the maid to admit the visitor.

Adhémar entered with the ease of manner which is due to familiarity with good society, and is the especial attribute of men of letters and artists.

"I have come rather tardily, madame," he said, "to thank you for your kindness in sending to inquire about the trifling burn on my hand. You must have considered me very discourteous for not coming at once to offer you my acknowledgments, did you not, madame?"

"Why, no, monsieur; not at all. You had burned yourself in my cause; surely, the least I could do was to inquire concerning the condition of your burn; it was my duty; whereas there was no sort of obligation on you, monsieur, to put yourself out and waste your time by calling upon me."

"Oh! madame, allow me to believe that you do not think so ill of me as to deem it possible that it could put me out to come to see you. I should be a very unfortunate mortal if it were not a pleasure to me. But my reason for not coming was——"

"Well, monsieur, it was——?"

"Mon Dieu! madame, I don't know just how to say it. I am embarrassed——"

"You, monsieur, embarrassed with a lady! Oh! I can't believe it—unless, indeed, you have something very disagreeable to say to her; in that case, I can imagine that it comes hard to you."

"Ah! it seems to me that one could never willingly be disagreeable to you—and yet——"

"Well! you haven't told me yet why you didn't come before."

"Well, madame, it was because I thought that when a man had the good fortune to be received by you, he must inevitably feel a desire to come often—yes, very often—and that that might offend you."

Nathalie lowered her eyes, and murmured:

"Really? was that why you didn't come?"

"Yes. You know, madame, there is a proverb that warns us against playing with fire; and, to me, you are the fire at this moment."

"You have already proved to my satisfaction that you are not afraid of it. Do all women cause you such terror? Frankly, monsieur, I do not believe it!"

"Oh, no, madame! there are some with whom one cannot encounter anything more dangerous than an *ignis fatuus*—and that is not to be feared."

"A truce to jesting, Monsieur Adhémar; I want to see your wrist, and satisfy myself that it is really well."

Adhémar pulled up his sleeve and showed her the wrist that had been burned. The better to examine it, Nathalie must needs take the hand which was held out, and draw it toward her; and that hand, when she touched it, presumed to press hers very tenderly, thereby causing keen emotion to the young woman, who faltered:

"It is cured, but you have a great scar there. Mon Dieu! shall you always have it?"

"I hope so!"

"What do you say? you hope so? Why?"

"Because it will remind me of the day when I had the good fortune to be of some little service to you."

"Some little service! Why do you say a little, when it is quite possible that you saved my life?"

"Ah! if you really do owe me anything, it depends only on you to pay the debt."

"How, pray?"

"You cannot guess, madame?"

"No, monsieur; I am not good at guessing."

"Oh! I beg your pardon—but you should be better able than any other to divine the thoughts that come from the heart."

"Why I, more than another?"

"Because there is a something in your eyes which indicates their perspicacity."

"If my eyes have such a peculiar expression, I shall not dare to raise them again."

"Oh! do not deprive me of the pleasure of looking at them; that would be a punishment."

"Come, come, monsieur, don't talk to me in this way; you are in the habit of making pretty speeches to all women, no matter how little they may deserve them; but, as a general rule, they are accustomed to your language, to your flatteries, and they laugh at them because they know that they must not take too seriously the gallant speeches of a man to whom love is only a pleasant pastime. But I am not one of those women, monsieur! I go into society very little, and the life that artists lead is entirely unfamiliar to me. You will agree, will you not, that if I should take what you have said to me as being said in earnest, if I should place any reliance on your words, I should make a great mistake and should very soon have reason to repent?"

Adhémar was silent for a few moments; but he looked at Nathalie, and his expression was almost sad. At last he said, with a sigh:

"Ah! madame, if I had the good fortune to be loved, I should be too happy! But, no; women are all inconstant, they

never love truly; they want to be adored, but they reserve the right to love us only in accordance with their caprice."

Nathalie could not restrain a smile, as she replied:

"You have a very singular way of paying court to one of them!"

"Oh! I beg your pardon, madame, I beg your pardon; I didn't mean that to apply to you!"

"But you were speaking of women in general?"

"True; but, of course, there are exceptions."

"Have you never met any of the exceptions?"

"No, I have not had that good fortune."

"And that is what has given you such a bad opinion of all women?"

"Oh! I am wrong, no doubt; for, after all, the fact that no one has ever loved me doesn't prove that they may not have loved others."

"Do you say that no one has ever loved you, monsieur?"

"Never really, madame."

"Are you quite sure of that?"

"Only too sure, alas!"

"But, monsieur, have you, who think that no one has ever really loved you, have you yourself ever loved in that way?"

Adhémar did not reply for some seconds, then murmured:

"Why, I think so——"

"Ah! you are not perfectly sure!"

"When one is inclined to love passionately, madame, if he sees that his passion is not reciprocated, don't you think that that should suffice to lessen his ardor?"

"No, monsieur, I do not think so; I think that when one is really in love, it is not so easy to banish from one's heart the object of one's love. In short, it is my opinion that love is not to be reasoned with, and that when you come to the point where you begin to reason you have ceased to love. But, upon my word, this is a strange conversation; one would think that we had to write an essay on the proper way to love.—Have you produced a new play or written a new novel since I saw you?"

"No, madame, no; I have done nothing."

"You have been lazy, eh? Fie! that's very bad!"

"No, I haven't been lazy; but I have been preoccupied—which is by no means the same thing, and is a much greater hindrance to work."

"You know Monsieur Lucien Grischard, do you not, monsieur?"

"I do, madame; but how did you know?"

"Oh! in the most natural way; this Monsieur Lucien knows—indeed, I may say that he is courting a young lady who is my most intimate friend, Mademoiselle Juliette Mirotaine."

"Yes, he is very much in love with her, and would like to marry her; he has told me that."

"And Juliette has no secrets from me; she is very fond of this Lucien, whom her father refuses to allow her to marry. She has told me all her sorrows."

"Very good; but I don't quite see where I come in."

Nathalie blushed, hesitated, and finally replied:

"If my friend tells me everything that interests her, do you not think, monsieur, that I should do as much? That accident of mine—which, but for you, might have been so disastrous to me—I told her about that, and naturally I told her the name of the person who had—burned himself in his efforts to put out the fire. When she heard your name, which is so well known, she cried: 'That gentleman is a friend of Lucien!'—And that is how I knew that you know him. Is that explanation satisfactory, monsieur?"

"Ah! madame, it is a thousand times too kind of you to give it to me; my reason for asking was to find out whether you had remembered me."

"It would have been very ungrateful on my part to forget you so soon."

"Mon Dieu! madame, a very clever man has said: 'Ingratitude is independence of the heart!'—That is rather sad, but it is more or less true."

"No, monsieur; ingratitude simply proves that one has no heart."

The conversation was prolonged to a great length between those two, who understood each other so well even when they were silent. But Adhémar was afraid of presuming too far, as it was his first visit; so he took his leave of Madame Dermont at last, saying:

"Will you allow me to come to see you again?"

Nathalie accorded him that permission with such a pleasant smile that it was impossible to doubt the pleasure it afforded her to give it.

As he left the pretty widow's presence, Adhémar said to himself:

"That is a most charming woman; I feel that I should soon love her dearly. Perhaps it would be wiser for me not to see her again; for, if I yield to the temptation to love her in good earnest, she will do like the rest, she will deceive me and make me unhappy. But I am arguing as if she were already my mistress! What right have I to think that she will love me, that she will yield to me? But something tells me that she will. Well, after all, why should I be afraid to be happy when the opportunity offers? 'We must love!' said Jean-Jacques; 'we must love!' said Voltaire.—That is the only subject, I fancy, on which those two famous men agreed. So we must not repulse love when it tries to steal into our hearts; and even though it should cause us more pain than pleasure, that is better than not to love at all."

Madame Dermont did not say all that to herself, but she yielded to the impulse of her heart, which disposed her to love Adhémar; his personality attracted her, and even before she knew him she loved him for what he had written. Now that she knew him, it gave her pleasure to hear him talk; a secret sympathy drew her toward him, and, despite

his low opinion of women, she did not try to combat the love which was taking possession of her heart; she hoped to compel him in the end to do justice to her sex; for, as she was not fickle in her tastes, she could not understand how all women could be frivolous and inconstant.

It caused her great joy, therefore, to hear Adhémar ask permission to call upon her again; and if she was unable to conceal the pleasure that request afforded her, it was because she was not a coquette and did not attempt to hide her real feelings beneath a feigned indifference.

X

THE DUBOTTÉ HOUSEHOLD

It is time for us to turn our attention to that husband whom his wife adored—a state of affairs which is sometimes seen, but which is of uncommon occurrence none the less. And instead of manifesting his gratitude for that conjugal adoration, and for the loving caresses which his wife lavished upon him, by graceful little attentions and amiable behavior, the husband in question seemed, on the contrary, fatigued, annoyed, bored, by madame's caresses; indeed, he sometimes evaded them on the most frivolous pretexts. For men are made that way; and if their wives deceived them, they would fall in love with them again. Poor, weak mortals! who complain when you possess, and complain even more loudly when you have ceased to possess! You are never content, and it is so with everything! As for myself, ever since I was born, I have constantly heard men complain of their plight in love, in politics, and in business; I have always found people discontented; and, at all periods of time, and under all governments, I have heard merchants and tradesmen say: "Everything is at a standstill; there's nothing doing; business is wretched!" and other complaints of the same sort, which do not prevent business from going on as usual—some making their fortunes, others becoming insolvent, as in all times.

After the hurried exit of the false Italian count and the commission merchant in sugar, the remainder of Monsieur Mirotaine's guests were, as may be imagined, in a state of much confusion and excitement; those who had been present at the dinner, and were aware of its object, looked at one another without speaking; but those who had come for only the evening plied the host and his wife with innumerable questions; while they as persistently questioned Dubotté, who had laid bare the fraud.

"But are you quite sure, my dear Dubotté," said Mirotaine, "that this pretended Count Miflorès is really one Seringat?"

"Perfectly sure; Seringat, apothecary at Pontoise. I passed nearly two months in that city, where I went to receive a legacy.—You remember, Nonore?"

"Oh! I should say so! I was unhappy enough while you were away; I did nothing but cry!"

"You cry far too much when I am away, my dear love; you must cure yourself of that habit, or it will make your eyes as red as a rabbit's.—As I was saying, during my stay at Pontoise I met Monsieur Seringat in society several times."

"And he is married?"

"Very well married; to a very pretty woman, who, I am sure, does not amuse herself weeping when her husband is away. I had the pleasure of dancing with her at a party given by the notary of the town."

"Ah! you bad man! you danced when I wasn't there!"

"My dear love, if when a man is married he is debarred from tripping the light fantastic except with his wife, it would be enough to disgust men with marriage forever! You absolutely refuse to realize that although a man has a wife he is none the less bound to be always polite and agreeable to other women. I have told you that a hundred times!"

"And what about his wife?"

"Parbleu! his wife has the same rights! And, above all things, she ought not to do as you do—keep herself in her husband's pocket all the time. Why, it's beastly form; it's as vulgar as the devil! You really must cure yourself of that; I don't want you to be vulgar."

"But," continued Monsieur Mirotaine, "I cannot see what motive this Monsieur Seringat can have had to present himself in a respectable house, under a name which doesn't belong to him, and as a man who desires to marry?"

"He told you that he desired to marry?"

"He didn't breathe a word of it," said Aldegonde, "and he didn't make a single effort to talk with Juliette."

"Then why do you say that he wants to marry; for, unless his wife is dead—and that seems to me most improbable, as she was young, and as fresh as a rose——"

"You noticed that, Philémon?"

"Oh! my dear love, don't comment in this way on every word I say, I beg you! I have noticed many other women since."

"Ah! you villain! And what about me?"

"You! why, you are my wife, and that ought to satisfy you; it seems to me that that's something to say!—To cut it short, my dear Mirotaine, I tell you again, this whole business is probably a joke invented by my friend Dodichet, who passes his time looking about for somebody to make a fool of. And so, although he's an old schoolmate of mine, I have never asked him to my house; not that I am afraid of his nonsense; I have a wife, thank God! with whom I can sleep with both eyes shut!"

"And that is just what you do, my dear; you always sleep when you're with me."

"Hush, Nonore! These domestic details are never talked about in company."

"Why not, my dear?"

"Why, because——"

Monsieur Mirotaine was as savage as a bulldog because he had given a dinner party to no purpose. Aldegonde was

annoyed at being deceived by her dealer in wardrobes, who had gone away in dire confusion at having made a mess of it. The rest of the company soon followed Madame Putiphar's example; the three balloons withdrew, constantly colliding with one another; Monsieur Brid'oison, in the hat which had been left in place of his; Artaban, climbing on his father's shoulders; Madame Trichon, rubbing the eye which had received the pickled onion; and young Callé, looking longingly at Aldegonde, who did not look at him because she was angry. Juliette alone was happy, but she dared not show it.

Lastly, Dubotté and his wife took leave of the host and hostess.

"This party has been a failure," said Philémon to young Callé, who put on his gloves as he went downstairs. "It's only ten o'clock—what in the deuce can we do now?"

"Seven minutes past ten!" said the young spark, looking at his watch; "I agree with the Treasury."

"Never mind; a fellow can't go home to bed at seven minutes after ten; for my part, I hate to go to bed early."

"True—it's bad form."

"But you always want me to go to bed early, my dear."

"Yes—because it's very healthy for women; they need more sleep than we do.—Which way are you going, Monsieur Callé?"

"Rue de la Tour d'Auvergne, No. 8, monsieur."

"Indeed! and we live on Rue Bleue, within a few steps. By the way, Monsieur Callé, are you related to a Callé of Lyon, wholesale dealer in silks?"

"He's my cousin, monsieur."

"Pardieu! he's one of my best friends. When we were bachelors, he used to come to Paris often; we've had many a spree together!"

"What, my dear! did you ever go on sprees?"

"I was speaking to Monsieur Callé, Nonore; it doesn't concern you.—So you are Édouard Callé's cousin?"

"I have that honor."

"Sapristi! what a bore it is to go home at ten o'clock!"

"If you want to take me anywhere, my dear, I am all ready."

"Why, no, madame, no; I don't care to take you anywhere to-night. It's too late to go to the theatre—so there's nowhere to go but a café, and men don't take their wives to a café; it's very bad form. Besides, women don't enjoy it, and they're terribly in the way."

"But you go there a great deal!"

"I go to my club—a most excellent club, where one can always have a game of cards; and I confess that I am strongly inclined to go there and play a game of whist."

"Well! take me to your club."

"Upon my word! as if women were ever admitted! Women at a club! Why, we couldn't hear ourselves talk! I feel just like going there to-night, but it's in an entirely different direction from my house. It just occurs to me that as Monsieur Callé lives in our quarter, it would not inconvenience him very much to leave you at our door; in that way, I could go to my club."

"I am entirely at your service, monsieur, and it will give me great pleasure to escort madame."

"What! you are going to leave me, Philémon? you are going to send me home with monsieur, whom I hardly know?"

"Why, bless my soul, Nonore! I don't see that monsieur has a very terrifying aspect. Besides, he is a friend of Mirotaine, and the cousin of a man with whom I am very intimate; so he isn't a stranger to me."

"I don't care for that; you know very well that I am not in the habit of taking any man's arm but yours."

"Exactly; and it's a most absurd idea, of which you must cure yourself."

With that, the fair-haired beau took his wife's arm from within his own and turned it over to the young man, who was modestly waiting.

"My dear Monsieur Callé," he said, "I intrust my wife to you, and my mind is entirely at ease; I am convinced that you won't lose her."

"Oh! no, monsieur; I will not leave madame until she is safely inside her door."

"Thanks.—Au revoir, Nonore! go right to bed; I shan't be late."

"Philémon! Philémon! you are going away without kissing me!"

But Philémon was already at some distance; delighted to be rid of his wife, he had fairly taken to his heels. The loving Éléonore heaved a profound sigh, and decided at last to take the arm which young Callé offered her. They walked away, the little woman still sighing, her escort cudgelling his brain to think of something to say to console her.

"If madame thinks that we are walking too fast," he faltered at last, "we can walk more slowly."

"Oh! this is all right, monsieur."

And they walked on in silence. In a moment, the little woman, who was rather fond of talking, opened the conversation.

"You are not married, are you, monsieur?"

"No, madame; I am a bachelor."

"When you are married, shall you send your wife home under the escort of some acquaintance?"

"Mon Dieu! madame, I must confess that I don't know what I shall do."

"Shall you be displeased if your wife always wants to go out with you?"

"Oh! I think not, madame."

"Will it annoy you, if she comes to you often for a kiss?"

"Oh! certainly not; far from it! especially if—especially if she—no, it wouldn't annoy me."

Monsieur Callé had tried to pay a compliment to the lady on his arm, but it would not come out.

"Well," continued Éléonore, "my husband often pushes me away when I take a fancy to kiss him."

"He does it in joke, of course?"

"No, monsieur; sometimes he even scolds me; he declares that my manners are vulgar; that only workingmen's wives kiss their husbands like that. Is that true?"

"Oh! I can't tell you, madame."

"If it is, I am sorry my husband isn't a workingman; because then I could kiss him when I wanted to, and he wouldn't think I was ridiculous."

Callé made no reply, but he thought:

"It seems that this lady is very fond of kissing. If I were her husband, I wouldn't object. She isn't such a beautiful woman as Madame Mirotaine, but her manner is gentler—and then, she seems to be very caressing."

In due time they arrived at Dubotté's abode. Éléonore thanked her escort, who bowed respectfully and tried again to make some complimentary remark, but with no better success, although his efforts were rewarded by a courtesy.

"That gentleman is very polite," said Madame Dubotté to herself, as she entered the house; "but he doesn't talk enough."

Monsieur Dubotté, who returned home very late that night, because he had been elsewhere than to his club, did his utmost to get into bed without waking his wife; a manœuvre which he often executed, and in which he was very skilful. The next morning, while he was dressing, he said to madame:

"Well, my dear love, were you content with your escort? You got home without accident, I fancy?"

"Oh! yes, he's a very nice young man; he brought me to the door."

"Pardieu! did you suppose he would drop you half-way? You asked him to come to see us, I hope?"

"No, I didn't; why should I ask him?"

"You should have done so; it would have been no more than polite. Do you know, I like that little Callé; I should be very glad to have him visit us. He's a young man to whom one can safely intrust his wife."

"Why, my dear, do you expect to send me about with another man often?"

"I don't say that; but there are unforeseen circumstances. For instance: we have tickets to the theatre; I often have them, you know, through my connection with the actors. Well, I can't go; or, at least, I can't go till very late; then what do I do? I ask Callé to escort you to the theatre, and I join you there when I have finished my business; do you see?"

"What! you would let me go to the theatre with another man? O Philémon!"

"But if I come and join you there, it's precisely the same thing as if I went with you! That sort of thing is done every day."

"Well, I simply shouldn't enjoy it without you."

"Don't you understand that I would come, too—later?"

"That isn't the same thing."

"Oh! how far behind the times you are, my dear love! Luckily, I know that young man's address; he told us what it was: No. 8, Rue de la Tour d'Auvergne."

"And you mean to go to see him?"

"His cousin was my intimate friend, and he can tell me something about him. Stay! I have an idea: I'll invite him to dinner; the fellow's all right socially, so that we can afford to receive him; he isn't like that scamp Dodichet—there's a man I will never invite! That was a neat trick he played on Mirotaine. But why is this Seringat, this Pontoise druggist, in Paris under an assumed name? What can he have done with his wife? If I had time, I'd go to Pontoise and find out."

"You'd take me with you, wouldn't you?"

"Oh! there you are again! how amusing that would be! To stuff my wife in my pocket for a little trip of twenty-four hours, and double, yes, treble the expense! That would be downright idiocy. But, don't worry; I haven't the time to go to Pontoise."

XI

DUBOTTÉ ATTEMPTS TO TRAIN HIS WIFE

A few days later, Dubotté said to his wife:

"My dear love, we shall have two people to dinner to-morrow; tell the cook to be careful with the dinner, and, above all things, don't forget the sweets; I don't enjoy my dinner, you know, unless I have sweets."

"Yes, you have a very sweet tooth."

"Every man who loves women must love sweet things."

"Ah! you love them too well, you bad boy!"

"Sweet things?"

"No, women! If you loved only your own wife, it would be all right."

"My dear love, I might retort: I love *crême au chocolat*! But if you should always give me that for dinner, I might get tired of it."

"What does that mean? that you care no more for me than you do for a *crême au chocolat*?"

"That was a little joke. Think about your dinner for to-morrow."

"Whom have you asked? My two dear friends, Madame Lambert and her sister, I am sure."

