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DUPONT'S DISCOMFITURE

As she spoke, Georgette found a way to let the skirt fall at her feet. She jumped over it, ran to where her shawl and bonnet were hanging, and left the room before Dupont, who still held the striped skirt in his hand, had recovered from his astonishment.

NOVELS

BY

Paul de Kock

VOLUME VI

FRÉDÉRIQUE

VOL. II

THE GIRL WITH THREE PETTICOATS

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FRÉDÉRIQUE

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XXXIII

ROSETTE THE BRUNETTE

I was conscious of a secret feeling of satisfaction, which I attributed to my reconciliation with Frédérique. I was pleased to have her for a friend; there was something unique, something that appealed strongly to me, in that friendship between a man of thirty and a woman of twenty-seven; and I promised myself that I would not again so conduct myself as to break off the connection.

But I had not forgotten Saint-Bergame's words, as he passed our carriage: "So it's that fellow now! each in his turn!"—It was evident that he believed me to be Madame Dauberny's lover. I was not surprised that he should have that idea. People will never believe in the possibility of an innocent intimacy between a man and woman of our age. But Frédérique had been deeply wounded by Saint-Bergame's remark; indeed, by what right did the fellow presume to proclaim that from the housetops? Was it spite? was it jealousy? Whatever his motive, the man was an impertinent knave; and if I had not feared to compromise Madame Dauberny even more, I would have gone to him and demanded an explanation of his words. But, perhaps an opportunity would present itself; if so, I would not let it slip.

Several days had passed since my drive in the Bois, when, as I was strolling along the boulevards one morning, I halted, according to my custom, in front of one of those pillars upon which posters are displayed by permission. Being very fond of the theatre, I have always enjoyed reading the various theatrical announcements. I did not carry it so far as to read the printer's name; but, had I done so—*that is a very harmless diversion!*

But observe how harmless diversions may give birth to diversions that are not harmless. A young woman stopped close beside me, also to read the announcements; and I was not so absorbed by the titles of dramas and vaudevilles that the sight of a pretty face did not distract my thoughts from them.

I think that I have told you that certain faces, certain figures, possess an indefinable charm and fascination for me at first sight. The young girl who stood beside me—for she certainly was a young girl—wore a simple, modest costume, denoting a shopgirl on an errand: dark-colored dress, shawl,—no, I am mistaken, it was a little alpaca cloak,—and a small gray bonnet, without any ornament, placed on her head with no pretence of coquetry; it had evidently been put on in a hurry.

But, beneath that unassuming headgear, I saw a refined, attractive, piquant face. She was a brunette; her complexion was rather dark, but her fresh, brilliant coloring gave her a look of the *Midi*. Her brown hair was brushed smoothly over her temples; her eyes were black, or blue—or, more accurately, blue bordering on black. They were large, and said many things. The mouth was very pretty, and well supplied with teeth. I had thus far only caught a glimpse of the latter, but that was enough. The nose was straight and well shaped, slightly turned up at the end, which always gives a saucy look to the face. Add to all this a lovely figure, neither too tall nor too short; a pretty hand—of that I was sure, for she wore no gloves; and, lastly, a modest and graceful carriage; and you will not be surprised that I forgot the names of the plays and performers printed on the posters before me, and devoted my whole attention to that young woman.

For her part, she had glanced several times at me, as if unintentionally. She scrutinized the posters for a long while; and as I was in no hurry, I too remained in front of the pillar. I had assured myself at least twelve times that *La Grâce de Dieu* was to be given at the Gaîté, and it seemed to me that my neighbor also kept reading the same thing over and over again.

However, she walked away at last along the boulevard. We were then in front of the Gymnase. There was nothing to detain me there, for I was thoroughly posted concerning the programme at the Gaîté. Furthermore, that grisette took my eye. I believed that I could safely classify her as a grisette, with liberty to do her justice later, if I had insulted her. Why should I not try to make her acquaintance? For some time, my behavior had been virtuous to a degree which accorded neither with my tastes nor with my habits. Being obliged to eschew sentiment with my former acquaintances, I was conscious of a void in my heart which I should be very glad to fill.

I walked after the young woman. One is sometimes sadly at a loss to begin a conversation in the street; but for some reason or other, I did not feel the slightest embarrassment with that girl. She walked so slowly that I easily overtook her. She did not precisely look at me; but I was fully persuaded that she saw me. Should I begin with the usual compliments: "You are adorable! With such pretty eyes, you cannot be cruel!" or other remarks of the same sort? No, they were too stupid and worn too threadbare; so I addressed her as if we were already acquainted, and said:

"Do you like the theatre, mademoiselle?"

"Yes, monsieur, very much!"

She answered without the slightest affectation, and with no indication that she was offended by my question. I took that as a good omen, and continued:

"Would you like to go to-night?"