"No, I haven't asked your friends. Madame Lambert takes snuff, and I consider it a detestable habit in a woman.

Let her smoke, if she wants to; I can stand that; there are some very pretty women who smoke, nowadays. But to carry a snuff-box! horror! When she takes out her handkerchief, you would think you were in a porter's lodge. With her sister it's something else: whenever you look at her, she throws her head to one side and shakes it and blinks her eyes."

"That isn't her fault; it's a nervous trouble."

"I don't say it is her fault, but I don't dare to look at people who have that sort of trouble; I am always afraid that I shall do just what they do. I have asked two gentlemen to dinner; that will be livelier, not so strait-laced; we can laugh and enjoy ourselves. There'll be Bruneau, one of my fellow clerks in the department——"

"Oh! I don't like your friend Bruneau; he's good for nothing but to smoke and drink beer, and doesn't enjoy himself anywhere except in cafés. As soon as dinner's over, he'll want to go to the café, of course. So polite to me! If he would only go alone, I wouldn't care a rap; but he always takes you with him!"

"Oh! no, not always; only once in a while, to play a four-handed game of dominoes; he's very strong at it."

"And who's the other?"

"The other—can't you guess? It's the young man who was obliging enough to escort you home the other evening—Monsieur Callé."

"Have you been to his house?"

"I was on my way there when I met him. He told me all about his cousin, and we had quite a long talk; he seems a very pleasant fellow."

"That's funny, for he hardly spoke a word to me."

"He looks as if he was very bashful. However, I asked him to come to dinner to-morrow, and he seemed much flattered by the invitation."

"What's the sense of having him to dinner?"

"My dear love, we must have a little company, deuce take it! we can't live like bears!"

"You never ask *my* friends!"

"If there were any pretty women among them, I'd invite them fast enough, never fear! but they vie with one another in ugliness."

"That does not prevent their being agreeable!"

"For my part, I find them mortally tiresome."

Young Callé, who was deeply touched by Dubotté's invitation, did not fail to appear promptly, after taking the most minute pains with his costume; for his bashfulness did not prevent his being a good deal of a dandy. Éléonore greeted her quondam cavalier graciously enough, although he could not succeed in uttering the compliment he tried to address to her; the little woman felt more at ease with a bashful young man, and she liked him much better than Monsieur Bruneau, the frequenter of cafés.

The latter was a man of forty years, neither handsome nor ugly, but always carelessly dressed. There was always a certain disorder in his costume, although his clothes themselves were as fine as other men's. But, generally speaking, it is the way clothes are worn that makes all the difference, and we see men very well dressed who never look so, while others, even in the simplest costume, seem to be dressed with the greatest elegance. Monsieur Bruneau never wore gloves, he had a sort of dirty aspect, and smelt of tobacco a mile away. He passed all the time he was not employed at the department in playing dominoes and drinking beer or absinthe. To his mind, women were of less importance than the double-blank. But Dubotté was much attached to Bruneau, because when he desired to keep an appointment with one of the fair sex he had only to make a sign to his friend, who never failed to say:

"Just come to the café for a few moments; those domino fiends are waiting for us; we'll play the best two games in three, then you can come back to your wife."

Dubotté would assent, promise Éléonore to return very soon, and pass the whole evening away from her. It was small wonder, therefore, that such friends were not at all welcome to madame, and that she preferred to them a young man who was so bashful that he stumbled over a compliment.

Dubotté received Callé as if he had known him for years; he shook hands with him effusively; a little more, and he would have embraced him. Dinner was served, and, in the midst of the conversation, Dubotté exclaimed:

"Pardieu! I know now why Dodichet played that joke on poor Mirotaine; it has just come back to me. One of our mutual friends, a poor fellow named Lucien, is in love with Mademoiselle Mirotaine.—Did you know that, Monsieur Callé?"

"Yes, monsieur; I have heard Madame Mirotaine say so; but as the young man has nothing, they refuse to give him Mademoiselle Juliette."

"Exactly; Lucien told us about it not long ago; he was afraid that some rich man would marry the girl, who has no dowry, but who is very pretty.—Don't you think she's pretty, Nonore?"

"Oh, yes! to those who like brunettes."

"And I remember that Dodichet said to Lucien: 'Don't you want me to help along your love affair by playing some good practical joke on your old skinflint of a Mirotaine?'—He called him an old skinflint, because he's very close-fisted, very miserly; you must have noticed that?"

"I have never paid any attention to that, monsieur."

"Well, he didn't miss fire."

"Oh! but that was a very scurvy trick for him to play—to get himself and his friend invited to dinner!"

"And by Mirotaine! For my part, I think it was very clever! Dodichet is really much cleverer than I supposed."

"What does he do?"

"Mon Dieu! nothing at all. He has run through all his property, making sport of everybody all the while! But what will it bring him to? Starvation!—for, in this world, we all have to do something in order to succeed—to make a good position for ourselves;—eh, Bruneau?"

"How's that? what?"

"Pshaw! he never attends to the conversation!"

"Give me something to drink; I like that better."

"I was saying that everyone has his goal here on earth; I know what mine is, and I shall get there!—You must have a goal, too, Monsieur Callé—you, too, want to arrive, eh?"

"Arrive where, monsieur?"

"I have no idea. What is your business?"

"I haven't any, monsieur; I don't do anything. I have ten thousand francs a year."

"That makes a difference—you have arrived!"

"I," said Monsieur Bruneau, "am one of the strongest domino players in Paris; and that was the point I wanted to arrive at.—Do you play dominoes, monsieur?"

"No, monsieur; I don't know how to play anything but bézique."

"Ah! do you play bézique?" cried Dubotté. "That's my wife's favorite game; she adores bézique.—Isn't that so, Nonore? aren't you very fond of the game?"

"Yes, my dear, I like to play with you."

"True; but you'd enjoy it much more to play with somebody else; for when you and I play, whether the stakes are two sous or ten, we never pay; how exciting that is! With anybody else, you stake your money in earnest, and defend it, which is always much more interesting."

After dinner, Dubotté immediately prepared a card table and said to Callé:

"You and my wife must play a game of bézique; she plays very well."

"With pleasure, monsieur; I will do whatever you wish."

"It would be much better for you to play with monsieur, my dear; you play much better than I."

"Not by any means! I tell you that you know the game perfectly."

"But what will you do while we play?"

"I will look over you, or talk with Bruneau; don't worry about me."

The little woman concluded to take the cards, solely to obey her husband, for she had a shrewd suspicion that he would not stay long to watch the game. Young Callé, who was ready to do whatever was wanted, seated himself opposite Éléonore, and said:

"How much does madame wish to play for?"

"I don't care at all."

"With how many packs?"

"I don't know."

"How much shall we play for?"

"Whatever you choose."

"Come, come, my dear love, don't be such a fool! Sapristi! you play with four packs, ten sous the game of two thousand; we make the five hundred and the fifteen hundred with treble bézique—that's how we always play.—Is that satisfactory to you, Callé?"

"Oh! anything suits me, monsieur."

The game began. Dubotté stood by the table at first, watching the game, and exclaiming from time to time:

"Bravo, Nonore, bravo! you play superbly; you will certainly win.—I think my wife will beat you, Callé!"

"I trust so, monsieur."

When the game was well under way, Dubotté made a sign to Bruneau, who said:

"I promised Durand to meet him at the café this evening; I must go."

"Ah! will Durand be at the café? I have a matter of business to talk over with him."

"Very well; come down there for a moment with me."

"I think I will, as it's only a step. I'll just go and say two words to him."

Seeing Dubotté take his hat, his wife cried:

"What, Philémon! are you going out?"

"For ten minutes only; I will come right back."

"And monsieur here?"

"Pardieu! I don't stand on ceremony with Monsieur Callé. He will certainly excuse me if I go out for a moment."

"Oh! as long as you choose, monsieur; don't mind me."

"Besides, you're playing cards with him. Play on! play on! make double bézique! I am coming right back."

"But, Philémon——"

"I shall be here in ten minutes."

And the fair-haired beau vanished with his confederate, Bruneau. Nonore sighed, but continued to play. She vanquished her opponent, who lost every game. Did he do it as a matter of courtesy, or was luck constantly on the young woman's side? She kept saying to him:

"Mon Dieu! monsieur, it must vex you to lose all the time!"

"No, madame; far from it."

"When you have had enough, we will stop."

"Oh! I never have enough, when I have the pleasure—when I am playing with—a person——Four aces, madame."

"Mark them, monsieur."

Midnight found Callé still at bézique with Madame Dubotté, who had won four francs, but was beginning to yawn. When the clock struck twelve, she said:

"You see, monsieur; this is what my husband means by ten minutes!"

"He must have been detained, madame, or his watch has stopped."

"No, monsieur; but it's always this way when he goes out alone, and it makes me very unhappy! It is midnight, monsieur, and I must not impose upon your good nature any longer. We have played enough. My husband is far from polite, I must say! He asks you to dinner, and then goes out——"

"Oh! madame—I assure you that—I much prefer—I did not care—especially as——"

"Good-night, Monsieur Callé!"

"Madame, I have the honor to salute you!"

And the young man took his leave without finishing his compliment.

XII

EXPEL THE NATURAL INSTINCTS, AND THEY RETURN AT THE GALLOP

A month had passed since Adhémar paid his first visit to Madame Dermont. In the week following their conversation, he had called every other day, and since then had not let a single day pass without seeing her. What had happened between them that their intimacy had become so close? It seems to me that you should be able to guess.

Nathalie had made an instant conquest of Adhémar's heart; she was the woman whom he was seeking, whom he desired to meet, whom he ardently longed to have for his mistress, and, above all, by whom he aspired to be loved; she possessed all that he wished to find in a sweetheart; and still he had tried for some time—not for long—to struggle against the inclination of his heart; for the more strongly he felt that he really loved Nathalie, the stronger was his foreboding that he should be unhappy if he could not succeed in inspiring something more than a mere passing sentiment in return for a sincere passion.

Nathalie, on the other hand, had not tried to combat the sentiments which Adhémar aroused in her heart. Being a widow, and absolute mistress of her acts, why should she have spurned the love which she read in his eyes, and which he expressed so well? A coquettish woman would, perhaps, have postponed the moment of surrender; a woman who is really in love offers only a weak resistance, for she shares the happiness she gives.

Adhémar often asked Nathalie now:

"Is it really true that you love me?"

"Ah! my dear, how can you ask me that? What fresh proof do you want me to give you of my love?"

"Forgive me! that isn't what I meant. I only feared—for I am not agreeable every day—I dreaded that—that you might cease to love me."

"How ill you judge me! Do you take me for one of those women to whom love is a mere whim and never a real sentiment?"

"No, no, I don't think so; I was wrong; I am often unjust."

"You are afraid that I shall not always find you agreeable?—what nonsense! When you are with me, I am happy, and that is enough for me. Be thoughtful, abstracted—serious even! I see you and am with you; I ask nothing more. I say to myself: 'He is thinking about his work, about some new plot, perhaps. I mustn't disturb him. In a moment, he will come back to me; he will see that I am by his side.'"

"Ah! Nathalie! I love you so dearly! Do you know, it seems to me sometimes that I love you too much!"

"One never loves too much, my dear, when he inspires as much love as he gives. Believe me, you do not go ahead of me!"

And, on leaving her, Adhémar said to himself:

"Yes, she really loves me; for, if she doesn't, why should she pretend to? What motive has she to deceive me? She certainly is not guided by any selfish interest, for she refuses to receive the slightest present from me; she told me in the most positive terms that she would be seriously angry with me if I gave her anything but flowers!—'I have the wherewithal to satisfy all my tastes and fancies,' she said; 'I want nothing from you but love; the best gift from you would offend me, for I should say to myself that you thought it was necessary to make me love you!'—I had no choice but to obey her.—Upon my word, I believe I have found a woman who will not deceive me! it's a miracle!"

In return for her affection, Madame Dermont demanded from her lover nothing but entire confidence; she would not admit the possibility of his being jealous, and often said to him:

"To suspect the woman you love is an insult to her; as you are perfectly sure that I love you, you should never dream for an instant that I am deceiving you."

Adhémar thought that Nathalie was perfectly right; but jealousy is a sentiment that does not come and go at the word of command; some people are born jealous, just as some are born quarrelsome, petulant, or cowardly. Education may teach us to disguise our failings, but it does not eradicate them.

One morning, calling at Madame Dermont's a little earlier than usual, Adhémar found her with a clouded brow; and although she received him with her accustomed cordiality, it seemed to him that she was distraught and that her smile was not so frank and open as usual. He fixed his eyes on hers and asked:

"Has anything gone wrong with you this morning?"

"With me, my dear? Why, no! nothing, I assure you."

"You seem preoccupied, however; is nothing troubling you?"

"What do you suppose can be troubling me?"

"Nothing, I trust! But I ask you the question."

"My dear, so long as you love me, nothing will ever trouble me."

"So much the better; in that case, nothing ever will. I was thinking that, as we are not always together—that is to say, in my absence you might have had visitors."

"You are mistaken, my dear; for me, you are never absent; you are constantly in my thoughts."

Adhémar put his mistress's hand to his lips. But in a few minutes his brow darkened anew; he drew a long breath, then exclaimed:

"This is very strange!"

"What is, my dear?"

"It smells of tobacco smoke here."

"Do you think so? I don't smell anything."

"Oh! that's because you don't choose to. It smells of tobacco, and of poor tobacco, too! I should think that someone had been smoking a pipe here."

Madame Dermont turned her head away as she replied:

"It may have been the water carrier who brought the smell here."

"The water carrier? I didn't suppose that he came into your bedroom, and your kitchen is some distance away. That was not a happy reply."

"Mon Dieu! my dear, what do you mean by that? Not a happy reply! Do you mean to say that you attach any importance to such a trifle?"

"A trifle! You know, madame, the proverb says that there's no smoke without some fire; and, in like manner, there's no smell of tobacco smoke without a smoker. I came too early to-day, probably!"

"What do you mean by that, monsieur?"

"I mean—it's easy enough to understand! You have had some visitor who was smoking. The devil! a man must be on very familiar terms with a lady to smoke in her bedroom! Who has been here to see you so early?"

Nathalie paced the floor impatiently, murmuring:

"What a lot of questions about a smell that may have come from the neighbor's!"

"Oh, no! you have no neighbor on this side."

"So this is your confidence in me, Adhémar?—'I shall never be jealous,' you said."

"Women are the most astonishing creatures! When you ask them a question, they answer with another, which is a very clever way of not answering at all. Will you tell me who has been here this morning, who has had the presumption to smoke a pipe in your apartment, or, at all events, to poison the air with the smell of a pipe?"

"No one, monsieur."

"Very well, madame; I came too early to-day; that will teach me a lesson for another time."

And Adhémar seized his hat and rushed from the room; while Nathalie, having at first started to detain him, overcame the impulse to do so.

"She has certainly had a visitor who smoked," said Adhémar to himself, as he went away, "but she won't admit it. I don't claim that she shouldn't receive anyone at all; but if that was an innocent visit, she wouldn't have denied it. So she evidently has mysteries—secrets from me. Therefore, she deceives me; she's no better than the rest. Ah, me! I ought to have expected it! It's all over; I will never go to her house again!"

All day long, the jealous wretch kept repeating those words: "I will never go to her house again!" And he rushed hither and thither, to cafés and theatres and parties; did all that he could to divert his thoughts, and did not succeed. The next day he was very much depressed, and said to himself as he went out:

"I will not go to see her, that is sure! What a shame! I loved her so dearly—more than I have ever before loved a woman! That makes her treachery the more outrageous. Ah! I was very wise to make up my mind that I would never care for any woman again."

Musing thus as he walked, Adhémar arrived in front of the house where Madame Dermont lived.

"So much for habit!" he thought. "I came here without knowing it. But I won't go in. Still, I may as well walk in this neighborhood as anywhere. I'll look at her windows; that will give me something to think about."

For two hours he walked up and down in front of the house, gazing at Nathalie's windows, walking rapidly away when he fancied that he saw someone through the glass, and sighing when he saw no one. Suddenly he felt a hand on his shoulder; it was one of his colleagues, who said to him:

"What on earth are you doing here, Adhémar? Are you on the lookout for a scene or a dénouement?"

"Faith! yes; I was thinking over a new subject."

"Come with me; you can tell me your plan as we walk."

"I'll go with you gladly; but I won't tell you anything, because you would want to be in the play."

"Well! I would do my share."

"Thanks, I know you! you hang around, you make absurd remarks, you abuse your confrères, you find fault with everything that others do, and never produce anything yourself. That's the way you do your share!"

"You are very polite this morning! I am in several plays, nevertheless, which have had some success."

"Yes, I am well aware that you are; but that doesn't prove that you had anything to do with them. We know how it's worked on the stage nowadays, all the scheming and jobbing that go on there!"

"You are in a savage mood to-day! Do you know that I should be justified in demanding satisfaction for what you have said?"

"Oh! I'm at your service. Do you want to fight? I ask nothing better."

"And I haven't the slightest desire to do it! You're in a bad temper, and I am not. You're looking for a quarrel, and I am looking for sport. Adieu!"

"He is right," Adhémar reflected, when he was alone again. "I am ugly, because she has made me unhappy. It's always the women who make us what we are!"

The next day, after long hesitation, Adhémar surrendered; he could not resist his ardent longing to see her whom he had tried in vain to forget.

"The idea," he thought, "of losing my temper, of quarrelling over a smell of tobacco smoke, which may have come from the neighbor's after all! Pshaw! there's no sense in that!"

He flew rather than ran to Madame Dermont's, and did not give the servant time to warn her mistress, but rushed

into her room. Nathalie was alone, but her eyes were red and tears were still standing in them. Adhémar threw himself at her feet, seized her hands, and covered them with kisses.

"Forgive me! forgive me! I have made you unhappy. In pity's name, forgive me!"

"Three days without coming to see me! Ah! my friend, is this your love for me?"

"Why, yes, yes, I adore you, and that is why I am so jealous."

"I forbade you to be jealous, and you promised. Have you ceased to believe in my love?"

"I am a guilty wretch—I am, indeed—since I have made you shed tears."

"I thought it was all over, that you would never come again."

"As if that would be possible! As if I could exist without you! But let us forget this storm; you forgive me, don't you?"

"Yes, of course. But, I beg you, my dear, don't give way to these transports of jealousy. Suspicion wounds the most loving heart."

"It is all over. I am cured."

Peace was concluded, and once more the most perfect harmony reigned between those two, who were so well suited to each other. A fortnight had passed since the reconciliation, when the ill-fated odor of tobacco was once more perceptible in Madame Dermont's apartments when her lover came to see her during the day. Adhémar said nothing. He even determined not to show that he noticed the smell. He tried to be as amiable and lively as usual; but, in spite of his efforts, he was distraught and often replied at random to what Nathalie said to him. She too, probably suspecting the cause of his preoccupation, was decidedly embarrassed.

Adhémar prolonged his visit, however, and had been with his mistress a considerable time, when, as he glanced aimlessly about the room, he spied something on the floor, close against the long window curtains, which partially covered it. That object, which was of peculiar shape, aroused our author's curiosity, and, seizing a moment when Nathalie was arranging some flowers, he walked quickly across the room and picked up what he had seen. He examined it at close quarters and was stupefied to see that it was a pipe case.

"You can't tell me now that you do not receive visits from a smoker!" cried Adhémar, well-nigh speechless with rage.

"What is it now, my friend?" replied Nathalie, leaving her flowers.

"What is it! Mon Dieu! madame, the veriest trifle. See! this is what I just picked up, over by your window, where you hoped, no doubt, that it was well hidden."

"What is it, monsieur?"

"Don't you know what it is, madame?"

"No, I give you my word that I haven't an idea."

"Well, it's a pipe case—a filthy pipe case, which smells pestiferous. The pipe isn't inside; probably the person to whom it belongs was smoking when he went away."

Nathalie blushed and frowned slightly, but said nothing. Adhémar's wrath waxed hotter; he scrutinized the case anew, then handed it to the young woman.

"Here, madame—pray take it; you can return it to the man who owns it. Ah! so I was not mistaken the other day in thinking that you had received a visitor who smoked?"

"Well, monsieur, suppose it were true? All men smoke, nowadays."

"All men? Aha! so you admit now that you have received a man—and in your bedroom! Who is he? where did he come from? what did he come here for? How long has he been coming here? Answer me, madame!"

"No, monsieur, no; I will not answer when I am questioned as you question me!"

"Oh, yes! that's an excellent scheme, I see! When you women can't think up a lie on the spur of the moment, you fall back on your dignity. That does very well with simpletons, but I hoped that you wouldn't treat me as one of them. I had too much self-esteem!"

"Adhémar, this is a very brutal way to talk to me! Is this how you keep your promises?"

"Madame, a man is never jealous without some reason. I was right before; I have the proof of it to-day. You must have intrigues, since you conceal from me the visits you receive. And when a woman has intrigues, when she receives men in secret—why, everybody knows what that means!"

"Ah! monsieur——"

"You deceive me just as all the others have! I ought to have expected it. And yet, I thought that I had had better fortune this time. Ah! these women! But it is all over now, all over! I will never be their dupe again!"

And Adhémar dashed the pipe case, which he still held, on the floor, and rushed from the room, frantic with rage, without looking at Nathalie.

XIII

A YOUNG MAN WHO DID NOT SMOKE

You will remember that after the famous dinner given by Mirotaine, at which Dubotté had recognized in the soi-disant Italian count an apothecary of Pontoise, the latter had instantly left the company; and that, very shortly thereafter, Dodichet had done the same, declaring his purpose to challenge Miflorès, who had deceived him by holding himself out as a bachelor. But he had no sooner left the Mirotaine abode than, instead of pursuing Seringat, whom he was certain of finding at home the next day, Dodichet betook himself to the address given by Lucien, to whom he was anxious to relate all that he had done in the interest of his love affair.

Having arrived on Quai Jemmapes, by way of Pont du Faubourg du Temple, Dodichet said to himself:

"I wonder which corner it is—the right or the left? I forgot to ask him that. I'll go to both. On the left, I was told,

used to stand the famous Vendanges de Bourgogne—a restaurant which was noted for its sheep's feet, and used to be a great place for weddings and banquets. *Sic transit gloria mundi.* On the right, there used to be nothing but swamps, I believe. I'll begin at the left. I can't be too sure of finding Lucien at home. A bachelor doesn't stay in his room in the evening; indeed, he often goes out during the day, and sometimes sleeps out. Never mind; perhaps they can tell me what café he usually goes to for his cigar; for he must smoke somewhere."

In the first house at which Dodichet asked for Lucien Grischard, the reply was:

"This is the place, monsieur."

"Ah! is it, indeed? Excellent! Where am I likely to find him in the evening?"

"Why, in his room, monsieur."

"What! does he stay at home in the evening? doesn't he ever go out?"

"Very rarely, monsieur."

"Then he is in now?"

"Go up to the sixth floor—the door at the left; you'll find him in."

"What a strange mortal!" thought Dodichet, as he climbed up the stairs; "to stay at home in the evening! To be sure, if he received visits from ladies! But that is not probable."

When he reached the sixth floor, Dodichet tapped on the left-hand door, and a voice called out:

"Come in; the door is unlocked."

Dodichet turned the knob, and found himself in a tiny room with a very sloping roof. A bed without curtains, a large table used as a desk, two chairs and a mirror, were substantially all the furniture the room contained; and yet it seemed well furnished, because shelves were nailed to the wall on all sides, containing, instead of books, small pasteboard boxes, all of uniform size. There were many of them on the table too, but those were empty; and at that moment Lucien was seated at the table, engaged in filling the boxes with long black pins, of which he had an enormous quantity before him. By way of robe de chambre, he wore a long flannel jacket, patched in several places, and on his head was a sort of cap which had lost its visor. The room was but dimly lighted by a small lamp; however, Lucien recognized his visitor at once.

"Halloo, Dodichet!" he cried. "To what chance do I owe the pleasure of seeing you at my quarters? I assure you that I wasn't expecting you!"

"I am sure of that. But I am very fond of going where I am not expected. Is this where you live?"

"Yes, my friend."

"And there's only this one room; is this all?"

"Absolutely all. It's quite enough for a single man."

"Quite enough! You're not hard to suit. Where am I to sit down, pray?"

"Where you please."

"Where I please? But I don't see any chair."

"Why, yes, I have two. Wait a moment; the other one is covered with my clothes; I used it as a commode; I'll clear it for you."

Lucien removed his clothes from the chair to the bed, then returned to his occupation, saying to his visitor:

"Now, sit down and tell me what brings you here. I must go on working, because I am in a hurry."

"Oh! don't mind me! It's infernally cramped here, all the same! What the devil are you doing there?"

"As you see, I am putting these pins in boxes. I have to arrange them carefully and see that there's the same number in every box."

"How does this business of yours come on?"

"Not so badly; it rather looks as if it were going to take. I tell you, my fortune would be made, if I had been able to discover, as Rozière of Romainville did, all that can be done with Panama!"

"With Panama! why, they make straw hats with it, I thought."

"But Rozière made soap with it that cleanses perfectly, and many other things too."

Having seated himself, Dodichet said:

"First of all, before I tell you what brings me here, just lend me your *bouffarde*, will you; I want to have a puff."

"My *bouffarde*?"

"Yes; or your pipe, if you like that better."

"But I haven't any pipe."

"No pipe? you surprise me! It's less expensive than cigars. Well, then, give me a cigar—as dry a one as you can."

"I haven't any cigars either."

"The devil! I seem to have caught you at low tide. In that case, pass me your tobacco pouch and I'll make a cigarette."

"I am distressed, my dear Dodichet, to be obliged to refuse you again; but I haven't a particle of tobacco here."

"No tobacco! you haven't any tobacco! That is a good one! Do you smoke straw, then? For, of course, you must smoke something?"

"Why so? as a matter of fact, I don't smoke at all. I have neither the time nor the inclination; and, frankly, I don't see the necessity."

"You don't smoke—at your age! You poor devil! you must be horribly bored!"

"That's where you are mistaken; I am never bored, for I am always at work. Why do so many men smoke? Because they have nothing to do, and don't know how to employ their time, which seems to them murderously long; so they smoke and imagine that they're doing something, that they are busy. That is a wretched occupation which serves only to encourage indolence!"

"I say, Lucien, do you know that you tire me with your moral reflections about smokers?"

"Well, my dear friend, you shouldn't call me a poor devil because I don't smoke; I just answered you, that's all; I

will add that I should apply the same term to those young men who smoke all the time, who always have a pipe or cigar in their mouths. In the first place, they smell detestable; secondly, they ruin their lungs; and, lastly, they spend a great deal of money; it doesn't seem much, because it's only a little at a time; but the smallest sum, when you keep putting it out every minute or two, amounts to a good round sum at the end of a year. To workingmen especially, this habit of smoking is disastrous, and it has impoverished more than one family."

"Do you expect with your sermons to cure smokers of smoking? If you do, you're devilishly mistaken!"

"Oh! I have no idea of curing anybody. I simply tell you my opinion—opinions are free."

"But you see, Lucien, when you have once acquired the habit of smoking, that's the end of it; you can't give it up."

"I beg your pardon, my dear friend, but a man can break himself of any habit; all you need is a firm will; if you could make me believe otherwise, it would amount to convincing me that all men are maniacs, machines, automata which are obliged to do the same things over and over again; and that would make me grieve for mankind! I haven't mentioned all the fires and accidents caused by the carelessness of smokers. Why, Mademoiselle Juliette Mirotaine has a friend who had her dress all burned on the boulevard by a match which someone had thrown on the sidewalk without taking the trouble to step on it."

"I always step on mine!—But let's drop the subject. You're sure that you haven't so much as a pinch of tobacco in your pouch?"

"I haven't a pouch even. What the devil should I do with one?"

"He has no pouch! you hear him, great God, and you don't blast him!—Well, when I leave you, I am going to see some ladies—ladies, do you hear?—and I am very sure that they'll have some tobacco for me."

"That is possible, as there are some ladies who smoke nowadays."

"Yes, my dear friend. Oh! you needn't shrug your shoulders! The fair sex is for tobacco."

"There are ladies and ladies!"

"Well, let's drop it.—I will be brief: my dear friend, I have just done you a very great service."

"You have! how so?"

"I have just come from Monsieur Mirotaine's, where I dined."

"Mon Dieu! you make me shudder!"

"Nay, rather rejoice! I had seen the wardrobe dealer, and told her that I had a very rich count who wanted to marry and who would not ask for any dowry."

"I asked you not to play any wretched practical joke."

"True; but I didn't listen to you, and it's well I didn't; for everything went off as if it was on wheels."

"Whom did you present as the man who wanted a wife?"

"Someone who can't refuse me anything, who plays whatever part I assign to him, because I know a certain secret. Ha! ha! ha! Poor Miflorès-Seringat! or Seringat-Miflorès!—There's a pigeon whom Providence placed in my hand most opportunely!"

"Go on! what happened at Monsieur Mirotaine's?"

"We had a fairly good dinner, except for the vin ordinaire, which was only too plentiful, the champagne, which tasted like Rogé's purgative lemonade, and the *crême à la vanille*, which was sweetened with camphor. My false count didn't say a word, but confined himself to eating; as I had said, however, that he wanted a chance to study the young lady before he proposed, everything went well; but, after dinner, while we were in the salon, picking up radishes and pickles which Mirotaine had in reserve in his pocket, lo and behold! Dubotté arrived with his wife—a pretty little blonde, on my word!—Would you believe that Dubotté recognized my pseudo-count, and said to him: 'How are you, Seringat? how's your good wife?'—You can imagine the sensation!—Papa Mirotaine was furious, the wardrobe woman confused, the guests stared at one another in amazement,—and my soi-disant marrying man took his legs in his hand, after consigning to the devil the man who had asked him about his wife. In the midst of all that confusion, I had great difficulty in keeping from roaring with laughter.—Monsieur Mirotaine questioned me; he undertook to be wrathful, but I mounted a higher horse than he; I declared that Miflorès had fooled and deceived me, and that I was going to demand satisfaction from him. I came away, and here I am!—Well, what do you say to that?"

"I say that you did wrong to play this farce, and I am afraid that it will do me more harm than good."

"Why, no, it won't; the old miser, disgusted with the idea of prospective husbands he doesn't know, will refuse to receive any more of them, and will consent to give you his daughter."

"I have no hope that things will turn out so."

"You're an ungrateful wretch!—Try to oblige your friends, and this is the reward you get! And he can't even give me a bit of tobacco!"

"You intended to be useful to me, my dear Dodichet, and I thank you for it; but, I say again, I am not at all at ease as to the results of your ill-timed jest."

"If you smoked, you wouldn't be so timid! Adieu, virtuous man, prudent man, indefatigable worker! Adieu, O most extraordinary man—who doesn't smoke! You are not of your epoch!"

"That may be! but I am perfectly sure that a time will come when Frenchmen will have become courteous and refined once more, and will be unable to understand how their ancestors could have smoked so much!"

"Adieu! I fly now in quest of my treasurer; I must see him, for the waters are low, and I want to buy a gorgeous costume for my début in the rôle of Joconde."

"At the Opéra-Comique?"

"No; at Quimper-Corentin."

Lucien returned to his boxes of pins, reflecting upon all that Dodichet had told him.

"As a matter of prudence," he thought, "I shall do well to wait a few days before appearing at Monsieur Mirotaine's; he must be very angry at having been made a dupe; I will give his anger time to subside; I will wait until he has partly forgotten to-day's occurrences, so that he cannot guess that I know anything about them."

But during the week that passed before Lucien went to Mirotaine's, Dubotté had entertained young Callé at

dinner, and, as we have seen, had told his guest why Dodichet had conceived the idea of bringing forward a husband for Mademoiselle Juliette; that it was in the hope of serving his friend Lucien's interests. Young Callé, who was a great gossip, like most people who have nothing to do, did not fail to repeat to Aldegonde all that he had learned at Dubotté's, and the stepmother repeated it to her husband; whereupon the latter made a scene with his daughter.

"You were in collusion with those wretches," he cried, "those blackguards who cheated me out of a dinner! it was your Lucien who urged them to play that joke on me, of which the assize court would take cognizance! When I see him, I'll tell him what I think of him."

It was of no use for Juliette to protest, to swear that she knew nothing about it, and that Lucien was incapable of devising the malicious scheme which they had presumed to carry out—Monsieur Mirotaine was convinced of the contrary; and when, two days later, poor Lucien appeared before his love's father, humble and smiling, and inquired for his health, Monsieur Mirotaine flew into a rage and pushed him toward the door, crying:

"My health! You have the insolence to come to inquire for my health, after making a fool of me to such a point that it made me ill! You are very bold to show your face before me again!"

"Why, monsieur," stammered Lucien, in dire dismay, "what have I done that you should treat me like this?"

"What have you done? He pretends not to know! But you can't fool me, monsieur!—Think of the dinner I was forced to give—a dinner of eleven covers! three courses! and my old claret! And that Italian count—who was only an apothecary—whom Dodichet introduced as a millionaire in search of a wife—when he already had one at Pontoise! And the coffee and liqueurs! Your friend Dodichet helped himself to cognac three times! Can you deny that he's your friend, and that he invented that abominable farce in the hope of helping on your love for my daughter?"

"If Dodichet did that to do me a service, I swear to you on my honor, monsieur, that it was done against my will; that I expressly forbade him to attempt the slightest liberty with you!"

"Oh! tell that to the marines, monsieur! you admit that this Dodichet is a friend of yours, and that's enough to justify me in forbidding you to set your foot inside my doors again."

"But my intentions are absolutely pure, monsieur; as you know, my pin-making enterprise opens very well; I hope to be able to extend it very materially."

"Yes, yes! you'll have your excellent friends praise it and brag about it! But I will not be your dupe any more. Go! and don't think of showing yourself here again; you won't be admitted!"

Monsieur Mirotaine pushed the young man into the porch, and closed the door violently upon him. Whereupon Lucien walked slowly away, murmuring:

"I shan't see Juliette again; I cannot even exchange a word or two with her any more. Ah! Dodichet! what a pitiable service you have done me!"

XIV

DODICHET, TENOR

On leaving Lucien, Dodichet first of all purchased some tobacco, then called at Mademoiselle Boulotte's, where Rosa had agreed to be; for those damsels were informed of the scene which was to be played at Monsieur Mirotaine's, and, as they were very curious to know how it had gone off, Dodichet had promised to call and tell them about it the same night.

The two *figurantes* were smoking, and drinking grog; and Boulotte's room, although much larger than Lucien's, was so filled with smoke that one could hardly see across it. Which fact did not prevent Dodichet from exclaiming in admiration at the picture before his eyes:

"Bravo! bravi! This brings me back to life! I have just left a man who is not a man—he doesn't smoke! But here, on the contrary, I find women who are equal to any trooper; this sets me up again!"

"Ah! here's Dodichet! Good-evening, Dodichet!"

"Good-evening, my young fairies of the wings! have you any cigarette papers?"

"Oh! what a question! We would as soon be without bread!"

"True! my question was unnecessary. Your education is complete. Give me a few. What are you drinking there?"

"Grog at three-six——"

"I will take several glasses. Be good enough to mix me one, Rosa, while Boulotte, who has the knack of rolling cigarettes, rolls eight or ten for me. Ah! mesdemoiselles, I am thirsty for a smoke!"

"Well, I don't see that you've anything to do but open your mouth; there's no lack of smoke here."

"You do not understand me, my gay young Andalusian; I mean that I am athirst to smoke, myself, and I have just been calling on a man who never smokes!"

"Mon Dieu! where was that bird raised?"

"He never goes out, he stays at home all the time; he is in love, he thinks of his charmer—that takes the place of a pipe."

"Has his charmer been well seasoned?"

"I didn't ask him."

"Well! tell us about the scene with the would-be husband at Monsieur Mirotaine's, the marriage *à la* Putiphar."

"Everything went off perfectly; but in the evening, a friend of mine, Phœbus Dubotté—I call him Phœbus because he's fair-haired and conceited—Phœbus arrived with his wife. It happens that he knows the individual whom I had introduced as an Italian count."

"The man who lends you money because you know a secret that concerns him, and in whose presence we mustn't mention Pontoise?"

"The same; Boulotte, you have a memory like a creditor. But Phœbus mentioned Pontoise, and called my friend Miflorès by his true name. You can guess the effect produced by that recognition!—Pass me a cigarette.—The

Mirotaines are furious, Putiphar would like an opportunity to horsewhip me. My false count ran away, and I took my leave, declaring that I proposed to run my sword through him somewhere. The dénouement of our comedy was hurried a little; but it had to come to an end some time, and I was beginning to be rather tired of the Mirotaine circle. Still, there were some excellent types there. A certain Monsieur Brid'oison, who looked on in admiration while his son performed gymnastic feats on everybody's shoulders; his wife ate her hair, and a sister of the host wept all the while because a pickled onion hit her in the eye."

"And the dinner—was that good?"

"A miser's dinner. Wretched wines! no truffles! a *crême au camphre!*"

"*Au camphre?*"

"With camphor instead of sugar; I don't advise you to try it; it isn't a satisfactory substitute. However, we did the trick; and I have just been to see Lucien, to tell him how I have helped on his love affair."

"Did he thank you?"

"On the contrary, he scolded me, and preached me a sermon on tobacco!—Pass me a cigarette.—Now, I must find my Miflorès, for I need money. I have seen a dramatic correspondent, and he tells me that I am wanted at Quimper-Corentin, where they require a tenor *jeune premier*. I am young; I have an attractive countenance and a good enough voice! I can reach high *G!*"

"*G!* but that isn't *C!*"

"I am perfectly well aware, Mademoiselle Rosa, that *G* is not *C*, or rather *do*, to speak more elegantly; but a chest *G* is very neat, all the same; and, besides, if the audience isn't satisfied, I'll say: *zut!* [you be hanged!] and they will be."

"In what rôle are you going to make your first appearance?"

"In *Joconde*. I sing: *J'ai longtemps parcouru le monde!* as if I'd never done anything else."

"So they play comic opera at Quimper-Corentin, do they?"

"Why, my dear Rosa, where have you been? Don't you know that since the theatres were enfranchised they play all kinds everywhere? I have seen *Tartuffe* in a barn, and *La Bataille de Pultava* in a bedroom; the Russians hid behind a night commode, and the Swedes carried a chamber vessel with the bayonet. So there is nothing strange in their playing comic opera at Quimper. There's only one thing that makes me hesitate: the correspondent warned me that the manager doesn't furnish the costumes; and as I don't want to play Joconde in a frock-coat or an overcoat, I must buy a costume. I want it to be dazzling, gorgeous! That's why I need money, and I must find Miflorès."

"But I thought you were expecting a legacy from an old aunt?"

"Yes, I still have that legacy in prospect; and that's the last! But the old aunt persists in living. That's why I must see Miflorès."

"But by what spell do you succeed in making that man lend you money so often?"

"Ah! that is my secret!"

"But you'll tell us your secret, Dodichet, won't you? You'll confide it to us?"

"I will tell it to you, mesdemoiselles, when I no longer need to borrow money of Miflorès; when I have inherited from my aunt."

"Oh! do tell us your secret, dear old Dodichet! We'll be very close-mouthed."

"I do not doubt your discretion, mesdemoiselles! That's why I won't tell you anything more."

Dodichet drank three grogs, smoked five cigarettes, then went home, humming:

"'Mais on revient toujours
A ses premières amours!'"

The next morning, quite early, Dodichet went to the hotel where the mysterious apothecary lived. He found him packing his trunks and preparing to move.

"What does this mean?" cried Dodichet; "why these preparations for going away?"

"Because I am leaving this house."

"Why, pray?"

"Because I'm afraid I shall be found here. There's your friend, that stout man, who presumed to call me Seringat last night before a whole roomful! I am very angry, monsieur! It was a mean trick that you played on me, to take me to a house where I might meet a man who knew me at Pontoise! I don't propose to lend you money so that you can treat me in such a way as that!"

"Allow me to observe, my dear friend, that at this moment you are talking like a goose! And I will prove to you in a few words that you have no common sense. I borrow money of you—which I will return, by the way, when I inherit from my aunt, you may be sure."

"Very well; I don't care about that; I'm in no hurry."

"Now, my reason for having recourse to your purse of late is that I am rather short, that I need your help. You lend me money, not to oblige me, I know that perfectly well, but because you're afraid that I will divulge what you are so anxious to conceal."

"Yes, monsieur; that's the only reason—it's not from friendship at all."

"Thanks; I appreciate that token of affection! But if I brought you face to face with someone who had known you at Pontoise, that is to say, who might disclose—what concerns you, why, it would be all over; you wouldn't lend me any more money, because everything would be known!—So you see that it is altogether against my interest that anyone should recognize you. This Dubotté came to Mirotaine's—a most miraculous thing; for he had always refused to go there, because they give their guests cocoa for refreshments—he said so himself in my presence. So it was simply an unlucky chance that he came there last night. Moreover, I had no idea that Dubotté had ever known you at Pontoise; but luckily it was before your—your event; he knows nothing about that."

"My word! if he'd mentioned that, I should have done some crazy thing!"