"To-night? Oh, dear, no! But I was looking for the Palais-Royal advertisement; I wanted to know what they were playing there, and I can't ever find it."

"I am sorry I didn't know that sooner, for I would have shown it to you."

"After all, it don't make any difference."

"But if you like the theatre, won't you allow me to give you some tickets?"

"Tickets! Do you have theatre tickets? for what theatre?"

"It doesn't make any difference: I have some for them all. Perhaps you may think that I am lying, that I say this to trap you, when my only purpose is to make your acquaintance. But I assure you, mademoiselle, that I shall be only too happy to be useful to you. Allow me to send you some tickets; that doesn't bind you to anything."

The girl stopped. We were then near Porte Saint-Denis. She hesitated a moment, then replied:

"Well! send me some tickets; I'll accept them; but don't send them to my house; that'll never do, because I live with my aunts. I have a lot of aunts, and I am not free."

She smiled so comically as she said this, that I saw a double row of lovely teeth. I ventured to take her hand; that was going ahead rather fast, but, for some unknown reason, although I had not been talking with her five minutes, I felt as if I knew her well. She let me hold and press her hand, which was plump and soft; it did not seem to vex her in the least.

"Where shall I send the tickets?"

"To my employer's."

"What is your trade?"

"I mend shawls and fringes. I'm a very good hand at it, I promise you!"

"I don't doubt it, mademoiselle."

"Just now I'm doing an errand for my employer; she always sends me on errands, I don't know why; she says that the dealers aren't so strict with me! It's a bore sometimes to go out so often; but sometimes it's good fun, too."

"Will you tell me your name?"

"No."

"Will you come to a restaurant with me and breakfast?"

"No; in the first place, I haven't got time; they're waiting for me, and I must go back. In the second place, I wouldn't go, anyway, like that, with someone I don't know."

"That's the way to become acquainted."

"Suppose anyone should see me go into a restaurant with you—one of my aunts, for instance! I've got seven aunts!"

"Sapristi! that's worse than Abd-el-Kader! No matter! come and have breakfast with me at my rooms, and you will see at once who I am—that I am not a mere nobody, a man without means or position."

"Oh! I didn't say you were, monsieur."

"I live on Rue Bleue, No. 14; that isn't very far away. If you will trust me, I promise you that I won't even kiss the end of your finger."

"Perhaps not, monsieur; but I tell you, I haven't got time; I must go back; I am late already, and I shall be scolded."

"Very well! where shall I send you a ticket, then?"

"At Madame Ratapond's, No. 48, Rue Meslay; just give it to the concierge. Mark it: *For Mademoiselle Rosette, at Madame Ratapond's.*"

"And you are Mademoiselle Rosette?"

"Perhaps. When will you send the ticket?"

"Whenever you choose."

"To-morrow, then."

"To-morrow, very good!"

"How many seats?"

"I will send you a box with four seats."

"Ah! splendid! That will be fun."

"But you will go?"

"To be sure!"

"And I may speak to you?"

"*Dame!* I don't know about that. If I am with my employer, you must be careful. But I'll go out in the entr'acte."

"Then I will make an opportunity to say a few words to you. And you won't come and breakfast with me? An hour passes so quickly!"

"Oh, no! no! Adieu, monsieur! You won't forget—Mademoiselle Rosette, at Madame Ratapond's, No. 48, Rue Meslay."

"No, mademoiselle, there's no danger of my forgetting."

She walked away, and I did the same. I was enchanted with my new acquaintance. Mademoiselle Rosette was altogether charming, and in her eyes, in her answers, I saw at once that she was no fool. Suppose that I had fallen upon a pearl, a treasure! It was impossible to say. The things we find without looking for them are often more valuable than those we take a vast amount of trouble to obtain.

XXXIV

THE UMBRELLAS.—THE POLKA

Love and poetry—these are what make hours seem like minutes. Be an author, a poet, a novelist, or a lover, and for you time will have wings. I thought of Mademoiselle Rosette all day, I dreamed of her all night, and the next morning I set about fulfilling my promise. There is nothing so easy, in Paris, as to obtain theatre tickets; it is not necessary to know authors or managers; it is enough to have money. With money one can have whatever one desires. I was on the way to a ticket broker's, when I found myself face to face with Dumouton, the literary man, who was of the dinner party at Deffieux's.

Poor Dumouton had not changed; he was still the same in physique and in dress. The yellowish-green or faded apple-green coat; the skin-tight trousers of any color you choose. But I noticed that he had two umbrellas under his arm, although there were no signs of rain. He offered me his hand, as if he were overjoyed to meet me, crying:

"Why, Monsieur Rochebrune! bonjour! how are you? It's a long while since I had the pleasure of meeting you."

"Very well, thanks, Monsieur Dumouton! indeed, I believe we have not met since Dupréval's dinner."

"True. We had a fine time at that dinner; everybody told some little anecdote; it was very amusing."

"Are you still writing plays?"

"Still. But one can't find such a market as one would like. There is so much intriguing at the theatres! The writing of a play isn't the most difficult part, but the getting it acted. Speaking of theatres, you don't happen to need an umbrella, do you?"

"No, thanks, I have one. Are you selling umbrellas now?"

"No—but—it happens that I bought one yesterday; and, meanwhile, my wife had bought one, too. So you see, we have too many; I would be glad of a chance to get rid of one; I would sell it cheap."

"If I hadn't one already, I might make a trade with you; but as I don't need it——"

"Still, it's often convenient to have two or three; for you lose one sometimes, or lend it to somebody who doesn't return it. That has happened to me a hundred times; and then, when you want to go out, it rains; you look for your umbrella, and it isn't there. That is very annoying; so it's more prudent to have two."

"But you apparently don't think so, as you want to sell one of yours."

"Oh! we have five in the house now."

"That makes a difference; but I don't quite understand why you bought another."

Dumouton scratched his nose; I could not help thinking of Rosette's seven aunts, and that Dumouton could shelter them from the rain with his seven umbrellas.

"What do you suppose I would like to have at this moment?" I asked him, as he sadly shifted his umbrellas from his right arm to his left.

"A cane, perhaps? I have one with a crow's beak head that would please you."

"No, no! I never carry a cane. What I would like at this moment is a theatre ticket for this evening."

Dumouton's face fairly beamed.

"For what theatre?" he cried.

"Faith! that makes no difference; but I would like a whole box."

"I have what you want, I have it right in my pocket. See, a box at the Gymnase!"

"The Gymnase it is!"

Dumouton took from his pocket an old notebook, or wallet, or, to speak more accurately, two pieces of leather—just what to call it, I do not know; but it contained a mass of papers, some old and soiled, others clean and new. He produced from it a pink one, which proved to be a ticket for a box at the Gymnase. I took the ticket and read at the foot of it the name of one of our most popular authors.

Dumouton restored his papers to his pocket, put his umbrellas under his left arm once more, and looked at me with an anxious expression, murmuring:

"Don't you want it?"

"Yes, indeed! But I was reading the name on it."

"Oh! that's of no consequence; I asked for it for him, but he can't go. You'll take it, then, will you?"

"Yes, gladly."

"There's only one thing. I have promised a box to some people to whom I am under obligations, and I can't break my word. It's too late to go to the theatre to ask for one, so I must buy one of a ticket broker; and I don't know whether——"

I did not let him finish the sentence.

"I don't propose that you shall be put to any expense on my account. How much will the ticket cost you?"

"Oh! a hundred sous, I suppose."

"Here's the money; and I am your debtor."

Dumouton pocketed the five francs with a radiant air. But he took his umbrellas in his hand again and held them out to me.

"I am sorry that you won't take one of these," he said.

I glanced at them, and replied:

"But neither of them is new."

"Oh! that may be; we bought them at second-hand. But they are good ones, and not dear. I will give you your choice for ten francs."

It was clear to my mind that poor Dumouton was sadly in need of money. Why should I not gratify him by buying an umbrella? That was simply a roundabout way of asking a favor. I took one of the umbrellas at random, and said:

"Well, if it will relieve you,—and I can understand that these two are a luxury, if you have five at home,—give me this one. Here's the ten francs."

Dumouton took the money and slipped one of the umbrellas under my arm so rapidly that I thought that he had run it into me; and fearing perhaps that I would change my mind and go back on my bargain, he left me on the instant, saying:

"I am very glad you needed an umbrella. Bonjour, Monsieur Rochebrune! hope to see you again soon!"

He disappeared, running. I examined the article I had purchased: it was a very good umbrella, with a laurel-wood stick; the head was a trefoil with silver trimmings, and the cover dark green silk. After all, I had not made a bad bargain; but I would have been glad not to have it on my hands just then, for the weather was fine, and it makes a man look very foolish to carry an umbrella under such circumstances.

But I had my ticket. I entered a café and called for paper and ink. I put the ticket in an envelope, with this superscription: *For Mademoiselle Rosette, at Madame Ratapond's.*

I carried the missive myself, for the name Ratapond did not inspire confidence. Moreover, I was not sorry to ask a few questions and find out a little more about Mademoiselle Rosette.

I arrived at Rue Meslay, and found the designated number. I passed under a porte cochère and was walking toward the concierge's lodge, when an enormous woman, who reminded me of one of the handsome sappers and miners who change their sex during the Carnival, came toward me from the farther end of the courtyard.

"Who do you want to see, monsieur?" she demanded.

"Does Madame Ratapond live in this house, madame?"

"Yes, monsieur; fifth floor above the entresol, the door opposite the stairs."

"I beg your pardon, madame; but what is that lady's business?"