"I don't know what you'd have done; but you see that I could not have anticipated that meeting. Come, my little Seringat, you're not angry with me any more, are you?"

"Oh! don't call me Seringat—I don't want to be Seringat again!"

"To be sure—you are Miflorès. All right! My dear friend, I shall be obliged to resort to your purse once more. I am going to make my début at the Quimper-Corentin theatre, in *Joconde*, nothing less! And I must have a costume for the rôle, a rich and elegant costume; Joconde is Count Robert's friend, you know?"

"No, I don't know that play."

"I will reply in the words of Monsieur Prudhomme, in *La Famille Improvisée*: 'You would be wrong if you could.'—How much do I owe you now?"

"Two thousand francs, which I have lent you at four different times."

"That's right—five hundred francs each time; well, lend me a thousand at once to-day. Then I shall owe you three thousand. But my old aunt can't last much longer; and then, too, I am going to make a great success on the stage, and tenors are paid fabulous prices now! I can easily pay you three thousand francs, when I am earning fifty thousand a year."

Monsieur Seringat took his wallet from his pocket and took from it a thousand-franc note, which he handed to Dodichet, saying:

"This is for keeping my secret!"

"Thanks, my dear friend; you have unpleasant moments, but some very agreeable quarter-hours. Will you come to Quimper to see my début?"

"No, I don't want to leave Paris; one can lose one's self better here, in the crowd. I have discovered a small hotel, at the rear of a courtyard, at the farther end of Rue Saint-Jacques, and I am going to take refuge there."

"Very good; but as it is essential that I should always be able to find you, if only to repay what I owe you, I think I will accompany you to your small hotel at the rear of a courtyard—for it must be rather hard to find, courtyards ordinarily being behind the hotel. Then I will bid you farewell, and start for Bretagne to gather laurels and yellow-boys."

A cab was waiting at the door; the luggage was placed on top, Dodichet took his place inside, with Seringat, and did not leave him until he had seen him established in an old house on Rue Saint-Jacques, which resembled a hotel about as much as Suresnes wine resembles Chambertin.

Dodichet's first care was to lay in a stock of tobacco, pipes, cigars, and cigarette papers. After that, he turned his attention to his costume for the rôle of Joconde. He spent three hundred francs, but he had a gorgeous costume, which was almost new. On returning home, he tried it on, and deemed himself so handsome in it that he sent his concierge to tell Boulotte to come to see him as Joconde.

Mademoiselle Boulotte came, and uttered an admiring exclamation at sight of Dodichet in tight, white silk pantaloons, slashed with violet velvet, a tunic of velvet of the same color, a lace ruff, a velvet cap surmounted by a fine white feather, a gilt belt, and yellow turn-over top-boots. She insisted that he should go in that guise and take a glass of beer with her; but he dared not take the risk of going to a café, because it was not Carnival time. The best he could do was to send out for a dinner to the nearest restaurant, and dine with his young friend in his new costume.

Mademoiselle Boulotte was enchanted, and fancied that she was dining with a foreign nobleman. They ate and laughed, and drank freely. Dodichet sang snatches of his part between the courses; his voice had a fair range, but it had been made hoarse by the excessive use of tobacco.

"My dear boy," said Boulotte, "you mustn't smoke on the day of your début; no, nor on the day before, either."

"Pshaw! pshaw! I'm a little hoarse this evening; but if you swallow the yolk of an egg raw, your voice becomes clear again, as if by magic. Meanwhile, let's drink and smoke! I don't act to-morrow."

They smoked and drank so much that Joconde ended by rolling on the floor in his fine costume, which he found spotted and rumpled and torn the next morning. He was obliged to buy another pair of silk trousers; then he lost no time in taking the train for Bretagne, without trying on his costume again.

Arrived at Quimper-Corentin, Dodichet started off at once to find the manager of the theatre. As he had a large supply of self-assurance and cheek, he assumed the airs of one of the most talented performers of the age, and the manager was taken in by his manner of the man accustomed to winning triumphs. To make himself thoroughly agreeable to the manager and to his future comrades, Dodichet invited them all to dine at the best hotel in the town. At the table, he announced that they must not spare the claret or the champagne. The local artists were not accustomed to such treatment, and the manager himself, amazed to see a tenor who was apparently wallowing in gold, was persuaded that he had placed his hand on an Elleviou or a Tamberlick.

That same evening, the posters announced the early début of a young tenor who had already appeared with great success at the leading theatres of Russia, Germany, and Italy. As a measure of precaution, Dodichet did not include France. As his name was not very pleasant to the ear, and seemed better fitted to a comic actor than a real virtuoso, he caused himself to be announced as Signor Rouladini, which name seemed to promise an Italian artist.

"How many rehearsals do you want?" the manager asked his new recruit; who replied, with the assurance which never deserted him:

"One will be enough. I know the piece by heart, and at a pinch I could play all the parts."

But, at the rehearsal, il Signor Rouladini, who claimed to know the play by heart, did not know even his own lines, and repeatedly turned to the prompter.

"I have forgotten it a little, because I knew it too well," he said. "But to-morrow, before the audience, I shan't miss a word."

"You are still very hoarse," said the manager; "would you prefer to have your début postponed a day or two?"

"No, indeed! for my voice will be just the same later; but on the day of my début, I will swallow the yolks of two or three eggs raw, and my voice will be clear and sweet. Don't you worry at all!"

The manager did not seem to be altogether reassured, but all the artists to whom Dodichet had given a dinner declared that he must have a very sweet voice when he was not hoarse. The leading lady advised him not to smoke till after his début. But Dodichet laughed in her face, and offered to bet that he would smoke on the stage while she

was singing; the manager formally forbade his débutant to make that experiment, and warned him that the audiences in that town were not very patient.

"That's because you don't know how to take them," was the reply; "I defy them to show a bad temper with me!"

The day of the début arrived. In the morning there was another rehearsal. Dodichet knew his part no better, and constantly appealed to the prompter, an obstinate old supernumerary, who insisted that the débutant was deaf. The voice was somewhat improved, thanks to the yolks of eggs; but on leaving the rehearsal, Dodichet, in order to tighten up his nerves, drank punch and treated all his comrades except the prompter, with whom he was angry; and therein he made a capital mistake: an actor should take as much pains to stand well with his prompter as a tenant with his concierge.

At dinner, Dodichet thought it best to get slightly tipsy, so that he would not be frightened when he faced the audience. Then he smoked, coughed, spat, and tried his voice: the punch had entirely destroyed the effect of the eggs, and his voice was almost inaudible. He sent out for eggs, and ate several more raw while he was dressing, so that he was horribly sick at his stomach when he went on the stage.

The sight of the crowded theatre greatly disturbed the débutant; he did not know where he was, and spying in a proscenium box a man with whom he had played dominoes the night before, he bowed and took off his cap to him. Luckily, the audience took the salute for itself. The actor who was on the stage with Dodichet motioned to him that it was his turn to speak, but he had not the faintest idea what he was to say; so he turned to the prompter and said in an undertone:

"My cue! my cue!"

"I just gave it to you," retorted the prompter, with the utmost coolness.

The audience began to murmur. The actor who was playing Count Robert came to his comrade's assistance once more; he skipped part of the scene to the prelude to Joconde's famous air: *J'ai longtemps parcouru le monde*. Thereupon there was profound silence in the hall; for everybody was curious to hear the voice of the individual who acted so wretchedly, and they were beginning to say to one another:

"That's your Italian singer all over! The dialogue is nothing to him, and the music everything."

But on that occasion the music proved to be much worse than the dialogue. The combination of eggs, punch, wine, and tobacco had given the débutant such a peculiar voice that, when he attempted to sing, he emitted a sort of unearthly sound which reminded one of a tea kettle, a duck, and a serpent all at once.

The pit roared with laughter at first. But Dodichet coughed, spat, and tried to smile at the audience, saying:

"This is nothing! it's a cat [hoarseness]!"

Then he began again:

"'J'ai longtemps parcouru le monde!'"

"Go and do it again!" cried a voice from the pit.

Dodichet began to cough again, then spat at the prompter, who stuck his head out of his box, and shouted:

"Look out what you're doing!"

Once more the débutant began his air:

"'J'ai longtemps parcouru le monde;
Et l'on m'a vu, et l'on m'a vu!——'"[R]

A storm of hisses arose; this time the audience thought that he meant to mock at them, and on all sides there were shouts of:

"Down with him! put him out!"

Dodichet tried to go on:

"'Et l'on m'a vu, et l'on m'a vu!'"

"We've seen quite enough of you!" cried the pit in chorus. "Off you go!"

Dodichet pretended not to hear, and insisted on continuing his air; but the audience made a terrible uproar, and some young men in the pit threw raw potatoes and copper sous at the débutant.

"Ah! this is the way you treat me, is it?" he cried; "well, you're a pack of brazen-faced hounds!"

And with that, he turned his back on the audience, made a most contemptuous gesture, and rushed into the wings. But the gesture he had indulged in and the words he had uttered excited the wrath of the spectators to the highest pitch; they jumped down among the musicians, climbed upon the stage, and scoured it in all directions.

"We'll teach the fellow to show such disrespect to the public," they said; "it's a hiding, not hisses, that Signor Rouladini needs."

And the prompter in his hole rubbed his hands in glee.

The manager tried in vain to pacify the audience; they would not listen to him. But Dodichet's comrades, seeing that the matter was becoming serious, hustled him out of the theatre by a side door, with a policeman's cloak over his shoulders and a fireman's helmet on his head.

"Leave the town at once," they said to him. "Don't go back to your hotel, for you won't be safe there. Hurry to the station, and skip! the Bretons don't understand a joke; they might do you a serious injury."

Bewildered by what had happened to him, Dodichet found himself in the street with no clear idea how he had got there. Luckily for him, he invariably carried his purse in his belt, so that he would always be able to take something. He soon decided what course to take. Wrapping himself in the cloak they had thrown over his shoulders, and fixing the fireman's helmet firmly on his head, he made for the railway station.

"The provinces are not enlightened enough to appreciate me," he said to himself; "I will return to Paris. I have two hundred francs in my purse still, and with that I can await events."

He jumped into a carriage in which there were three women. His strange costume frightened them, and they started to change carriages; but Dodichet reassured them by saying that he had just left a fancy-dress ball, and that he had retained his disguise on a wager. But, at the first stop, he purchased other clothes, not daring to return to Paris as Joconde, a policeman, and a fireman all in one.

This change of costume was expensive, and when he arrived in Paris Dodichet had but one hundred francs left of the thousand Seringat had lent him. But, on the very day of his return, he received a letter from Troyes in an envelope with a black border.

"My poor aunt is dead!" he said to himself; "faith! I'll not play the hypocrite so far as to weep for her. Her money arrives in the nick of time. I will pay Seringat, I will buy a cashmere shawl for Boulotte, and I will weave days of gold, truffles, and champagne; for the dear aunt was rich. She must have left me more than a hundred thousand francs!"

Dodichet broke the seal; the letter did, in fact, announce the death of his aunt, who had left her whole fortune to a third or fourth cousin, as she did not choose that it should go to her scapegrace of a nephew, who had made such a wretched use of the money his other relations had left him.

Dodichet did not expect to be disinherited; he angrily crumpled the notary's letter which told him the news; and for the first time his reflections were not rose-colored.

XV

A RASCALLY BROTHER-IN-LAW

After his quarrel with Nathalie, Adhémar sought distraction and pleasure to no purpose; go where he would, he found neither. When one loves truly, it is a very painful thing to cease to see her whose presence had a never-failing charm; one tries in vain to put a brave face upon it, and to tell one's self that a lost love is readily replaced by another; in reality, we cannot tear a beloved image from our hearts so easily; we are conscious of an aching void, a brooding melancholy which follows us everywhere; and we prefer the memories of the past for which we sigh to all the pleasures that the present has to offer us.

Adhémar was unhappy, and dissatisfied with himself; and yet he strove to convince himself that he was justified in breaking off that intimacy which had so much charm for him.

"I loved her," he would say to himself; "I loved her sincerely, but she did not love me, for she deceived me. That pipe case did not belong to any woman. So that she received visits from men without telling me! and when one's mistress once has mysteries of that sort in her life, everyone knows what it means. And that smell of tobacco, which I had noticed before! That smoker must have come often to see her! Ah! Nathalie, Nathalie! you who were the woman I had dreamed of—to be loved by whom would have made me so happy! But, no, women cannot be faithful; why should she have acted differently from the others?"

On a certain day, when the young author was walking along the street in gloomy mood, thinking such thoughts as these, he suddenly found himself face to face with Lucien, who, also, was sighing dolorously.

"Ah! Lucien!"

"Adhémar!"

"Where are you going, my dear Lucien?"

"I am going—upon my word! I don't know where I am going. I am walking about at random—I am so unhappy! so desperate!"

"Really? Come, tell me your troubles, my poor Lucien. I am none too cheerful myself, by the way. So we will share our sorrows; that always helps a little. Hasn't your invention, your little business enterprise, succeeded?"

"Why, yes, it is going on very well, and that is just the reason I am in such despair."

"I don't understand you."

"As my business seemed to be prospering, I thought I might hope that Juliette's hand would be given to me at last. But, instead of that, Monsieur Mirotaine has turned me out of his house and forbidden me ever to go there again, all because Dodichet conceived the unfortunate idea of helping along my suit by introducing to the Mirotaines a pretended millionaire Italian count, who was to propose for Juliette; they got themselves invited to dinner, and Monsieur Mirotaine went to some expense to entertain them. Then Dubotté arrived and laid bare the fraud. Monsieur Mirotaine saw that they had made a fool of him, and he is convinced that I was in the plot with Dodichet; hence his anger against me, and the prohibition to go to his house again!"

"What a devil of a fellow that Dodichet is! I remember perfectly that you definitely forbade him to play one of his wretched jokes on this Mirotaine."

"He meant to do me a service, so I can't be angry with him. And yet, he is the cause of my being turned out of the house."

"That old miser's anger will cool down, if you succeed in your undertakings. His daughter will make him listen to reason."

"But meanwhile I can't see her, or have any understanding with her. When I was admitted to her father's house, we found ways of exchanging a word or two in secret. But now that I can never see her, how am I to let her know anything about me? Why, to be unable to see, even for a single minute, the woman one loves, is the cruelest kind of torture, Adhémar, I tell you!"

"To whom are you saying that?"

"Do you mean to say that you can't see the woman you love?"

"In other words, the woman I loved did not love me! or she deceived me, which amounts to the same thing. So I ceased to see her; and yet, I know perfectly well that I love her still."

"Are you quite sure that she deceived you?"

"Quite sure; as sure as a man can be when he sees that a woman has secrets from him. Tell me, Lucien, suppose

you should learn that your Juliette received visits, of which she never breathed a word to you; wouldn't you think that she had some intrigue on hand? I assume, of course, that she is living in her own apartment and is mistress of her actions."

"If Juliette was her own mistress and lived in the most modest little room imaginable, it would be of no use for anyone to say to me: 'She receives other men than you;' I would not suspect her for an instant!"

"Sapristi! what confidence! And suppose you had proof that she received men secretly?"

"Why, I should consider that she must have some reason for concealing those visits from me; for she certainly has none for telling me, for swearing to me that she loves me, if she doesn't love me. When I enter the room where she is, doesn't she always receive me with the sweetest smile? can I not read in her eyes all the pleasure that my presence affords her? Ah! not until she ceased to be the same to me, should I have the slightest fear that she no longer loved me!"

"You have a happy disposition, and no mistake! You are not jealous, are you?"

"Oh, no! not at all!"

"Tell me, do you know Madame Dermont? She is a friend of Mademoiselle Juliette, I believe?"

"Madame Dermont? Yes; I met her several times at Juliette's before Monsieur Mirotaine had forbidden me to talk with his daughter. She's a most attractive woman. Juliette has no better friend. They tell each other their joys and their sorrows, and neither of them has any secrets from the other. She knows that Juliette loves me; and if she could do anything to help us, she would ask nothing better. But she hasn't the power, poor woman! She has had a heap of trouble of her own."

"Who? Nathalie?—I mean Madame Dermont. What trouble? She never mentioned it to me."

"Do you know her, then?"

"Yes, a little. I go to her house sometimes. But this trouble of hers? Tell me about it, I beg you, dear old Lucien!"

"I heard about it from Juliette, to whom, as I just told you, Madame Dermont confides all her sorrows."

"But these troubles of hers? these troubles? for God's sake, come to the point!"

Lucien looked at Adhémar with a smile, as he replied:

"How deeply interested you seem to be in anything that concerns that young woman! Can it be, by any chance——"

"Yes, yes, I love her, I adore her, I am mad over her! And these troubles?—in pity's name, my friend, tell me all you know!"

"Madame Dermont, as you know, is a widow; but her husband had a brother,—a sad scamp, by the way,—who would never do anything but drink, gamble, smoke, and haunt low resorts. When Monsieur Dermont died, Alexandre—that was the brother's name—Alexandre was frantic with rage when he found that he was not his heir, but that the whole fortune—rather a modest one, by the way—which his brother had left went to the widow. He called on his sister-in-law, made an unpleasant scene, and went so far as to threaten her; but she has a clear head and a strong character, and she turned him out of the house. Thereupon, Alexandre saw that he had gone to work in the wrong way, and that he would not obtain anything from Madame Dermont by threats; so he called on her again, and that time he did not play the swashbuckler, but wept and whined over his sad plight. The young widow did not turn him out again, but gave him five hundred francs and advised him to enlist; that was the only profession in which he could hope to make anything of himself. Alexandre promised to follow that advice; but, after a few months, he came back to his sister-in-law and told her he was dying of hunger, that he had eaten nothing since the day before; and he smelt horribly of brandy and tobacco!"

"And tobacco? He smoked, did he? Ah! now I understand. Poor woman! But why didn't she tell me all this?"

"Why? Because it is a painful thing to say that a man who is closely allied to you, who bears your name,—for Alexandre's name is Dermont,—in fact, you don't like to confess that such a ne'er-do-well, such a blackguard, is your brother, or that he has, at all events, the right to call you his sister."

"And the wretch has come again to torment Nathalie, I suppose?"

"Mon Dieu! yes; she doesn't know how to get rid of him! And yet, it is very hard to continue giving money away when it serves only to encourage vice and debauchery."

"Oh! I'll rid her of her miserable brother-in-law! Dear Nathalie! But why didn't she confide in me? No matter! I am a wretch; I am unworthy to be loved by such a sweet, dear woman!—Lucien, give me your hand. Ah! my friend, if you knew how much good you have done me! You have brought me back to life, to happiness, to love—that is to say, to her! Adieu, Lucien, adieu! I hasten—I fly to beg for forgiveness. She will grant it, won't she? she will grant it?"

Without waiting for a reply, Adhémar walked hurriedly away in the direction of Madame Dermont's; but when he drew near, and could see the house in which she lived, he slackened his pace; he began to wonder how she, whom he had left so cavalierly in consequence of his unjust suspicions, would receive him. And when he reached the door, he stopped; he dared not go in, but cudgelled his brain to find some pretext, some excuse, for calling.

He had been standing for some minutes, irresolute, before the porte cochère, when he was abruptly pushed aside by a person who said to him in a hoarse voice as he entered the house:

"Stand aside there! Don't you see that you're blocking up the door?"

The speaker was a man of about thirty, very carelessly dressed, whose hat was dented in several places; his face was prematurely old and bloated, his manner was vulgar and impertinent, he was saturated with tobacco, and seemed to be slightly tipsy.

"Where are you going, monsieur?" the concierge called to him as he passed through the porte cochère and started for the staircase, while Adhémar, who was on the point of calling him to account for the discourteous way in which he had pushed him aside, waited to hear his reply.

"Where am I going? Sacrebleu! you know well enough; this ain't the first time I've been here! I'm going up to my sister's—Madame Dermont."

"Madame Dermont is out, monsieur."

"You always say the same thing; and you know that I go up, all the same."

"I have been expressly forbidden to let you go up, monsieur, and this time you shan't go!"

"I shan't go up! is that all, old dormouse? Just think of that! Madame Dermont won't receive me! But I am Alexandre Dermont, her husband's brother, and she has no right to close her door to me; and I'm going up, all the same, and you can go hang, concierge! And my sister-in-law will have to receive me, because—because——"

Monsieur Alexandre did not finish his sentence, because someone stood before him, barring his passage, and forced him back, looking him steadily in the eye.

"Well, well!" he muttered; "what does this fellow want?—Let me pass, I say!"

"I want you—yes, you, Monsieur Alexandre Dermont."

"I don't know you—let me go upstairs!"

"You shall not go upstairs, you shall not go to your sister-in-law's, who is perfectly justified in refusing to admit a miserable wretch, a scoundrel of your stamp!"

"What! what do you say? What business is it of yours?"