As I asked the question, I felt in my pocket and took out a two-franc piece, which I slipped into the hand of the colossus, who instantly assumed a coquettish, mincing air and seemed to diminish in size until she reached my level.

"Oh! monsieur," she replied, "Madame Ratapond's a very respectable woman; she sends shawls into the departments and on the railroads."

"Has she many workgirls?"

"Six, and sometimes more."

"Do you know one of them named Mademoiselle Rosette—a pretty brunette, with a shapely, slender figure?"

"Oh! yes, monsieur. Mamzelle Rosette! To be sure, I know her; she goes up and down twenty times a day. She often does errands. Does monsieur happen to have brought her a ticket to the theatre? She told me this morning she expected one to-day, but she didn't count much on it."

"That is just what I have brought for her."

"Oh! won't she be glad, though! I tell you, monsieur, you can flatter yourself you've given her a lot of pleasure. She'll dance for joy when I tell her!"

"She doesn't live in the house, does she?"

"No, monsieur; she comes about eight o'clock or half-past."

"At what time does she go away?"

"Why, when the others do. Usually about eight, unless they're working late; then it's as late as ten, sometimes."

"Here is the letter, madame, with the ticket; will you be kind enough to hand it to mademoiselle in person?"

"Yes, monsieur, I understand. You see, I'm sure it won't be long before she comes in or goes out, and she always speaks to me when she passes."

"I rely upon you, then, madame."

The colossus cut several capers by way of courtesies; I left her standing on one leg, and went my way. I had found that the girl had not deceived me in what she told me; that was something. I did not suppose that I was dealing with a Jeanne d'Arc, but I did not care to fall into the other extreme. I determined to go to the Gymnase, and to have a little note in my pocket, appointing a meeting, which I would slip into Mademoiselle Rosette's hand if I was unable to talk freely with her.

I was on my way home, when I heard my name called. I turned and recognized Monsieur Rouffignard, the stout, chubby-faced party, who also was one of the dinner party at Deffieux's.

"Parbleu!" I said, as we shook hands; "this is my day for meetings!"

"Bonjour, Monsieur Rochebrune! have you seen our friend Dupréval lately?"

"Not for a long while! I have not done right; but I have been told that since Dupréval was married he has entirely renounced pleasure and gives all his attention to business; so that I have been afraid of disturbing him."

"It is true, he has become a regular bear; he thinks of nothing but making money. For my part, I make it, but I spend it too!"

"And I spend it, and don't make any. Such is life: everyone follows his tastes, or the current that carries him along; if we all did the same thing, it would be too monotonous."

"I have just met a man who was at our dinner party at Deffieux's, and who can't be very well content with his lot at present; I don't know whether that will make him less rigid in the matter of morals."

"Whom do you mean?"

"Monsieur Faisandé, the clerk in the Treasury Department, who was shocked when he heard anything a little off color."

"What has happened to him?"

"He has lost his place, that's all."

"Dismissed?"

"Yes, and he certainly hasn't embezzled. I heard all about it from a man who is a clerk in the same bureau. Would you believe, Monsieur Rochebrune, that that individual, who was so virtuous, so pure in his language, sometimes passed a fortnight without showing his face at his desk? If it had been on account of sickness, no one would have said a word; but, no, the man wasn't even at home; he didn't show himself there any more than he did at the bureau; not even at night; and his wife and child expecting him all the time! He passed a fortnight away from home!"

"What a cur!"

"You are right: *cur* is the word. They began, at the bureau, by warning him that, if he were not more regular, his conduct would be reported. He paid no attention. They cut down his salary; and he kept on in the same way. At last, they gave him his walking ticket. And now he's thrown on his wife's hands, and she has to work day and night to support her family! Poor woman! may heaven soon rid her of the fellow!"

"Cur and hypocrite often go together. I have never had the slightest confidence in people who prate about their own virtue, honesty, or merit."

While I was speaking, Monsieur Rouffignard happened to glance at my umbrella, which he at once began to scrutinize closely.

"You are surprised to see me with an umbrella in my hand, in such beautiful weather as this, aren't you?"

"Oh! I am not surprised at that, but— Will you allow me to touch it?"

"Certainly."

I handed the umbrella to my stout friend, who examined the handle, opened and closed it, and exclaimed:

"Parbleu! I am sure now that I'm not mistaken."

"Do you happen to recognize my umbrella?"

"Your umbrella? You say it's yours?"

"Why, to be sure! I bought it not two hours ago, and that is why I am carrying it now."

"In that case, I should be very glad to know where you bought it."

"You know Dumouton—the literary man?"

"Dumouton! Indeed I know him; he borrows five francs of me every time he sees me. But go on!"

"Well! I met him this morning. He had two umbrellas under his arm, and he urged me so hard to buy one of them that I finally bought this one."

"Ah! the villain! Upon my word, this is too cool! He actually sold you my umbrella, which he borrowed the day before yesterday and was to return that evening, and which I am still waiting for! Oh! this is the one—a trefoil with silver trimmings. It's my umbrella! Well! Monsieur Rochebrune, what do you say to that performance?"

Poor Dumouton! I was sorry that I had been the means of showing him up; but how could I suspect that he had sold me Rouffignard's umbrella? It was very wrong; but, perhaps, he needed the money to pay his baker. I felt that I must try to arrange the matter.

"You agree with me!" cried the stout man; "you call this a shameful trick, don't you?"

"No, Monsieur Rouffignard. I think that there is some misunderstanding simply, some mistake; that Dumouton is not guilty—"

"Not guilty! and he sold you my umbrella?"

"Allow me. When I met Dumouton this morning, he had two umbrellas under his arm. He offered to sell me one. 'And what about the other?' I asked him.—'The other isn't mine,' he said; 'it was lent to me, and I am going at once to return it.'—He certainly was speaking of yours, then. I made a bargain with him for his umbrella. But we talked some little time, and, when he left me, he must have made a mistake and given me the wrong one; that's the whole of it."

"Do you think so?"

"I am so sure of it that I will give you your umbrella, and go to Dumouton's to get the other."

"Infinitely obliged, Monsieur Rochebrune. But, as Dumouton proposed to bring mine back, I may find the other one at my house; in that case, I will send it to you at once."

"Do so, pray; au revoir, Monsieur Rouffignard!"

"Your servant, Monsieur Rochebrune!"

The stout man went off with his umbrella; I was quite sure that he would find none to send to me. Unfortunate Dumouton! See whither *petits verres* lead, and idling in cafés, and risky collaborations!

My thoughts recurred to the ticket for the box at the Gymnase. Suppose that should be claimed at the door, like the umbrella! Suppose my ladies should be denied admission, humiliated! That would prove to have been a precious gift of mine! And the name that was written on it! Suppose that that should mislead Mademoiselle Rosette! Faith! that would be amusing. In case of an emergency, as I had given the damsel my address, and had forgotten to tell her my name, I determined to instruct my concierge as to what he must say if anyone should call and ask for the person

whose name was on the ticket.

I waited impatiently for the hour at which the play would begin. I was convinced that they would be admitted on the ticket I had sent. Dumouton had undoubtedly asked for the box under some other name than his own, with the intention of selling it; that was very pleasant for the person whose name was written out in full on the ticket!

I could not afford to appear at the very beginning of the play; I should look like an opéra-comique lover. I waited until eight o'clock, before I went to the Gymnase. I had been careful to observe the number of the box, which was the best in the second tier. The play had begun; I walked along the corridor, found the number in question, and satisfied myself by a glance through the glass door that the box was full. That was satisfactory; she had come. My next move was to take up a position on the opposite side; at a distance, it would be easy for me to keep my eyes on the box without attracting attention.

I entered the opposite balcony, where nothing would intercept my view of the person on whose account I had come.

But to no purpose did I fix my opera glass on the box in question; to no purpose did I rub it with my handkerchief so that I could see more distinctly: among all the faces that filled the box I had given my pretty grisette, there was not one that resembled or even suggested hers. I looked again and again. It was impossible; I thought that my eyes deceived me. There were four women in the box, and I examined them one after another. It did not take long. In front, there was a rather attractive person of thirty or thereabouts; but she did not in the least resemble Mademoiselle Rosette: as for the other three, they were all between fifty and seventy, and vied with one another in ugliness.

What had they done with my pretty Rosette? where was she? I wanted her, I must have her! Deuce take it! It was not for that quartette of women that I had bought the box of Monsieur Dumouton, who had seized the opportunity to entangle me in the folds of an umbrella! Who were those people I was examining? Madame Ratapond? some of my inamorata's aunts? I had no idea, but I was horribly annoyed. So she had not come! although the ticket was meant for her; although she knew that I would go there solely in the hope of seeing her and speaking to her! So she did not choose to make my acquaintance, but simply to make sport of me!

I left the balcony and returned to the corridor; I asked the box opener if the ladies in such a number had said that they expected anyone.

"No, monsieur; they didn't say anything about it. Anyway, the box is full; there's four of 'em."

"I know that. By the way, please show me their ticket."

The box opener showed me the coupon: it was the one I had sent. I was completely *done!* I returned, in an execrable humor, to the balcony, but this time nearer the box. From time to time, I glanced at that assemblage of the fair sex, every member of which, with one exception, was exceedingly ugly. But it seemed to me that they had noticed me. Perhaps they fancied that they had made a conquest of me. In any event, there was but one of them who could reasonably imagine that. Soon I began to think that they whispered and laughed together as they looked at me. Perhaps it was my imagination. But, no matter! I had had enough. She for whom I had come was not there; why should I remain?