"I say that you're a low-lived hound, that you call on Madame Dermont for no other purpose than to worm money out of her, which you spend in orgies and debauchery! And you are not ashamed to be guilty of such conduct! Do you think that Madame Dermont's modest fortune will serve to gratify your passions forever? No, monsieur; don't count upon it. I forbid you—do you hear?—I forbid you to show your face at your sister-in-law's again!"

"By what right, I should like to know?"

"By the right that every decent man has to protect a woman who is abused and threatened and robbed!"

"Oh! you make me tired! I propose to go up."

And Monsieur Alexandre, turning half around, tried to reach the stairway. But Adhémar overtook him, seized him by the throat, and held him against the wall, saying:

"If you make another attempt to go up those stairs, I'll smash your head against this wall!"

"You're choking me, monsieur!"

"Did you hear me?"

"Yes; but let me go!"

"Will you swear never to come to Madame Dermont's again?"

"Yes, I swear; but you are murdering me! I left a pipe case at my sister's; I came to get it."

"You didn't come on any such paltry errand as that; you came to ask that lady for more money, dastard that you are!"

"You insult me, monsieur!"

"Ah! you feel that you are insulted, do you? Very well! if you have the least bit of pluck, come with me, and I'll give you satisfaction. There's a gunsmith's close by; we can go there and get pistols, and take a cab. Come!"

"I, fight! I think I see myself! no, thanks! Let me go; I've had enough! I swear I won't come here again."

"Go, then; but if you fail to keep that oath, I swear that I won't fail to shoot you!"

Monsieur Alexandre did not stay to listen to any more; he ran away as if he feared pursuit. Thereupon the concierge, who had armed himself with his broom to support Adhémar if necessary, exclaimed:

"Ah! monsieur, how lucky it is that you happened to be here to drive that miserable scamp away! He wouldn't listen to me—but you! Why, you gave him such a shaking that I warrant he'll never come again. You have done Madame Dermont a very great service, I promise you!"

"Has she really gone out?"

"No, monsieur, no; she hardly ever goes out lately; but those were my orders for that rascal. You can go up, of course; she'll be glad to see you."

Adhémar went upstairs, but paused at Nathalie's door; he was intensely excited.

"She hardly ever goes out, so the concierge said," he thought. "Has she been sick? Am I the cause of it? Oh! this infernal jealousy! How will she receive me? No matter! I will see her, and die at her feet if she doesn't forgive me."

He rang with a trembling hand; the maid opened the door, and uttered a cry of joy when she saw who it was. Servants almost always divine their mistress's secret thoughts, and this one was very sure that Adhémar's return would bring back joy and happiness to the house, which had been very gloomy since he had ceased to come.

"Ask Madame Dermont if she will see me," said Adhémar.

The servant, with a beaming face, hurried away to her mistress, and returned almost immediately to say that he might go in. Adhémar did not wait for the words to be repeated. He found Nathalie holding her embroidery frame in her hand, but not working. A glance sufficed to show him that she was pale and changed, and that her features wore an expression of profound melancholy. Adhémar could contain himself no longer; he rushed forward and threw himself at Nathalie's feet; he seized her hands and pressed them in his own, crying:

"Mercy! forgive me! if you could only know how I have reproached myself! but I will not offend again, I swear! I am cured. Oh! I have been so unhappy ever since I saw you last!"

"And what about me, monsieur? Do you think that I have not been unhappy? Why didn't you come back sooner? What prevented you?"

"Because—I didn't know—— Look you, Nathalie—I will not lie to you—to-day I met Lucien, and I learned from him that you had a brother-in-law who smoked——"

"And then you understood that I had no other intrigue. Bad boy! if you hadn't left me so abruptly, I would have told you the whole story; but when jealousy takes possession of you, it is impossible to make you listen to reason."

"Hereafter, my confidence in you will be absolute. You love me—you forgive me once more, do you not?"

"Yes, but this is the last time; for such scenes are too painful to me."

At that moment they heard the servant laughing uproariously. Nathalie rang for her and asked her the reason of that outburst of merriment.

"Oh! madame, hasn't monsieur told you what he did to your scamp of a brother-in-law? The concierge just told me. Monsieur took him by the throat and turned him out of the house, and promised to cut him in pieces if he ever dared to come to see you again!"

"Is this true, Adhémar?"

"Yes; did I do wrong?"

"Oh! far from it; you have done me a very great service. It seems that I am destined to be saved by you from all sorts of dangers! You see, monsieur, that you did wrong to desert me!"

Adhémar's only reply was to cover with kisses the hand she abandoned to him; and the maid returned exultantly to the kitchen, crying:

"What joy! The man with the quid of tobacco won't come here again!"

XVI

A BAIGNOIRE

After the evening when young Callé played bézique until midnight with Madame Dubotté, the clinging Éléonore said to her husband:

"Do you know, monsieur, that it was very wrong of you to leave me to pass the evening alone with a young man? and that it shows the greatest indifference on your part toward your wife? for, if I didn't love you as I do, I might revenge myself for your neglect. You expose me to the risk of receiving declarations of love!"

"My dear love, you don't look at things from the right standpoint," Philémon replied, caressing his mutton-chop whiskers, which threatened to encroach upon his cheeks. "Tell me, did Callé make a declaration?"

"Oh, no!"

"You see! Deuce take it! I know with whom I leave you: that young man is as virtuous as Voltaire's *Candide*. Do you know *Candide*?"

"No, my dear."

"I'll get it for you; for you're a little behindhand in literary matters, and I propose to train you in every way. I don't choose to have people say of my wife that she's a ninny. I won't have that, do you hear? and you must govern yourself accordingly."

"I will try, my dear."

"To return to Callé: he is more or less of a simpleton. He doesn't dare to look a woman in the face; indeed, he hardly dares to speak to one. So you see that I can safely leave you with him. If he should ever become any woman's lover, she would have to make the first overtures!"

"Do you think so, my dear?"

"I am sure of it; he would never dare to declare himself, unless he got a little help. And so, my dear love, as I know your virtue and your affection for me, I am entirely easy in my mind. I would intrust you to Callé, my dear, as I would to a keeper of the seraglio. Do you know what a keeper of the seraglio is, in Turkey?"

"No, my dear."

"Well, he's a eunuch."

"What in the world is a eunuch?"

"Why, don't you know that? I'll tell you some night—when it rains. Evidently, I have a great many things to teach you."

A few days later, Philémon said to his wife one morning:

"My dear love, I am going to make you very happy!—I know how much you like the theatre, especially the Gymnase; well, I have taken a box for you there, for to-night."

"Oh! what fun! at the Gymnase! and a box! How lovely of you, dear! Tell me what time we must start, so that I can be ready and not make you impatient."

"Oh! the play doesn't begin till half-past seven—be ready at quarter-past, that will be early enough; he won't call for you before then."

"What did you say? call for me? Am I not to go with you?"

"No; I will join you later; I have to go to an evening party given by my chief. I can't miss that, you understand. When a man wants promotion, he must always stand well with those above him."

"But, in that case, as you knew you were going somewhere else, you shouldn't have got a box for this evening."

"Why not, pray? If I am enjoying myself in one place, is it any more than fair that you should enjoy yourself, too?"

"But you used always to take me with you to your chief's parties."

"Yes, to the dancing parties and the musicales. But this is to be a—serious party; we shall talk politics and discuss the best method of dealing with the maturing obligations of a new Oriental railway; and you can see for yourself that women would be bored to death to sit and listen to all that. That's why there are to be no women."

"With whom do you propose to send me to the play, then?"

"Oh! don't worry about that; I have sent word to Callé! I saw him yesterday, and asked him if he would like to take you to the theatre to-night. He jumped for joy; he adores the theatre."

"But you impose on that young man's good nature."

"On the contrary, I make him very happy! The poor fellow, who has never been able to have a mistress of a decent sort, is delighted to be your escort.—'People will think I've made a conquest of her,' he'll say to himself."

"And you are willing people should think that I am that young man's mistress?"

"Why, no, indeed! no one will believe it! What I say is, that he will imagine that people believe it. I have to dot all my *i*'s to make you understand!"

"There's one thing that I understand very well, monsieur; and that is, that nowadays you do your utmost to avoid taking me anywhere with you. Although you think me a great fool, I beg you to believe that I can see that perfectly well."

"Oh! that's just like a woman! taking everything hind side before! A fellow does all he can to be agreeable—buys a box at the theatre, for a charming play, and says to himself: 'I can't take her to a—political gathering, but I don't want her to sit mooning all alone in her chimney corner.'—And instead of being thanked for what he has done, he is overwhelmed with reproaches, and has to listen to the most absurd reflections! Don't you be alarmed: it will be very hot when I buy another box for you!"

Monsieur Dubotté left the house in a very ill humor. Madame said nothing more, but she probably thought a good deal. When evening came, she made her toilet and took infinite pains with it. Young Callé arrived with great promptness at the appointed time. He was in full dress, and becurled and perfumed as if he were going to a wedding.

"Here's your box," said Philémon, as he handed him the ticket; "I will join you later, if it's possible for me to get away from my chief's party early enough. Try to make my wife enjoy herself; that isn't very easy, for she's not always in good humor. If you succeed in making her amiable, you'll perform a miracle."

Young Callé bowed and set off with Éléonore, who was becoming accustomed to accept his arm. Her escort suggested taking a cab, but she refused, as the Gymnase was not far away. On the way, Callé began a number of sentences concerning the pleasure it afforded him to be with such a charming person; when he could go no further, Éléonore came to his assistance by saying: "You are very good!"—and the sentence remained unfinished.

When they reached the theatre, Callé looked at the ticket and said:

"It's a baignoire."

"A baignoire? I don't know what that is; is it very high?"

"No, on the contrary, it's low; on a level with the pit."

When the box door was opened, Éléonore hesitated about going in.

"Mon Dieu! how dark it is in there!" she exclaimed. "Is this our box?"

"To be sure, madame," replied the box opener; "and it's almost opposite the stage, as you see."

"Dear me! what a strange place! Yes, we do have a good view of the stage, that is true; but we can't be seen—it is hardly worth while to take pains with one's dress. However, perhaps I shall get used to it. Do you like these boxes, Monsieur Callé?"

"So far as I am concerned, madame, I am always satisfied when—I have the—the privilege——"

"You are very good!"

Éléonore took her seat at the front of the box, and Callé modestly seated himself behind her. When she had looked for a moment into the auditorium, of which she could see only a very small part, she turned toward her escort, who returned her glance, sighed, and said nothing.

"You can't see anything from where you are, Monsieur Callé, can you? Sit here in front, beside me."

"You are very kind, madame, but I am all right here; if I sat in front, I—I should crowd you."

"Not at all."

"I can see the stage very well."

"But you can't see the audience at all."

"I don't care for that; what I do see is much more agreeable to me—to look at—and when—when one is near—near madame—then one has no wish to—one does not look elsewhere for—one——"

"You are very good!"

The play began, and they listened intently; there was much talk of love in it. Éléonore seemed deeply interested in it; the young man continued to sigh. After the first act he went out, and returned in a moment with bonbons and *fruits glacés*, which he offered to Madame Dubotté. She accepted them with a sweet smile. It was an excellent chance to tell her escort that he was very good; but she contented herself with handing him a quarter of an orange, then proceeded to stuff herself with the sweetmeats. As a general rule, women are very fond of bonbons; a man ought always to have his pockets full when he wishes to make himself agreeable to them. You may vary the menu, however, by adding truffles stewed in champagne; then your success will be even more complete.

The second play began. Now and then, in order to obtain a better view, the young man leaned forward from behind Éléonore. At such times his head brushed against the pretty blonde's shoulders; those shoulders were very white and her chest well developed. Her dress was cut low, and while looking at the shoulders one could see the base of those charming globes which, to my mind, excel in value all balloons, past, present, and to come, even Nadar's *Giant*. With them, to be sure, you cannot float through the air; but I opine that what we find on earth is worth much more than anything we can find aloft. Young Callé, therefore, was not so much of a fool as he seemed, when he sat behind Éléonore. She, upon turning suddenly, collided with the head of her escort, who was not looking at the stage at that moment; and their two faces were so near to each other that the ends of their noses touched. A man accustomed to intrigues would have seized the opportunity to kiss the young woman, but Callé hastily drew back, stammering apologies which no one demanded of him; for Éléonore, when she found those eyes absorbed by contemplation of her charms, had been on the point of saying:

"You are very good!"

The second play had quite as much to say of love as the first. After the first act, finding that her companion continued to sigh without daring to speak, Éléonore remembered that her husband had told her that he needed to be encouraged, and that without encouragement he would never venture to talk with a lady; so she began the conversation.

"I have noticed one thing, Monsieur Callé."

"What is that, madame?"

"That there's a lot about love in all plays."

"Yes, that is true; you are right; they bring it in everywhere."

"Why is it, monsieur?"

"Why, madame, it is, apparently, because the authors don't know how to talk about anything else."

"Do you think so? I have heard people say that the stage was simply a copy of what happens in real life. But in real life people don't talk about love all the time, do they, monsieur?"

"Oh, no! madame, they don't always talk about it—although often—one would like to talk about it—but one doesn't dare."

"Oho! so it's because one doesn't dare. That is a great mistake! It seems to me that it's more interesting, more entertaining, than any other subject."

Young Callé had a declaration on the tip of his tongue. But the second act began, and he said nothing more. During the act, Éléonore dropped her opera glass on the floor. Callé instantly stepped forward to pick it up; but, in order to do it, he had to go to the front of the box and stoop until he was almost on his knees, for it was very dark, and he had to feel about on the floor. Instead of the opera glass, he seized Éléonore's foot and pressed it tenderly.

"Why, that is not my opera glass that you have, Monsieur Callé; it's my foot," said the pretty blonde, laughing.

"Are you sure, madame?"

"Oh! yes, I can feel. But where are you looking, Monsieur Callé? my glass isn't there; I can feel it with my foot."

Callé decided at last, albeit with regret, to take his head from under the seat; he had the opera glass, and presented it to the young lady with a trembling hand. She was deeply moved, so much so that, in trying to take it, she dropped it again. That time it fell in her lap, however; so Callé resumed his seat; but after that, when Éléonore turned to speak to him, she sometimes leaned upon him, perhaps unconsciously; ladies often venture upon trifling familiarities like that, which give great hopes to him with whom they indulge in them. The young man was as red as a cherry, and his eyes were always somewhere else than on the stage.

The act came to an end, and Madame Dubotté, turning to her escort, asked him what he thought of the play.

"I don't know, madame," he faltered; "I didn't hear a word of it."

"What! didn't you listen?"

"I beg pardon—I listened, but I didn't hear. I was so distraught by—— Did your opera glass fall again, madame?"

"Why, no—it's here in my lap."

"Oh! that's a pity!"

"Why so? would you like it to be on the floor again?"

"Oh! yes, because I might have the pleasure of looking for it. And then—and then——"

According to his custom, the young man failed to finish the sentence; but he heaved such a prodigious sigh that Madame Dubotté asked him with concern:

"Are you ill, Monsieur Callé?"

"Oh! no, madame; far from it!"

"Why do you sigh so deeply, then?"

"That is my way of being happy."

"Ah! that's curious. So you are very happy, are you?"

"Oh! yes, madame; I always am—when I am with you!"

He actually finished his sentence that time. Éléonore thanked him with a sweet smile; and during the last act she leaned much more frequently on the young man, whose knees served to transform her seat into an armchair.

The performance came to an end. They walked home slowly, very slowly; they did not seem in any haste to arrive. Éléonore talked about the play; the young man answered *yes* and *no* at random, but he pressed very tenderly the arm that was passed through his, and the caress seemed in no wise to offend her to whom it was addressed.

On reaching home, Madame Dubotté invited her young escort to come soon to play bézique with her, while her husband went about without her according to his custom. Callé promised to take advantage of her invitation.

And so, during the following week, Monsieur Callé went almost every evening to play bézique with fair-haired Éléonore; and she was no longer out of temper when her husband went out without her. Indeed, she sometimes said to him:

"My dear, if you have any business on hand, don't put yourself out for me; Monsieur Callé will come and stay with me. He is very strong at bézique, and never has enough of it; he is indefatigable!"

Dubotté was enchanted.

"At last I have trained my wife!" he cried; "she is just what I wanted her to be! She isn't on my back all the time now; she leaves me entirely at liberty. That is what I wanted to bring about; I had hard work, but I have succeeded. She goes to the theatre with Callé now, without showing any temper, even when I don't go after her."

The young woman did more than that: when her husband promised to secure a box for her, she always said:

"Try to get a baignoire, my dear!"

XVII

INCORRIGIBLE

Adhémar went to see Nathalie every day; during the day, he gave her all the time which his literary labors left at his disposal, and passed all his evenings with her. He often discussed with her his ideas, his plans for new plays; and sometimes read a scene to her, or a chapter of a new novel. He consulted her and profited by her advice. If Molière consulted his maid-servant, is it not much more natural to consult one's mistress? There is this difference, however: Laforest, Molière's servant, was proud and happy to be consulted by her master; whereas, out of twenty mistresses, there will be nineteen who will not listen to you when you talk literature to them, who will yawn when you read them a page that you have just written, or who will interrupt you at the most interesting point to say:

"What color do you prefer for a dress, my dear, green or blue? I myself think that blue is more becoming to me—what do you say?"

Thereupon you see that your efforts as a reader who desires to move his audience are thrown away; you put your manuscript in your pocket, and make up your mind never to talk with your fair one about anything but dresses and

fashions, as she takes no interest in anything else. But there are exceptions; there are women who are willing to listen when you do not talk to them about themselves, and who are able to talk about something besides styles and love. Nathalie was one of these exceptions; that is why Adhémar was so happy in her company; that is why they suited each other so well.

So it was that the most perfect harmony reigned between the lovers, when, on arriving at Madame Dermont's one morning much earlier than usual, Adhémar was informed by the servant that her mistress was not at home.

"What! she has gone out before noon? To do some shopping, I suppose?"

"I don't know, monsieur; but madame will certainly return very soon, for whenever she goes out in the morning like this, she always comes home before noon."

"Whenever she goes out like this!" muttered Adhémar, his heart beginning already to sink. "So Madame Dermont often goes out in the morning?"

"*Dame!* monsieur, I can't say just how often; but she has been out several times lately."

Adhémar did not pursue his questioning any further. He threw himself into an armchair, thinking:

"I will wait for her; of course, she will tell me where she has been."

And he tried to banish the evil thoughts which were already besieging his mind. Less than five minutes had passed, when Nathalie appeared. She seemed a little surprised to find Adhémar there; but she went to him with outstretched hand, and said, smiling as usual:

"Good-morning, my dear!"

"Good-morning, madame!"

"Oho! what does that *madame* mean? Since when have I been *madame* to you? Is it because you didn't find me when you came, that you would call me *madame*?"

"Why, no—it was simply for a change."

"I don't like the change, myself! What's the matter?"

"Nothing. Have you been to walk?"

"Yes—that is to say, I have been to pay a visit."

"Oh! a visit. Would it be presumptuous in me to ask you to whom you pay visits—so early?"

"Why, yes, a little presumptuous, perhaps. However, as I see that you are frowning, and that you probably suspect me of treachery already——"

"Oh! upon my word!"

"No, you are incapable of it, aren't you?—Well, monsieur, I have been to see my poor friend Juliette. Are you satisfied?"

"Mon Dieu! I asked you—just for something to say."

"Yes, I understand—and to find out where I had been."

"Did you see your friend Juliette?"

"To be sure!"

"And you have been to see her often of late?"

"Why not? if I can comfort her or gratify her by listening to her confidences. If you were unhappy, wouldn't you be very glad to have a true friend come to see you and try to console you?"

"Oh! when I am unhappy, I keep it to myself, and don't go and tell other people about it."

"Women are not like men, my dear; when they have troubles—love troubles, especially—they love to pour out their hearts on a friend's breast."

"Yes, women are very fond of having secrets between themselves, of being mysterious with us."

"Oh, dear! there you go again, with your evil thoughts! Is it because I have been to see Juliette that you are so cross?"

"Cross? I am not cross!"

"As if I didn't know you! as if I couldn't read in your eyes! You promised me absolute confidence."

"It seems to me that I am proving my confidence in you at this moment."

"By making wry faces because you didn't find me when you came this morning! Come, my friend, let us reason a little; you should be logical: if I don't love you, what reason have I for pretending to, for feigning sentiments which I do not feel—for deceiving you, in a word? Come—answer me!"

Instead of answering, Adhémar rose and paced the floor, sat down at the piano, ran his fingers over the keys, began waltzes, polkas, and mazurkas; then ran to Nathalie and kissed her, saying:

"Forgive me, dear girl; I slept badly last night; I have a little headache; that is why you found me so sulky."