I left the theatre. I was weak enough to pace back and forth on the boulevard, in front of the door, hoping that she might come. But the clock struck ten. I decided to go away. I went into a café and read the papers, and about half-past eleven I went home, depressed and shame-faced. Really, that girl was most seductive, and I had fancied that there would be no obstacle to our liaison.

My concierge stopped me.

"A young woman has been here asking for you, monsieur. That is to say, she didn't ask for you, but for that queer name monsieur told me."

My heart expanded; I became as cheerful as I was melancholy a moment before.

"Ah! so the young woman came, did she? A tall, dark girl, with a wide-awake look?"

"Yes, monsieur; that describes her."

"What time did she come?"

"About half-past eight."

"And she asked if Monsieur—the author whose name I gave you—lived here?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"And you answered?"

"I answered *yes*, as you told me to. I told her that you lived on the second floor, but that you had gone out."

"And then?"

"Then she said she'd come about noon to-morrow, and told me to tell you."

"She will come to-morrow?"

"Yes, monsieur, about noon."

"Very good! very good!"

I was beside myself with joy. I rewarded my concierge, then ran lightly up my two flights. Pomponne opened the door. I went in singing, and said to him:

"To-morrow, Pomponne, about noon, a young grisette will come here."

"Ah! a grisette—a new one?"

"What do you mean by that?"

"I mean one who has not called on monsieur before."

"Why, yes, of course, you idiot! She will ask for——"

"*Pardi!* she will ask for monsieur."

"Well, no; that is just what she won't do."

"Will she ask for me, then? But I don't expect anybody, monsieur!"

"Oh! how you annoy me with your reflections, Pomponne! She will ask for—— But, no, you would make some infernal blunder; I prefer not to have you here. I will send you on some errand, and let her in myself when she

comes."

"What, monsieur! do you distrust me to that extent?"

"Hush! you bore me."

"But if you want her to ask for me, monsieur, I'm willing, I don't refuse."

"Leave me in peace, and go to bed!"

Pomponne went to bed, weeping because I would not allow him to be there on the morrow to admit my young grisette. I fell asleep thinking of Mademoiselle Rosette. Her visit indicated a very earnest wish to make my acquaintance; or was it not due to her having read that name on the ticket? Was it not because she believed me to be a famous author that she had come to my lodgings? All women love renown; grisettes are as susceptible to it as other women. And in that case, when she learned—

"Faith!" said I to myself; "we shall see to-morrow; let's go to sleep."

At noon, I was becomingly dressed; I had sent Pomponne away, with orders not to return before two o'clock, and I impatiently counted the minutes.

I did not count long. The bell rang; I opened the door instantly: it was my grisette, in the same costume as on the day of our first meeting, and with a no less affable expression. She entered without ceremony. I ushered her into my little salon, and invited her to sit on the divan, saying:

"How good of you to come!"

"I came last evening."

"I know it. But why weren't you at the theatre? I was so anxious to meet you there! In fact, it was for you that I sent the box, and not for those others."

"Yes, but I couldn't go; there was work that had to be done, and at such times there's no fun to be had. You saw my employer, Madame Ratapond, and a specimen of my aunts."

"Ah! so those were your aunts; the elderly ladies, I presume?"

"Yes. And my mistress, what did you think of her?"

"She is very good-looking. But it was you that I wanted to see! You are so pretty, and I love you so dearly!"

At this point, I tried to add action to speech; but Mademoiselle Rosette pushed me away and arose, saying:

"In the first place, I want you to let me alone. Stop! stop! you think you can go on like that, right away— Oh, no! Later, I won't say! We'll see!"

Good! At all events, she gave me ground for hope. I liked her frankness exceedingly.

"In the second place, I must go; yes, I'm in a great hurry. I came here on my way to do an errand; but it wasn't far that I had to go, and my mistress will say: 'There's that Rosette idling again!'"

"Ah! so it seems that you do that sometimes?"

"Yes, sometimes; I don't deny it. I like to stroll along and look in the shop windows."

"Sit down a moment."

She did so, and said, after looking about the room:

"Monsieur—is it really true that it's you?"

"That it's I?—why— What do you mean?"

"Why, you know, yesterday, when I saw your name on the ticket, I shouted for joy, and I said: 'What! that gentleman who spoke to me is the one who writes the plays I like so much and go to see so often!'—Oh! I tell you, I was pleased then, and that's why I came right here last night: I remembered your address, and I asked if it was really you that lived in this house; and the concierge said *yes*, and I told him I'd come again to-morrow, at noon. Well! does that make you angry? you don't say anything."

"No; it doesn't make me angry. But I was thinking."

"I say, monsieur, do you know I'm mad over your plays? If I should go mad over you too——"

"There's no danger of that."

"What's that? there's no danger? What makes you say: 'There's no danger'? Perhaps you don't know that I take fire very quickly, I do!"

That young woman was decidedly original. She said whatever came into her head, without beating about the bush. I liked that frankness, in which there was something like artlessness. Mademoiselle Rosette was neither stupid, nor pretentious, nor prudish. She was a perfect little phoenix, was that grisette. I began by kissing her; she defended herself feebly, or, rather, she allowed herself to be kissed without too much fuss; but when I attempted to go further, she defended herself very stoutly, crying:

"I said: 'Not to-day!'—So, no nonsense; it's a waste of time!"

"Well, when, then?"

"Oh! we'll see; we've got time enough. Do you like me?"

"What a question! Many other men must like you, for you know well enough that you're as pretty as a peach."

"Oh, yes! I know that; people tell me so every day."

"Lovers?"

"Lovers and flatterers and chance acquaintances—what do I know? I can't go out without being followed, and it's sickening!"

"Come, Mademoiselle Rosette, tell me frankly: have you had many—lovers?"

"Lovers! I should think not! No, I've never had but one."

"That's very modest! And you loved him dearly, I suppose?"

"Why, yes."

"Why did you separate?"

She looked down at the floor, heaved a profound sigh, and murmured:

"Alas! he died, my poor Léon!"

"Oh! forgive me for reminding you of so sad a loss."

"Yes; he died—a little more than a year ago."

"How old are you?"

"Twenty. They've wanted to marry me off seventeen times already; but I won't have it; I haven't any taste for marriage. I am right, ain't I?"

"If you have no inclination for marriage, you will certainly do quite as well to remain free."

"Free, that's it! What fun it is to do just what one wants to do! In the first place, I should make a husband very unhappy! And in the second place, how can I marry, now? I don't choose to deceive anyone, and I certainly wouldn't hold myself out for something that I'm not any more."

"You are right, mademoiselle; you shouldn't have any secrets from the man you bind yourself to; but all young ladies aren't like you."

"They're wrong, then. I must go now; I shall get a scolding."

"Just another minute. Tell me; if you hadn't seen that name on the theatre ticket, wouldn't you have come to see me?"

"Oh, no!"

"Then it was on account of the name alone that you came, not on my account?"

"But it was on your account, as the name's yours."

"But suppose it were not mine? suppose it were a mere accident that that name was on the ticket?"

The girl gazed earnestly at me, then exclaimed impatiently:

"Come, go on! what do you mean? I don't like to have anyone hold my nose under water."

"I mean, mademoiselle, that, like yourself, I do not choose to deceive anyone, or to hold myself out for what I am not. The author of whose works you are so fond—I am not he. My name is Charles Rochebrune; and I haven't the least little bit of renown to serve as a halo to my name. If my concierge lied to you yesterday, it was because I thought that you would not come here for poor me; and, as I ardently desired to see you again, I ventured upon that little fraud, to obtain the pleasure of receiving you here. But I never intended to carry it any further.—That is what I wanted to tell you."

Mademoiselle Rosette was silent for a few moments; I heard her mutter in a disappointed tone: "It's a pity!" But the next minute she smiled and held out her hand, saying:

"I don't care—it was good of you to tell me the truth!"

"Then you are no longer angry with me?"

"What good would that do?"

"And you will love me a little?"

"We shall see. Ah! a piano! Who plays the piano? I love music!"

I sat down at the piano, and played quadrilles, waltzes, and polkas. When I reached the last-named dance, she began to polk about the salon with fascinating grace.

"Do you like the polka?"

"I adore it! Do you polk?"

"A little."

"Let's try it."

She took my arm, and in a moment we were polking all over the salon to a tune which I was obliged to sing while we danced. It was very fatiguing; but Mademoiselle Rosette did not weary; she was an intrepid dancer. We were making our fifteenth circuit, at least, when the door was suddenly thrown open and Frédérique appeared. She stood, speechless with amazement, in the doorway; she had not eyes enough to look at us. I attempted to stop and go to her; but Mademoiselle Rosette dragged me on and compelled me to continue:

"Come on, come on!" she cried. "Do you think of stopping now? My word! Why, I can polk two hours without stopping!"

XXXV

A HIGH LIVER

Mademoiselle Rosette danced on with undiminished ardor, but I felt that mine was rapidly giving out; my voice was dying away, and there were moments when I did not make a sound. After watching us for some time, Frédérique took her place at the piano and began to play a polka for us.

Then there was no longer any reason why we should stop; I did not need to sing, it is true, but I did need the leg of a Hercules to keep pace with my partner, who exclaimed when she heard the music:

"Oh! that's fine! How much better we go with the piano!—Not quite so fast, madame, please! The polka isn't like the waltz."

But I could do no more; I stopped and threw myself into a chair. Mademoiselle Rosette thereupon concluded to sit down; and as she took out her handkerchief to wipe her face, she dropped a thimble, two skeins of cotton, a piece of cake, two sous, a spool of thread, a card, a lump of sugar, a skein of silk, and three plums.