Nathalie pretended to believe him, and harmony was reëstablished, in appearance at least; for in the bottom of his heart Adhémar was tormented by doubt; he thought of those frequent goings-out in the morning, ostensibly to see Juliette, and said to himself:

"She used not to go out so often—or, if she did, she told me herself when she intended to go."

Several days passed; Adhémar constantly changed the hour of his visits; but Madame Dermont was always at home, and he began to feel a little more at ease. But, impelled by that jealousy which in him was the inevitable concomitant of genuine love, it happened more than once that, after he had left Nathalie, he prowled about the street a long while, or stood under a neighboring porte cochère, to see if she did not go out; but he had his trouble for his pains, to his great contentment.

One morning, about nine o'clock, it occurred to him to go and walk through the street where Madame Dermont lived.

"I won't go up to her rooms," he said to himself, "for she's not an early riser, and I might disturb her in her sleep; but I may see her servant come out, and I can give her the bouquet I am going to buy for her mistress. Nathalie will find it by her side when she wakes, and she'll surmise from whom it comes."

He dressed hurriedly, and bought a lovely bouquet on Passage Verdeau. Then he walked to Rue de Paradis-

Poissonnière, to Madame Dermont's house, looked up at the windows, where all the curtains were still drawn, and strolled along the street, after looking at his watch: it was half-past nine. That was too early for a call on Nathalie, but he hoped that the servant would come out.

Ten minutes passed, and Madame Dermont's servant did not appear. Adhémar was tired of pacing the street with his flowers in his hand, and had almost concluded to go up, thinking that he could ring very softly, to avoid waking her, when he saw a cab coming rapidly toward him. It slackened its pace as it approached Madame Dermont's house. Adhémar, without pausing to weigh his reasons for so doing, stepped aside; something told him that he was interested in that cab, and he determined to see who alighted from it.

It stopped in front of Nathalie's door; a young woman alighted, paid the driver, and hurried into the house. But Adhémar had recognized her; he could not be mistaken; he had seen her features, he had recognized her dress, and the hat she wore when she went out in the morning: it was she, it was Nathalie! For an instant Adhémar thought of running after her and shouting:

"Where have you been?"

But he reflected that she might lie to him again; and a better plan occurred to him. The cab was still there, the driver preparing to return to his box. Adhémar opened the door, jumped in, and, taking ten francs from his pocket, placed them in the cabman's hand as he asked him where he wished to go.

The man was amazed at sight of the ten francs which his new passenger gave him even before hiring him.

"Oh! it's to be a long trip, eh? You want to go into the country, I take it, bourgeois?"

"The ten francs are to pay you for answering my questions briefly: a lady has just got out of your cab?"

"Yes, bourgeois; a pretty little lady—good style. I know what I'm talking about."

"Where did you take her from?"

"Where did I take her from? why, from here, bourgeois, about an hour and a quarter ago; it wasn't quite a half, but the little woman pays generous, without haggling."

"She took you by the hour, then, when she started?"

"Just so."

"Where did you go with her? Now, don't lie to me!"

"You pay too well for me to lie to you! Besides, there's no mystery about it; I took her to the Jardin des Plantes."

"To the Jardin des Plantes?"

"Yes, bourgeois; in front of the gate, on the water side. She got out there and told me to wait, and then she went into the garden."

"Alone?"

"Yes, yes, alone when she went in; but when she came out, after a quarter of an hour or more, she wasn't alone then."

"Who was with her?"

"A gentleman—a young man."

"A young man? What was he like—his dress—his features?"

"Oh! excuse me! but you don't suppose I took his photograph, do you? He was dressed, like everybody else, in a frock-coat. I thought he was rather a good-looking fellow. That's all I can tell you."

"And this man—this gentleman—this frock-coat—he came out with the lady, you say? Did she have his arm?"

"Oh! as to that, I can't say; I was on my box, and I didn't see them till they were close to my cab, and the young man helped the lady in."

"And got in with her?"

"No, no; he didn't get in—he said good-bye."

"How did he say it? Did he embrace her?—did he kiss her hand?"

"Oh! bless your heart! I was straightening out my reins, and I didn't see them embrace. The lady called out to me: 'Take me back to where you brought me from!'—The young man shut the door and went off—but, yes, I remember now that he said to her, as he went away: 'Thank you, thank you a thousand times for coming!'—Now, where'll you go, bourgeois?"

"To the Jardin des Plantes, to the same spot where that lady got out."

Adhémar's brain was on fire, his heart beat violently; he pressed his hands against his brow, saying to himself:

"It is absolutely certain now—she too deceives me—and she dared to tell me that she loved me! Ah! we don't deceive those whom we love! It is all over—yes, all over, this time! I won't see her again, for she would tell me another lie; she would invent some fable to make me believe that she is innocent! And perhaps I should be idiot enough to believe her. But, no, I do not propose to be her dupe again; I will see her no more. But that man with whom she makes assignations so early in the day—ah! if I could find out who he is, I would kill him! And yet, he is not the guilty one, for he loves her. But not as I loved her—oh, no!"

As he glanced about, Adhémar saw a handkerchief at his feet; he picked it up, examined it, and recognized Nathalie's monogram, which he had seen her embroidering with her own hands.

"She was so engrossed that she forgot it!" he muttered, twisting the handkerchief in his clenched hands. "A moment ago, she was here, on this seat, and she was thinking of another man!"

He could no longer control his grief; he sobbed bitterly, and the tears rushed from his eyes; but he felt a sort of pleasure in wiping them away with the handkerchief which belonged to her.

The cab stopped and the driver opened the door, saying:

"This is the very place where the little lady got out, bourgeois, and where I waited for her. There's the Jardin des Plantes."

Adhémar, absorbed by his reflections and memories, had no idea where he was or whither he was going. The cabman's words recalled him to himself. He jumped out of the cab and said to the man:

"You must come with me."

"Where to, bourgeois?"

"Into the Jardin des Plantes."

"Carriages ain't admitted; it's against the rules."

"I didn't say anything about your cab; I want only you. We will walk through the garden, and I want you to look closely at every man you see; and if you recognize the young man who escorted that lady back to your cab, you must point him out to me instantly."

The cabman began to laugh.

"My word! that's a good one, that is! You want me to go with you afoot, eh? And what will become of my cab and my horses in the meantime?"

"Mon Dieu! they won't fly away. Go and stand your cab over yonder where those others are."

"I can't do that, bourgeois; our orders is not to lose sight of our horses; I should be punished—discharged, perhaps."

Adhémar took ten more francs from his pocket and put them in the cabman's hand.

"Just a few times round the garden; while you're away, one of your comrades will look after your horses."

Money always produces its due effect; the cabman wavered, and at last replied:

"I'll go and ask Jérôme, who's over there, I believe, if he'll have an eye on my horses, and I'll share the ten francs with him—eh, bourgeois?"

"Yes, yes,—here, give him this five-franc piece; off with you!"

"Oh! Jérôme's a good fellow! he'll do it for me."

The driver ran to the cab stand, told his comrade what was wanted, and showed him the last five-franc piece he had received.

"We two will drink it up directly," he added.

Jérôme agreed; the cabman pocketed the hundred sous, and returned to Adhémar.

"It's all fixed," he said; "Jérôme will have an eye on my beasts."

"Come with me, then."

They entered the garden, the cab driver walking beside Adhémar, who said to him:

"Look carefully at all the men—the young men, I mean—and as soon as you see the one who was with that lady, say: 'There he is!'"

"All right, bourgeois; or, say I cough to warn you?"

"Very well."

There were few people in the garden. Adhémar walked rapidly, and his companion could hardly keep up with him.

"Sapristi!" he cried; "you travel faster than my horses!"

A young man passed them, and the cabman began to cough.

"Well!" exclaimed Adhémar, stopping abruptly.

"That's not the man, bourgeois."

"What in the devil did you cough for, then?"

"To let you know that he wasn't the one."

"You are not to cough unless you recognize him."

"Oh! all right! I understand!"

They went on again. They met a number of men, but the cabman made no sign; he simply said from time to time:

"If Jérôme should get a fare, who'd look after my cab?—By the way, monsieur," he said at last; "there's one thing perhaps I ought to tell you."

"What's that?"

"If the man you're looking for should pass us, I wouldn't know him. You see, I hardly looked at him, only just caught a glimpse of him, and I don't even know whether he was dark or light!"

Adhémar stamped impatiently, and, realizing that his search would necessarily be fruitless, decided to leave the garden. The cabman was overjoyed to find Jérôme still on the square.

"Where shall I take monsieur now?" he asked.

"Nowhere—thanks! I don't need you any longer."

In his then frame of mind, Adhémar preferred walking to riding; he craved air and exercise. He walked very rapidly, often without looking to see where he was going. However, he reached home in time, and had no sooner entered his study than he ran to his desk and seized his pen.

"I will write to her," he said to himself; "I cannot wait to tell her that I know of her treachery—and then everything will be at an end between us. I will try to forget her."

With a hand that trembled with excitement, although his thoughts caused it to move swiftly across the paper, he wrote Nathalie the following letter:

"Madame:

"You will deceive me no more! this time I have seen—seen with my own eyes—that you devote to another the hours that I am not with you. And you told me that I was wrong to be jealous! Ah! your treachery is shameful! Why not have told me frankly that you no longer loved me? But women are never willing to be frank! It is a part of their nature to deceive. I knew it, and I should not have believed you. Adieu, madame, and this time it is really forever!"

Having signed and sealed this missive, Adhémar sent for a messenger and told him to carry it to the person to whom it was addressed, and to come away at once, without waiting for an answer.

Then, throwing himself into a chair, and resting his head on his hand, he abandoned himself to his thoughts,

murmuring:

"Oh! if I could only forget her!"

XVIII

MONSIEUR SERINGAT'S SECRET

Dodichet, disinherited by his aunt, and with only a hundred francs that he could call his own, should have looked about for some occupation which would afford him a livelihood; but, instead of that, he bought more tobacco and cigars, went into a café and drank a glass of beer, then took a cab and was driven to the so-called hotel on Rue Saint-Jacques, where he had left Monsieur Seringat. He said to himself on the road:

"I must have recourse to that idiot again; it's a great pity, because I owe him a thousand crowns already, and I have no prospect of any legacy hereafter with which to pay him; but still, nobody knows, perhaps the public won't treat me as harshly everywhere as it did at Quimper-Corentin; my voice will come back; I'll take to a diet of yolks of eggs—and mulled eggs. Meanwhile, Seringat may as well lend me another thousand crowns. He's rich; if he wasn't, I wouldn't ask him for a sou, especially as he couldn't give it to me. But he told me himself, in the course of conversation, that he had twelve thousand francs a year. The idiot! he could be so happy with that! And to think that he's in hiding, that he's afraid someone will recognize him—and all because his wife—— Upon my word, it's incredible! I am perfectly sure that he hasn't his like in Paris!"

When he arrived at the old house, Dodichet dismissed the cab; he crossed the courtyard, and on the ground floor found the landlady, who was also concierge, and who supplied her guests with food; she filled a number of positions, in order to increase her profits. At that moment she was preparing snails *à la provençale*: first she took them out of the shell, which she filled with a stuffing strongly seasoned with garlic, then replaced the creature, and let the whole simmer over a slow fire.

"Gad! that smells good!" observed Dodichet; "you're cooking snails, are you, madame?"

"Yes, monsieur; and I venture to flatter myself that they'll be delicious."

"I am not mad over that animal; it seems to me that when he's cooked he becomes exactly like india rubber; but these have a seductive odor."

"They are *à la provençale*. If monsieur would like a portion, they're only six sous each; that ain't dear."

"Faith! no; and one must come to the upper end of Rue Saint-Jacques to get any sort of a dish all cooked at that price. Put one portion aside for me. I'll eat it when I come down from my friend Miflorès. For I suppose he's in, isn't he? and I'll go up."

The landlady-concierge dropped a snail which she was just preparing, looked at Dodichet with a tragic expression, and exclaimed:

"Stop, monsieur! don't go up! it's no use; you wont find Monsieur Miflorès."

"Has he gone out? Well, then I'll wait for him and eat my snails now; he won't be out long, I fancy?"

"Oh! I beg your pardon, monsieur; I can assure you that he'll never come back."

"What do you say? he'll never come back? Has he moved again, then? What does this mean?"

"Why, don't you know what has happened, monsieur?"

"Parbleu! madame, if I did know, I wouldn't ask you."

"Well, then, monsieur, I'll tell you everything, just as it happened. But first let me pick up this snail which slipped out of my hand."

"To be sure; shall you cook it with the others?"

"Fire purifies everything, monsieur.—It was like this: just a fortnight ago, a middle-aged man, very well dressed and with a very jovial air, came into my house, followed by a porter with his luggage. He asked me for a good room, and said he expected to spend ten or twelve days in Paris; that he had come here to enjoy himself; and he told me his name, Jacques Ronflard. Very good; I put him in a room on the first floor, looking on this courtyard; he went out soon, and didn't come in till very late. The next morning, monsieur, your friend Miflorès went out as usual to take a short walk before breakfast. He'd no sooner gone than my new tenant, Monsieur Ronflard, comes downstairs and says:

"'Pardieu! you've got an acquaintance of mine here; I just saw him through the window, and I recognized him right off. I'm very glad to find him in the same hotel; he's a good friend of mine, is Seringat, and he comes from Pontoise.'

"I looks at him, and I says:

"'But you're mistaken, monsieur; I haven't got any Seringat in my house.'

"'Excuse me, madame, but I saw him go out of this house this very minute.'

"'The man you saw go out of this house is named Miflorès, and not Seringat, and he never told me that he came from Pontoise.'

"'Apparently, madame, he's concluded to change his name; but I am perfectly sure that the person who just went out is named Seringat, formerly a druggist at Pontoise. Parbleu! I know him well; I've often bought insect powder of him to kill fleas. Poor Seringat! he's had a hard time. His wife—you see what I mean? The whole town knew about it; somebody even went so far as to write a song about him. Stay! I remember one verse. It goes to the tune of the *Carillon de Dunkerque*.'—And with that, he begins to sing:

"'Ce pauvre Seringat!
Il a fait tant d'éclat,
Que tout Pontoise a su
Qu'il était, ma foi, cornu!'

"Then he goes back to his room, saying:

"'To prove that it's him, you'll see me throw myself into his arms when he comes back. Be kind enough to let me know.'

"So he goes back to his room; and I don't deny that I didn't care much whether the other man was the hero of the song or not. In about a quarter of an hour, Monsieur Miflorès came back. As soon as I saw him, I runs and says to him:

"'Is it true, monsieur, that your name's Seringat, and that you came from Pontoise? There's a man in the house who says he recognized you. He even knows a song about you. He asked me to let him know as soon as you came in.'

"At that, I saw the poor man change color; he rolled his eyes around and clenched his fists, and he says to me:

"'Madame, I forbid you to let that man know. Make up my bill; I am going up to get my baggage and leave the house instantly.'

"It was no use for me to promise not to say anything to the other one; he wouldn't listen to me. He went up to his room, packed his valise, came down again, paid me my money, and went off. But Monsieur Ronflard had seen him through the window. So he comes running down again.

"'What!' he says; 'has he gone? didn't he wait for me? Oh! but I'll catch him!'

"And with that, he ran out to try to overtake his friend. He saw him in front of him, but the other turned and, seeing that he was being followed, began to run as if the devil was after him. Monsieur Ronflard was obstinate; he ran after him, and it seems that he kept calling to him:

"'Stop, don't run like that, Seringat! it's Ronflard; don't you know me?'

"The man from Pontoise ran all the faster. Somebody who saw them scurrying through the streets told me he thought they were running for the firemen. To cut it short, Monsieur Miflorès came to the river; he went down to the shore, saw a boatman pulling down stream, and motioned to him to take him aboard. The man rowed to the bank and laid a plank for him to come aboard. At that moment, Monsieur Ronflard came up and began to sing at the top of his lungs:

"'Ce pauvre Seringat!
Il a fait tant d'éclat,
Que tout Pontoise a su
Qu'il était, ma foi, cornu!'

"Poor Monsieur Miflorès no sooner heard that song than he rushed onto the plank; but he made a misstep and fell into the water. The current dragged him away—it seems that he couldn't swim. And when they succeeded in fishing him up, he was dead!"

"Dead! Can it be that he is dead? Poor Seringat!—for that really was his true name.—Well! there's no doubt that your Monsieur Ronflard did a good stroke of business then!"

"Why, monsieur, he seemed to be terribly distressed; he had the jaundice on account of it, and he only left Paris yesterday.—'I must go and tell Madame Seringat she's a widow,' he says to me, when he went away; 'I feel sure that it won't make her feel so badly as I do.'"

Dodichet did not recover for several minutes from the shock he had received. Then he sat down at a table and said:

"Be kind enough to give me my plate of snails, madame, with some bread and wine; for, after all, if I don't eat them, that won't bring poor Seringat to life. That's why I prefer to eat them."

The landlady hastened to serve Dodichet, and remained with him to talk, that being her greatest enjoyment. Dodichet heaved a faint sigh from time to time, but he did not waste a mouthful.

"Does monsieur find my snails to his taste?"

"They're very good, madame, and perfectly cooked. You almost make me like the dish, and I am forgetting the loss I have suffered.—Poor Seringat!"

"Is monsieur a great loser by his death?"

"Yes, indeed! I have lost—all that I had in prospect."

"Did he owe you money?"

"No, not exactly. But it amounted to the same thing."

"You will fall back on your friend's wife—his widow, I mean—won't you?"

"No; I have no claim on her. There is nothing left for me but to dedicate one last sigh to the deceased, and think of something else.—How much do I owe you, madame?"

"Sixteen sous in all, monsieur, for the snails and wine and bread."

"Well, that's not dear, on my honor! When I want to treat my mistress, I'll bring her here; especially as I see no prospect of a dinner at Brébant's."

Dodichet paid his bill and left the old hotel of which he had formerly held such a low opinion, but which he was now very glad to know, looking upon it as a possible resource in adversity. He bent his steps toward Boulotte's abode. As the wine he had taken with his snails had not gone to his head, he reflected on his position. The two blows which he had received in rapid succession annihilated all his hopes, and made even his present very precarious. However, he would not allow himself to be cast down; his heedless nature kept him from worrying about the future. Such natures are much to be envied, so some people declare. They never borrow trouble, and everything is rose-colored in their eyes!—I am not of that opinion; heedlessness means disorder, and disorder means ruin; and that is the fate of such happy-go-lucky natures.

When Dodichet arrived at the young ballet dancer's, she was not, as usual, making mineral rouge with bricks, but was engaged in drawing a dainty little network of veins on her temples, with indigo. At sight of her lover, she threw aside her brush and ran to embrace him.

"Here you are! How glad I am! Tell me all about your début and your triumph. I am sure you had wreaths thrown

to you, and made plenty of conquests! You were so handsome as Joconde! How many recalls did you have?"

"They recalled me, that's true enough," Dodichet replied, dropping into a chair, "but I didn't choose to go back; because they wanted to play a low trick on me. I had just time to escape, in a policeman's cloak and a fireman's helmet."

"What sort of a tale is this? What new practical joke have you been playing?"

"Well, it was a very poor one; the audience at Quimper-Corentin had the cheek to hiss, to send me to the devil; and I turned round and showed them my other face. At that, there were shouts and yelling and a great hullabaloo; and, as I have just told you, I had hardly time to get away."

"Is it possible? And what's become of your pretty costume?"

"I sold it, on my way back, to get a pair of trousers and a coat."

"So your début—you've got to begin again, eh?"

"Thanks, no! I have no desire to try it again in the same line. My voice won't come back."

"Oh! you smoke too much! I told you so! Luckily, your aunt's dead; a friend of yours told me."

"Yes, my aunt's dead, that's true; but she disinherited me!"

"Oh! my poor boy! what a grind! But, thank heaven! you still have your gold mine—the man who can't refuse you when you ask him for money—the man with the mystery!"

"My dear girl, the man with the mystery has followed my aunt's example; that is, he hasn't disinherited me, but he's dead."

"Oh! mon Dieu! Did someone mention Pontoise to him?"

"Better than that: someone sang him a song that was written about him at Pontoise, in which they poked fun at him about his accident; for I can tell you now what it was that that jackass was so afraid people would find out. Sieur Seringat had a very pretty wife, whom he believed to be a regular Lucretia. The fellow had the bad habit of making sport of deceived husbands, of laughing at their expense, and saying that no such misfortune would ever happen to him. But, lo and behold! one day, at an outdoor fête, our Seringat saw a veiled lady in the distance, just at dusk, slip into an isolated summer house, where, not long after, she was joined by a young officer. Feeling sure that the lady he had seen was the wife of one of the leading men of the town, Seringat got together several young men, confided his discovery to them, and guided them to the pavilion, which was not lighted, but which they entered, carrying torches, on the pretext of illuminating it. Whom did they find there? Whom but Madame Seringat, in criminal conversation with the young officer! Who was sheepish and shamefaced then? Who but Seringat; for all the husbands in Pontoise revenged themselves on him, and that same evening his misadventure was known all over the town. Seringat, in his rage and vexation at becoming one of that class at which he had always laughed, left Pontoise the next day, swearing never to return. He took the name of Miflorès, and anybody who knew him could get anything out of him by threatening to disclose his name and his adventure. In fact, he was drowned not long ago, because a man from Pontoise chased him, calling him by his real name, and singing a couplet in which he was ridiculed about his accident. In his haste to escape, Seringat, who was trying to get aboard a boat, made a misstep, fell into the river, and was drowned.—Now you know, my dear girl, how I made him lend me money. He had so much self-esteem, and was so vexed at wearing a pair of horns, that you had only to threaten to tell about it, to obtain all you wanted."

"Well, he was a Gribouille, on my word! to throw himself into the water for fear someone would know he had taken a fancy to *the yellow*! If all the husbands that happens to should run into the river, the fish would get a good fright!—And what are you going to do now, my poor Dodichet?"

"I am going to make a cigarette."

"That won't keep you alive."

"True; but to-morrow I shall go to see the theatrical agent. I'll tell him that I've changed my line, that I play the legitimate drama now, the leading rôles, Frédérick Lemaître's and Mélingue's and Dumaine's. He'll soon find me an engagement in some large town; for I don't propose to play in holes in the ground any more. I want a chance now to display my talents on a vast stage!"

"You're sure you have talents, are you?"

"Pardieu! everyone has; the only thing is to find them. A famous thinker has said: 'How many people have come into the world and left it without unpacking all their merchandise!'"

"What does that mean?"

"Don't you understand? You grieve me! That means that many people are born with talents and faculties which events, fatality or poverty, do not permit them to develop, to make manifest. Now, do you see, something tells me that I have dramatic genius in my stomach!"

"Dear me! And do you mean to force it out?"

"I mean to find my real vocation. Meanwhile, would you like me to treat you to snails? I know a place where they cook them in a way to make you lick your fingers."

"Thanks, I prefer something else!"

"After all, I still have a little money in my pocket, and I'll take you to Bonvalet's. Come, O Boulotte! On the way, I will purchase a number of dramas, and this evening I will learn the leading rôles by heart."

"I think I see you!" said Boulotte, putting on her jaunty little hat; "this evening you will smoke!"

XIX

THE END OF THE YEAR

After forming the resolution never to see Madame Dermont again, Adhémar, unable to resist successfully his intense longing to meet her, to catch a glimpse of her, even at a distance, suddenly determined to go to England. He gave himself hardly time enough to pack a valise, took plenty of money, and hurried to the railway, which took him to

Boulogne, whence he soon crossed the straits. He thought that he could escape from his memories by leaving his country, and went at once to London. He passed six weeks there, which seemed to him six years, did his utmost to fall in love with an Englishwoman, and, failing miserably, returned at last to Paris.

"I believe it will be easier for me to fall in love with a Parisian," he thought; "at all events, it's all over, so far as Nathalie is concerned; I never think of her now, and she probably spends her time with the young man that she met at the Jardin des Plantes. After this, the sight of her will not make the slightest impression on me, and my heart would beat no faster if I should meet her face to face. I no longer love her!"

However, his first act, on reaching Paris, was to go and gaze at the windows of her whom he declared that he no longer loved. He walked up and down in front of her house for a long time, scrutinized everybody who went in or out, and returned home at last, saying to himself that that was simply the remains of an old habit, and that it would soon wear out.

For a week he continued his daily promenades on Rue de Paradis-Poissonnière. On the eighth day, as he was going in the same direction, he remembered that it was just a year since he and his three friends had met at the café at the corner of the boulevard and Faubourg Poissonnière, and that they had all agreed to meet at the same place at the end of a year. So he changed his direction and went to the café, being curious to see whether his friends had remembered the appointment, and at the same time ready to seize any opportunity to obtain even momentary relief from his one haunting thought.

On entering the café, Adhémar spied Philémon Dubotté taking his ease with a glass of punch and a newspaper.

"Bravo!" cried Philémon, as they shook hands; "here are two men of their word! two men with a memory! I never doubted you, my dear fellow. How are you? You look a little pale. Didn't the air of London agree with you? I understand you have been in England?"

"Yes; the London air isn't very clear. It is composed in great part of smoke and fog; but it's not unhealthy, I believe, as the neighborhood of the sea drives away the noxious vapors."

"Did you make a lot of conquests over there? But of course you did."

"On the contrary, I kept clear of all intrigues."

"You astound me! I mean to go to England for the express purpose of finding out how the English women make love."

"Be careful! they take it more seriously than our French women do."

"Meanwhile, my dear Adhémar, you see before you the happiest man in Paris. I have arrived, my dear fellow, in every sense of the word. I am chief of a bureau—the position which was the one object of my ambition; and in my family relations I have nothing left to desire. My wife used to be perfectly killing with her affection; she would have liked to be hanging on my arm all the time; I have cured her of that nonsense, and now she lets me go out without her whenever I choose; sometimes, indeed, she is the first to suggest it. There's a young man who comes to the house to play cards with her, and who takes her to the theatre and to drive. I had great difficulty in accustoming her to it; but now the thing goes all alone, and she leaves me as much liberty as I can possibly desire. Well, Adhémar, what do you say? haven't I steered my ship pretty well? Why don't you congratulate me?"

Adhémar, who had smiled in rather an equivocal way while the handsome blond boasted of his good fortune, made haste to reply:

"You have reached your goal, my dear Dubotté, and, as you are satisfied, there is nothing for me to do but congratulate you."

"Gad! I should be hard to suit if I wasn't satisfied. And you must be, too, my dear fellow, for your success is uninterrupted, and you earn a lot of money."

"Happiness doesn't always depend on money alone."

"What about the other two fellows? have you any news of them?"

"No; I have been away from Paris, you know."

"Between ourselves, I am afraid poor Dodichet has turned out badly. He amused himself by perpetrating practical jokes that were much too dangerous, sometimes. I found him one day at poor old Mirotaine's, where he had brought a supposititious marrying man. I recognized the latter as a druggist from Pontoise, with a wife of his own. The result was confusion, disillusionment, revolution! That was a very poor joke."

"I heard about that. Yes, Dodichet wastes his whole life inventing such monkey tricks, which raise a laugh for the moment, but never have a beneficial result for the man who perpetrates them."

"I am sorry, for Dodichet is a good fellow at bottom."

"A good fellow! We think we have said everything, when we remark, in speaking of a man: 'He's a good fellow.'—For my part, I consider that that epithet is almost always applied to a person with whom it is advisable to avoid any intimate connection, for the good fellow is constantly doing idiotic things: he squanders his money like a fool, and, when it's all gone, thinks it the most natural thing in the world to borrow and never pay. He owes his tailor, his shoemaker, everybody he deals with. He never has a sou in his pocket; but if you ask him to join a party of any sort, he always accepts, and you have to pay for him. Sometimes he will even invite you to dine at one of the best restaurants in Paris; he will entertain you magnificently, sparing neither truffles nor champagne; but when it comes to paying the bill, which may amount to forty francs, he will find only fifty sous in his purse and ask you to advance the rest. He will make an intimate friend of anybody he happens to meet, and sometimes finds himself playing billiards with sharpers, because he is so trustful that he calls people whose names he doesn't know his friends. He never keeps a promise; he constantly feeds on chimerical illusions, and flatters himself that he is going to win a million of money, when he hasn't a sou in his pocket. That's the kind of person a 'good fellow' is: frankly, I prefer a bad one."

As Adhémar finished, an individual, very shabbily dressed, his body encased in an old, greenish frock-coat, buttoned to the chin, with not a particle of linen in sight, with a shocking round hat, almost brimless, on his head, and patched and muddy old boots on his feet, entered the café with a very pronounced limp, and halted in front of the two friends.

"Well, well!" he cried, "don't you know me? Here I am, faithful to our appointment of last year."

"Dodichet!" cried Dubotté and Adhémar in one breath.

"Yes, messieurs; Dodichet himself: slightly the worse for wear, and exceedingly hard up, as you see; but still ready to laugh when occasion offers!"

"But you are limping, aren't you?"

"Mon Dieu! yes, I am limping, and it's for life too; I shall always limp—it's the result of a fool's trick, an experiment, which I will tell you about directly. But make room for me at your table."

"With pleasure; will you have some grog, or beer?"

"Thanks; if it's all the same to you, I prefer a beefsteak."

"Waiter, a beefsteak for monsieur."

"With an endless supply of potatoes."

The beefsteak was brought; Dodichet consumed it, together with two loaves of bread and three carafes of water; it was evident that the poor fellow needed recruiting. His two old friends respected his appetite, and asked no questions until he had finished.

"Messieurs," said Dodichet, "having been disinherited by my aunt, and that old fool of a Seringat having fallen into the water while running away from one of his friends who sang a song to him based on his conjugal misadventure, I had no choice but to decide upon some definite course of action. I told you a year ago that the stage was my vocation. I still think so; but I must confess that I was not wildly applauded as a tenor—I smoked a little too much on the day of my début; to cut it short, I was not fortunate at Quimper-Corentin. On my return to Paris, the dramatic agent, to whom I made known my desire to play Frédérick Lemaître's parts, told me to go at once to Carpentras, where the leading man had burst a blood vessel while chasing someone who owed him three francs fifty. So I went to Carpentras; I introduced myself to the manager with that self-assurance to which I am subject. He welcomed me joyfully, and said to me: 'We want to give an extra performance to-morrow, for the benefit of wet-nurses with no children to nurse; I mean to give *Trente Ans, ou la Vie d'un Joueur*, and, to end the show, I have a young man from Pithiviers, who's as good at hair-raising leaps as Léotard. Can you play Frédérick's part in *Trente Ans*?'—'I'll play it for you right away, if you want,' said I, with a laugh. 'Don't be alarmed; I have it at my finger tips.'—That wasn't quite true; but, as I had seen the play very often, I thought to myself: 'I know the entrances and exits; that's the main thing; when the lines escape me, I'll try pantomime, or else I'll think up something that will suit the situation.'—The manager was overjoyed; he announced his extra performance, as well as my début, and that of a second Léotard. The critical moment arrived; the theatre was full, and the receipts fabulously large for that place. They began *Trente Ans*, and I didn't know a single line of the rôle of Georges.—Well! I played it like an angel! The townspeople, as they didn't know the play, had no suspicion that I was substituting my own words for the author's; my fellow actors opened their eyes; but when they got confused, I pushed them so hard that they had to speak. In a word, the play came to an end amid tremendous applause; I was recalled, and acclaimed to the skies. The manager embraced me and told me that I was engaged. At that moment, a letter was handed him; it was from his acrobat, who told him that his father had summoned him to Pithiviers to help prepare an unusually large order of pies, and that he was going at once. My manager was in despair. He had promised a performance on the trapèze, and the audience expected it; if he failed to give it, they would have the right to demand their money back, and he wouldn't have given it back for anything under heaven. Seeing the manager's embarrassment, I asked him to show me what the acrobat was supposed to do. He was to run at full speed, jump through a hoop covered with paper, and come out on the other side high enough in the air to seize a rope which hung down a little beyond the hoop. 'Is that all?' I asked, with a scornful laugh; 'why, that's a mere *pons asinorum*! I do much more than that when I toy with gymnastics. Be calm; give me the tights, and I'll show you some jumping that will be quite equal to that of your Pithiviers tumbler!'—The manager leaped on my neck, informed me that he doubled my salary,—which did not compromise him much, as he had not as yet offered me anything,—then went and told the orchestra to play the Tartar March while I was dressing; after that, he would have an announcement to make to the audience. He went to the front of the stage, bowed, and announced that his acrobat had accidentally sprained a ligament, and that the artist who had just played the part of Georges would take his place. Everybody praised me to the skies. 'What a man!' they said; 'he takes Frédérick's rôles and Léotard's at the same time!'—Meanwhile, I was doing my utmost to get into the acrobat's flesh-colored tights. I had great difficulty, for they were terribly scant for my rotund form; however, I got into them at last. The three blows were struck; the orchestra played the triumphal march from *La Muette* for me; I appeared, and was greeted with uproarious applause. To show my elasticity, I executed three handsprings before the audience; at the third, I tore my tights horribly, and showed them something besides my elasticity. However, that did not deter me; and the audience, thinking that I had another costume under my tights, and that I was making a lightning change in full view, applauded all the louder. That encouraged me, excited me! I ran onto the springboard, and jumped through the paper hoop; but, meaning to seize the rope as I came down, I jumped too high, and seized nothing but one of the wings, which came tumbling to the stage with me, and the fall dislocated my knee; that put an end to the performance.

"I must do the manager justice; I had hurt myself in order to oblige him, and he had my injury attended to; the surgeon went about it so skilfully that I shall limp all my life. Thus the theatrical career was closed to me, for you can't play Buridan or Kean with a limp. By way of compensation, the manager offered me the post of prompter. I accepted. 'Prompting isn't acting,' I thought. 'But as I can't act any more, I may as well prompt! it's a theatrical post; and although the audience doesn't see you, still you're a useful member of the cast, for you sometimes play all the parts.'—So I became prompter to the troupe; I was not discontented, for, after my accident, they gave a performance for my benefit, which was quite a success. I had passed more than a month in that position, when—I may as well confess it—my fatal passion for practical jokes attacked me with more violence than ever. We had a young fellow for the lovers' parts, who claimed that he had never made a mistake in his lines. One evening, when I was in rather a merry mood, our lover was on the stage with a princess with whom the plot required him to run away; and when she said to him, weeping bitterly: 'What are you going to do with me?' he looked at me and motioned to me to help him; so I whispered: 'Oh! how you tire me!'—and the poor devil made that reply to the princess. You can imagine the effect that produced; the audience laughed and yelled, and shouted *encore!* and the actress who took the princess's part boxed her lover's ears, with a: 'Let that teach you not to say such things to me on the stage.'

"The *jeune premier* succeeded, not without difficulty, in justifying himself; it was discovered that I was the only culprit, and the result was my dismissal. I returned to Paris, where I am reduced to the necessity of prompting in what used to be the suburbs.—That's my story, and this is what I have come to!"

"Pardieu! my poor Dodichet," said Dubotté, "it would seem as if this ought to have cured you, at last, of your mania for practical jokes."

"What would you have, noble Phœbus? that seems to have been my real vocation. But here comes our fourth man. Bless my soul! he must have arrived; for he has a most radiant expression, and there's a great change in his dress as well as in his face."

In truth, Lucien Grischard, who had just entered the café, was no longer the poverty-stricken youth, in a threadbare coat, with traces of grief and privation on his pinched features. To-day, his eyes were bright, and the expression of his face announced the contentment of his mind; his costume, while not dandified, denoted that its owner was in comfortable circumstances; lastly, his face wore a cordial smile, as he shook hands with the three persons whom he joined, and who had already noted with pleasure the happy change that had taken place in him.

"Good-morning, messieurs, good-morning!" he said, with a joyous intonation in his voice. "I am the last to come, but you will forgive me when you know what has detained me."

"How are you, Lucien? This much we see already, with the greatest pleasure—that your position has changed for the better; for you seem perfectly content; we can read that in your face."

"And why should I not be, messieurs! I am going to marry the woman I love. In a week, Juliette will be my wife. Monsieur Mirotaine has consented at last to call me his son-in-law. My dearest wish is fulfilled."

"How did you succeed in gaining your end? Tell us about it."

"By hard work and perseverance; my pins were a success, and I was making money; I invented something else, so that I made still more, and I succeeded in extending my business. But how was I to let Monsieur Mirotaine know that, when he had forbidden me to go to his house? That was the difficulty; it was absolutely necessary that I should see Juliette, in order to tell her all that I was doing; it was necessary to have a definite understanding with her, and to give her precise details concerning my position and prospects, so that she could say to her father: 'You can go to this place and that place, and there you will learn where Lucien stands.'—Luckily, Juliette has a friend, who came to our assistance. This friend obtained permission quite often to take Juliette out with her, sometimes to bathe, sometimes to go shopping; but, as a matter of fact, the two ladies would meet me at the Jardin des Plantes; there I could arrange with Juliette what she was to say to her father about my position."

"At the Jardin des Plantes!" interposed Adhémar; "you say those ladies used to meet you there?"

"To be sure. And one day, when I had some very good news to tell Juliette,—I wanted to tell her that I had succeeded in a new business undertaking,—as she was not very well, her friend, Madame Dermont, was kind enough to come alone to our usual place of meeting. I told her that I had succeeded, and she lost no time in going to tell Juliette the good news; and it was then that Monsieur Mirotaine, convinced at last that we were not imposing on him and that I really was able to earn money, opened his house to me again, and consented to give me his daughter's hand."

Dubotté and Dodichet congratulated Lucien. But Adhémar did not say a word to him; for what he had just heard had produced such a revolution in his whole being, that he was like one turned to stone, and had not the strength to speak.

"Well!" said Dubotté, rising and taking his hat; "it is a satisfaction to me to know that we have all arrived at the goal we had in view. Poor Dodichet alone has steadily fallen lower and lower. Though, after all, it's his own fault! He shouldn't have prompted a lover to say: 'Oh! how you tire me!'—But, no matter; you know my address, Dodichet, don't you? And when you are—cleaned out, come and dine with me; I always have a cover laid for an old friend who is in hard luck. Excuse me for leaving you, messieurs; but I must go and make sure that Callé can take my wife to the theatre to-night."

Dubotté having departed, Dodichet prepared to follow his example.

"No, indeed I wont go and dine with him!" he said. "If I should ever be too hard up, I wouldn't apply to him. There are some people whose benefactions are too heavy a load to carry. Au revoir, messieurs! I have eleven acts to prompt to-night, and I must go to my post—or my hole—it's the same thing. I sometimes am tempted to take a syringe with me and prompt with that. That would be a good joke. I think I'll wait till they play *Porceaugnac*."

"I don't ask you to dinner, Dodichet," said Lucien, "but I shall never forget that you tried to help me. If you ever find yourself without employment, come to see me; I shall always be able to find you something at which you can earn your living."

"Thanks, my boy; a little tobacco with it, and it will be all right."

"My purse is at your service, Dodichet," said Adhémar.

"I know it; I know you, my friend! But I am going to try to take care of myself. Besides, I am very fond of snails now, and they're cheap. I have a mind to raise them in my hole; that will give me something to do in the entr'actes. Au revoir, my children!"

When he and Adhémar were left alone, Lucien said:

"You haven't congratulated me on my good fortune, on my approaching marriage. You have a very unhappy look; and yet I know you too well not to be sure that you are glad for my happiness."

"Yes, Lucien; yes, I am, indeed! But if you knew what it has cost me! So it was you whom Madame Dermont went to the Jardin des Plantes to meet?"

"To be sure. Juliette wasn't able to come that day."

"Did Nathalie come in a cab?"

"Yes, she left the cab at the gate; I took her back to it and put her in, after thanking her for her kindness in coming."

"Oh! my friend, if you had only told me this sooner! I should not have suspected a woman whom I adored."

"I couldn't tell you any sooner, as you had gone to England. I couldn't go there after you! So you are at odds with Madame Dermont again, are you?"

"Yes. My infernal jealousy! I wrote her a letter—which was utterly without sense! I see it now."

"Have courage! she will forgive you."

"Oh, no! it's all over; she can't forgive me again; indeed, I feel that I don't deserve to be forgiven."

"Adieu, my dear Adhémar! excuse me for leaving you so soon. But Juliette is waiting for me, and we have so many preparations to make for our marriage."

"Go, my friend, go! Because I am unhappy, I have no wish to delay the happiness of other people."

XX

THE LITTLE STREAMS

Adhémar returned home alone. What he had learned, while it proved to him that he had wrongfully suspected Madame Dermont's loyalty, caused him more pleasure than pain, none the less; he was grieved, he was in despair, because he had broken his repeated promises and had had no confidence in Nathalie's love; but he was happy, very happy, to know that she had not deceived him, and to be able to say to himself: "She did love me!" So that, even in his grief, there was a something that made his heart beat joyously, and that allayed in some degree the bitterness of his regrets.

On reaching home, Adhémar attempted to work. But it is very difficult to write novels or plays when the heart is full, when a single thought forces itself constantly on the mind. As he reflected on what his three friends and himself had done during the past year, he thought:

"Proverbs are always right: little streams make great rivers; for the little streams act with equal effect for our good or our ruin. Philémon Dubotté had a wife who adored him, who would have liked to be always on his arm; instead of congratulating himself because he had found a phœnix, he was always on the lookout for opportunities to go about without his wife; he ridiculed her affection; he left her evening after evening alone with a young man, who was infinitely more agreeable to her than her husband was. All these ill-advised acts were the little streams which were certain to bring about the result which husbands ought, by every means, to try to avoid.

"Lucien Grischard was without means; but he had the most useful, the most reliable of all the elements of fortune: courage, perseverance, love of work. By dint of patience and privation, he succeeded in starting a small business, in making himself known, and in winning esteem by his probity; little by little, he has extended his connections and increased his business, and, insignificant as it was at first, he has made it lucrative. All these little streams have carried him on to his goal—to happiness. He has well earned it!

"Dodichet had everything that might make a man happy: sufficient means, health, and high spirits. But an unfortunate mania, an incessant inclination to make sport of others, to play practical jokes on his friends and acquaintances, led him into a path where he began by spending all that he possessed, and ended by living at the expense of other people. He was so incapable of behaving decently in any sort of position that he actually found a way to lose his place as prompter at a provincial theatre; and now he is reduced to poverty, as the result of all these follies piled one upon another, which some day will carry him off to the great river. For these *blagueurs* who are so agreeable in society often end in that way.

"As for myself—ah, me! if I am unhappy now, I have only myself to blame for it. After many unimportant liaisons, I met such a woman as I had dreamed of, and I had the good fortune to be loved by her; at last I knew that true, genuine love, which is so sweet to the heart; that love which leaves so far behind all those mad passions of a moment in which our youth is drowned. I was happy, ah! yes, very happy! But my infernal jealousy gave me no rest. Having been deceived a hundred times by women who did not know the meaning of love, I could not persuade myself that a woman was really faithful to me. My suspicions were unjust; that was proved to me several times, and yet it did not prevent me from conceiving new ones. These insults, so often repeated, have lost me Nathalie's heart. She has forgiven me many times, but I cannot hope that she will forgive me again, after that letter, in which, in my frenzy, I did not hesitate to tell her that her treachery was shameful, when her only purpose was to ensure Juliette's and Lucien's happiness! And I went off, without seeing her, without even asking her to explain her conduct! Oh! ghastly effects of jealousy! I had promised so solemnly to mend my ways; and, instead of that, I kept repeating my offence! Oh! I did not deserve to be loved sincerely!"

And Adhémar, whose arm was resting on his desk, laid his burning head on his hand; and would perhaps have remained a long while in that position, had he not felt the touch of a little hand upon his shoulder, while a well-known voice said to him:

"And yet, she loves you still, monsieur!"

The words echoed in the depths of the poor fellow's heart. He raised his head: Nathalie was beside him, smiling at him and looking into his face as lovingly as ever.

He uttered a cry, and stammered:

"Is it possible? Can it be that you forgive me again?"

"Yes, my friend, I must. Look—at that scar—the burn on your wrist—— You see that I must forgive you always!"

"Great God! I am afraid that my happiness is a dream."

"No, monsieur. Lucien came just now and told me how sad and unhappy you were. I thought that you were punished enough, so I came. Did I do wrong?"

"Oh! how good you are! Really I do not deserve to be loved like this!"

"Are you going to begin again?"

"Oh! this time, Nathalie, I swear——"

"Don't swear! Believe me, oaths amount to nothing. It ought not to be necessary to promise, in order to do what is right."

And now, readers, do you wish to know what has become of the small number of persons who have played a part in this simple study of contemporary manners?

First, Dubotté has continued to be perfectly content; his wife is no longer constantly clinging to his arm, but lets him go out alone as much as he pleases. Sometimes, indeed, she refuses to go with him; she has taken a great fancy

to the game of bézique, and young Callé is always ready to come and play with her.

Lucien Grischard, on becoming Juliette's husband, did not cease to love his wife and hard work; consequently, his business is flourishing, and his married life is one long honeymoon.

Dodichet, having conceived the droll idea of smoking in his prompter's hole, set the stage on fire and was found roasted, as a result of his last practical joke.

Monsieur Mirotaine, being unable at last to find anybody who cared to come to his evening parties in winter, where hot cocoa was served to the company, concluded to provide no other refreshment than that caused by opening the windows; but when he is invited to breakfast or dine at a restaurant, he never fails to empty the salt cellars and pepper boxes into little paper bags which he carries in his pocket.

Monsieur Brid'oison still goes into ecstasies over his son's skill and agility in gymnastics. Little Artaban never enters a salon without making a handspring, and his papa is confident that that fashion will soon be adopted by the fair sex.

Madame Putiphar, the dealer in second-hand clothes, still arranges marriages, in the interest, not of the young ladies concerned, but of the second-hand cashmere shawls which she slips among the wedding gifts.

Mademoiselle Boulotte is still trying to make mineral rouge with—no matter what!

We all have our inclinations, our *little streams*, which bear us on, some toward good, some toward evil. We must try to avoid the latter, and follow those whose water is pure and whose banks are bright with flowers: they are the ones that lead to good.

FOOTNOTES:

[A] *Ficelle*, literally, "packthread": vulgarly, a "trick," or a "trickster."

[B] *Pochetées*—that is, mellowed in the pocket.

[C] *Mistigri*, *misti*, or *misty*: in the game of bouillotte, the knave of clubs.

[D] *Cateau*, an abbreviation of Catherine, used among the common people; vulgarly, a girl of slovenly habits and loose life.

[E] There is, or was, a game called *brelan*; but the term was sometimes applied, in bouillotte, to a hand consisting of two aces and a king, when the other king of the same color was turned.

[F] Substantially a repetition, in thieves' slang, of the clause beginning: "when the secretary——"

[G] As there were but twelve arrondissements in Paris, this expression was used to denote an illicit connection.

[H] *Atelier*—usually, an artist's studio; also, workroom.

[I] A particular kind of roll.

[J] The word *marron*, in the original, has a significance here that cannot be well rendered in English. It means, variously: an interloper, a runaway, an unlicensed broker.

[K] *Cerf*, stag (in argot, cuckold); *cerf-volant*, kite (in argot, thief).

[L] A female supernumerary in a ballet.

[M] Street walkers.

[N] Much obliged.

[O] Literally, "lioness."

[P] *Miroton* is a dish in which onions are freely used.

[Q] The same French word—*broche*—means "brooch" and "spit."

[R]

Long have I travelled the wide world o'er,
And you have seen me, and you have seen me.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK SANS-CRAVATE; OR, THE MESSENGERS; LITTLE STREAMS ***

Updated editions will replace the previous one—the old editions will be renamed.

Creating the works from print editions not protected by U.S. copyright law means that no one owns a United States copyright in these works, so the Foundation (and you!) can copy and distribute it in the United States without permission and without paying copyright royalties. Special rules, set forth in the General Terms of Use part of this license, apply to copying and distributing Project Gutenberg™ electronic works to protect the PROJECT GUTENBERG™ concept and trademark. Project Gutenberg is a registered trademark, and may not be used if you charge for an eBook, except by following the terms of the trademark license, including paying royalties for use of the Project Gutenberg trademark. If you do not charge anything for copies of this eBook, complying with the trademark license is very easy. You may use this eBook for nearly any purpose such as creation of derivative works, reports, performances and research. Project Gutenberg eBooks may be modified and printed and given away—you may do practically ANYTHING in the United States with eBooks not protected

by U.S. copyright law. Redistribution is subject to the trademark license, especially commercial redistribution.

START: FULL LICENSE

THE FULL PROJECT GUTENBERG LICENSE

PLEASE READ THIS BEFORE YOU DISTRIBUTE OR USE THIS WORK

To protect the Project Gutenberg™ mission of promoting the free distribution of electronic works, by using or distributing this work (or any other work associated in any way with the phrase “Project Gutenberg”), you agree to comply with all the terms of the Full Project Gutenberg™ License available with this file or online at www.gutenberg.org/license.

Section 1. General Terms of Use and Redistributing Project Gutenberg™ electronic works

1.A. By reading or using any part of this Project Gutenberg™ electronic work, you indicate that you have read, understand, agree to and accept all the terms of this license and intellectual property (trademark/copyright) agreement. If you do not agree to abide by all the terms of this agreement, you must cease using and return or destroy all copies of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works in your possession. If you paid a fee for obtaining a copy of or access to a Project Gutenberg™ electronic work and you do not agree to be bound by the terms of this agreement, you may obtain a refund from the person or entity to whom you paid the fee as set forth in paragraph 1.E.8.

1.B. “Project Gutenberg” is a registered trademark. It may only be used on or associated in any way with an electronic work by people who agree to be bound by the terms of this agreement. There are a few things that you can do with most Project Gutenberg™ electronic works even without complying with the full terms of this agreement. See paragraph 1.C below. There are a lot of things you can do with Project Gutenberg™ electronic works if you follow the terms of this agreement and help preserve free future access to Project Gutenberg™ electronic works. See paragraph 1.E below.

1.C. The Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation (“the Foundation” or PGLAF), owns a compilation copyright in the collection of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works. Nearly all the individual works in the collection are in the public domain in the United States. If an individual work is unprotected by copyright law in the United States and you are located in the United States, we do not claim a right to prevent you from copying, distributing, performing, displaying or creating derivative works based on the work as long as all references to Project Gutenberg are removed. Of course, we hope that you will support the Project Gutenberg™ mission of promoting free access to electronic works by freely sharing Project Gutenberg™ works in compliance with the terms of this agreement for keeping the Project Gutenberg™ name associated with the work. You can easily comply with the terms of this agreement by keeping this work in the same format with its attached full Project Gutenberg™ License when you share it without charge with others.

1.D. The copyright laws of the place where you are located also govern what you can do with this work. Copyright laws in most countries are in a constant state of change. If you are outside the United States, check the laws of your country in addition to the terms of this agreement before downloading, copying, displaying, performing, distributing or creating derivative works based on this work or any other Project Gutenberg™ work. The Foundation makes no representations concerning the copyright status of any work in any country other than the United States.

1.E. Unless you have removed all references to Project Gutenberg:

1.E.1. The following sentence, with active links to, or other immediate access to, the full Project Gutenberg™ License must appear prominently whenever any copy of a Project Gutenberg™ work (any work on which the phrase “Project Gutenberg” appears, or with which the phrase “Project Gutenberg” is associated) is accessed, displayed, performed, viewed, copied or distributed:

> This eBook is for the use of anyone anywhere in the United States and most other parts of the world at no cost and with almost no restrictions whatsoever. You may copy it, give it away or re-use it under the terms of the Project Gutenberg License included with this eBook or online at www.gutenberg.org. If you are not located in the United States, you will have to check the laws of the country where you are located before using this eBook.

1.E.2. If an individual Project Gutenberg™ electronic work is derived from texts not protected by U.S. copyright law (does not contain a notice indicating that it is posted with permission of the copyright holder), the work can be copied and distributed to anyone in the United States without paying any fees or charges. If you are redistributing or providing access to a work with the phrase “Project Gutenberg” associated with or appearing on the work, you must comply either with the requirements of paragraphs 1.E.1 through 1.E.7 or obtain permission for the use of the work and the Project Gutenberg™ trademark as set forth in paragraphs 1.E.8 or 1.E.9.

1.E.3. If an individual Project Gutenberg™ electronic work is posted with the permission of the copyright holder, your use and distribution must comply with both paragraphs 1.E.1 through 1.E.7 and any additional terms imposed by the copyright holder. Additional terms will be linked to the Project Gutenberg™ License for all works posted with the permission of the copyright holder found at the beginning of this work.

1.E.4. Do not unlink or detach or remove the full Project Gutenberg™ License terms from this work, or any files containing a part of this work or any other work associated with Project Gutenberg™.

1.E.5. Do not copy, display, perform, distribute or redistribute this electronic work, or any part of this electronic

work, without prominently displaying the sentence set forth in paragraph 1.E.1 with active links or immediate access to the full terms of the Project Gutenberg™ License.

1.E.6. You may convert to and distribute this work in any binary, compressed, marked up, nonproprietary or proprietary form, including any word processing or hypertext form. However, if you provide access to or distribute copies of a Project Gutenberg™ work in a format other than "Plain Vanilla ASCII" or other format used in the official version posted on the official Project Gutenberg™ website (www.gutenberg.org), you must, at no additional cost, fee or expense to the user, provide a copy, a means of exporting a copy, or a means of obtaining a copy upon request, of the work in its original "Plain Vanilla ASCII" or other form. Any alternate format must include the full Project Gutenberg™ License as specified in paragraph 1.E.1.

1.E.7. Do not charge a fee for access to, viewing, displaying, performing, copying or distributing any Project Gutenberg™ works unless you comply with paragraph 1.E.8 or 1.E.9.

1.E.8. You may charge a reasonable fee for copies of or providing access to or distributing Project Gutenberg™ electronic works provided that:

- You pay a royalty fee of 20% of the gross profits you derive from the use of Project Gutenberg™ works calculated using the method you already use to calculate your applicable taxes. The fee is owed to the owner of the Project Gutenberg™ trademark, but he has agreed to donate royalties under this paragraph to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation. Royalty payments must be paid within 60 days following each date on which you prepare (or are legally required to prepare) your periodic tax returns. Royalty payments should be clearly marked as such and sent to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation at the address specified in Section 4, "Information about donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation."

- You provide a full refund of any money paid by a user who notifies you in writing (or by e-mail) within 30 days of receipt that s/he does not agree to the terms of the full Project Gutenberg™ License. You must require such a user to return or destroy all copies of the works possessed in a physical medium and discontinue all use of and all access to other copies of Project Gutenberg™ works.

- You provide, in accordance with paragraph 1.F.3, a full refund of any money paid for a work or a replacement copy, if a defect in the electronic work is discovered and reported to you within 90 days of receipt of the work.

- You comply with all other terms of this agreement for free distribution of Project Gutenberg™ works.

1.E.9. If you wish to charge a fee or distribute a Project Gutenberg™ electronic work or group of works on different terms than are set forth in this agreement, you must obtain permission in writing from the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, the manager of the Project Gutenberg™ trademark. Contact the Foundation as set forth in Section 3 below.

1.F.

1.F.1. Project Gutenberg volunteers and employees expend considerable effort to identify, do copyright research on, transcribe and proofread works not protected by U.S. copyright law in creating the Project Gutenberg™ collection. Despite these efforts, Project Gutenberg™ electronic works, and the medium on which they may be stored, may contain "Defects," such as, but not limited to, incomplete, inaccurate or corrupt data, transcription errors, a copyright or other intellectual property infringement, a defective or damaged disk or other medium, a computer virus, or computer codes that damage or cannot be read by your equipment.

1.F.2. LIMITED WARRANTY, DISCLAIMER OF DAMAGES - Except for the "Right of Replacement or Refund" described in paragraph 1.F.3, the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, the owner of the Project Gutenberg™ trademark, and any other party distributing a Project Gutenberg™ electronic work under this agreement, disclaim all liability to you for damages, costs and expenses, including legal fees. YOU AGREE THAT YOU HAVE NO REMEDIES FOR NEGLIGENCE, STRICT LIABILITY, BREACH OF WARRANTY OR BREACH OF CONTRACT EXCEPT THOSE PROVIDED IN PARAGRAPH 1.F.3. YOU AGREE THAT THE FOUNDATION, THE TRADEMARK OWNER, AND ANY DISTRIBUTOR UNDER THIS AGREEMENT WILL NOT BE LIABLE TO YOU FOR ACTUAL, DIRECT, INDIRECT, CONSEQUENTIAL, PUNITIVE OR INCIDENTAL DAMAGES EVEN IF YOU GIVE NOTICE OF THE POSSIBILITY OF SUCH DAMAGE.

1.F.3. LIMITED RIGHT OF REPLACEMENT OR REFUND - If you discover a defect in this electronic work within 90 days of receiving it, you can receive a refund of the money (if any) you paid for it by sending a written explanation to the person you received the work from. If you received the work on a physical medium, you must return the medium with your written explanation. The person or entity that provided you with the defective work may elect to provide a replacement copy in lieu of a refund. If you received the work electronically, the person or entity providing it to you may choose to give you a second opportunity to receive the work electronically in lieu of a refund. If the second copy is also defective, you may demand a refund in writing without further opportunities to fix the problem.

1.F.4. Except for the limited right of replacement or refund set forth in paragraph 1.F.3, this work is provided to you 'AS-IS', WITH NO OTHER WARRANTIES OF ANY KIND, EXPRESS OR IMPLIED, INCLUDING BUT NOT LIMITED TO WARRANTIES OF MERCHANTABILITY OR FITNESS FOR ANY PURPOSE.

1.F.5. Some states do not allow disclaimers of certain implied warranties or the exclusion or limitation of certain types of damages. If any disclaimer or limitation set forth in this agreement violates the law of the state applicable to this agreement, the agreement shall be interpreted to make the maximum disclaimer or limitation permitted by the applicable state law. The invalidity or unenforceability of any provision of this agreement shall not void the remaining provisions.

1.F.6. INDEMNITY - You agree to indemnify and hold the Foundation, the trademark owner, any agent or employee of the Foundation, anyone providing copies of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works in accordance with this agreement, and any volunteers associated with the production, promotion and distribution of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works, harmless from all liability, costs and expenses, including legal fees, that arise directly or indirectly from any of the following which you do or cause to occur: (a) distribution of this or any Project Gutenberg™ work, (b) alteration, modification, or additions or deletions to any Project Gutenberg™ work, and (c) any Defect you cause.

Section 2. Information about the Mission of Project Gutenberg™

Project Gutenberg™ is synonymous with the free distribution of electronic works in formats readable by the widest variety of computers including obsolete, old, middle-aged and new computers. It exists because of the efforts of hundreds of volunteers and donations from people in all walks of life.

Volunteers and financial support to provide volunteers with the assistance they need are critical to reaching Project Gutenberg™'s goals and ensuring that the Project Gutenberg™ collection will remain freely available for generations to come. In 2001, the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation was created to provide a secure and permanent future for Project Gutenberg™ and future generations. To learn more about the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation and how your efforts and donations can help, see Sections 3 and 4 and the Foundation information page at www.gutenberg.org.

Section 3. Information about the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation

The Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation is a non-profit 501(c)(3) educational corporation organized under the laws of the state of Mississippi and granted tax exempt status by the Internal Revenue Service. The Foundation's EIN or federal tax identification number is 64-6221541. Contributions to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation are tax deductible to the full extent permitted by U.S. federal laws and your state's laws.

The Foundation's business office is located at 809 North 1500 West, Salt Lake City, UT 84116, (801) 596-1887. Email contact links and up to date contact information can be found at the Foundation's website and official page at www.gutenberg.org/contact

Section 4. Information about Donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation

Project Gutenberg™ depends upon and cannot survive without widespread public support and donations to carry out its mission of increasing the number of public domain and licensed works that can be freely distributed in machine-readable form accessible by the widest array of equipment including outdated equipment. Many small donations ($1 to $5,000) are particularly important to maintaining tax exempt status with the IRS.

The Foundation is committed to complying with the laws regulating charities and charitable donations in all 50 states of the United States. Compliance requirements are not uniform and it takes a considerable effort, much paperwork and many fees to meet and keep up with these requirements. We do not solicit donations in locations where we have not received written confirmation of compliance. To SEND DONATIONS or determine the status of compliance for any particular state visit www.gutenberg.org/donate.

While we cannot and do not solicit contributions from states where we have not met the solicitation requirements, we know of no prohibition against accepting unsolicited donations from donors in such states who approach us with offers to donate.

International donations are gratefully accepted, but we cannot make any statements concerning tax treatment of donations received from outside the United States. U.S. laws alone swamp our small staff.

Please check the Project Gutenberg web pages for current donation methods and addresses. Donations are accepted in a number of other ways including checks, online payments and credit card donations. To donate, please visit: www.gutenberg.org/donate

Section 5. General Information About Project Gutenberg™ electronic works

Professor Michael S. Hart was the originator of the Project Gutenberg™ concept of a library of electronic works that could be freely shared with anyone. For forty years, he produced and distributed Project Gutenberg™ eBooks with only a loose network of volunteer support.

Project Gutenberg™ eBooks are often created from several printed editions, all of which are confirmed as not protected by copyright in the U.S. unless a copyright notice is included. Thus, we do not necessarily keep eBooks in compliance with any particular paper edition.

Most people start at our website which has the main PG search facility: www.gutenberg.org.

This website includes information about Project Gutenberg™, including how to make donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, how to help produce our new eBooks, and how to subscribe to our email newsletter to hear about new eBooks.