She got down on all fours to pick them up, then glanced at the clock and cried:

"Mon Dieu! half-past one! To think that I've been here an hour and a half, and I didn't mean to stay five minutes! Oh! what a trouncing I shall get! luckily, I don't care a hang! Adieu, Monsieur What's-your-name! I'm going."

She had already left the salon; I hurried after her and overtook her in the reception room, and, seizing her around

the waist, said:

"When shall I see you again?"

"*Dame!* I don't know; whenever you say."

"Will you dine with me to-morrow?"

"Dine with you? Yes, I'd like to."

"Will you be on Passage Vendôme at five o'clock?"

"No, no! not on Passage Vendôme; that's too near my employer's; someone might see me. Better go where we met first, on Boulevard Bonne-Nouvelle, in front of the Gymnase."

"Very good; at five o'clock?"

"That's too early; half-past five."

"Half-past five it is. Until to-morrow, then!"

"Yes; adieu!"

I kissed her, and she ran down the stairs four at a time. I returned to the salon. Frédérique's face wore a singular expression. She pretended to laugh, but her merriment seemed forced to me.

"Will you forgive me for leaving you alone a moment while I said a word to that young woman?" I said, as I sat down beside her.

"Why, of course! Do friends stand on ceremony with one another?"

"You see, I have taken advantage of the permission you gave me."

"You have done well.—Ha! ha! ha!"

"Why do you laugh?"

"Because you looked so comical, polking with that grisette just now. I had so little expectation of finding a ball in progress here!—Ha! ha! ha! I was speechless."

"By the way, how did you come in?"

"Through the door, naturally; I rang, and your servant admitted me. But you were so hard at work with your dancing that you didn't hear me—apparently.—Ha! ha! ha!"

"Oho! my servant admitted you, did he? I sent him on an errand and forbade him to return before two o'clock. The rascal! he couldn't restrain his curiosity, and he came back before the time."

"I disturbed you—I am very sorry. But it seemed to me that you had had enough; you were on your last legs. *Fichtre!* what a dancer that damsel is! You and I dance very well together—they took us for artists from the Opéra, you know; but if you had polked with your friend at Monsieur Bocal's ball, they would have carried you both in triumph, like *Musard*.—Ha! ha! ha!"

"You are in a satirical mood, Frédérique."

"Satirical with you? Bless my soul! it seems to me that that would be very unbecoming of me. You amuse yourself, you enjoy life, you know how to make the most of your best days—and you are quite right! I may envy your happiness, but certainly not laugh at it, I who can no longer do anything but bore myself and other people too."

She said these last words in a most melancholy tone, and her eyes were wet with tears.

"What's that you say about boring other people, Frédérique?" I said, taking her hand. "You didn't make that wicked remark for my benefit, I trust; if you did, it is absolutely false."

She hastily withdrew her hand.

"No, no!" she cried; "I don't know what I am saying, or what I am thinking about! Come, let us talk, my dear friend; who is this girl that I found with you?"

"She—why, she's a grisette; and a very pretty one, too, is she not?"

"Yes, that may be. She lisps when she talks."

"Oh! really now! Once in a while, there's something that makes her voice tremble, it is true, but it isn't at all disagreeable; quite the contrary."

"That's a matter of taste. Some men like women who lisp, just as some like red hair. I have known some who even went so far as to adore women with a limp."

"Oh! how caustic you are to-day, Frédérique!"

"And this beauty, with the quivering voice—how long have you known her?"

"Since day before yesterday."

"Peste! she's quite new! And the acquaintance is already—complete; you have nothing else to wish for?"

"Oh! I beg your pardon. We don't go so fast."

"But I should say that you go at quite a good pace. If the young lady should prove cruel, I should be much surprised."

"I trust that she won't be to-morrow."

"Ah! you are to see her again to-morrow?"

"Yes, we dine together; we have made the appointment, it's all arranged."

Frédérique abruptly sprang to her feet and walked to the window. She remained there some time. When she came back to me, I was surprised at her pallor.

"Do you feel ill?" I asked, hastening to meet her.

"No; I—I—was looking at the weather. Well! so you really have ceased entirely to think of Armantine?"

"What has induced you to mention that lady to me? What idea have you in your head?"

"A perfectly natural one. I am still surprised to find that you have forgotten her. Do you know that she has left Passy?"

"How should I know that? Do you suppose that I have been to Passy?"

"Oh, no! that is true. Well, Armantine has left the neighborhood of the Bois. She hasn't told me where she has gone; apparently, she isn't anxious to see me again. That's as she pleases: one should never force one's self upon

anybody. But I see that you are not listening to me! I forgive you: you are so engrossed by your new conquest and your blissful meeting to-morrow!—But I am forgetting that I have some business to attend to."

As she spoke, she put on her bonnet, which she had tossed on a table when she took her seat at the piano.

"What! you are going to leave me already?"

"Yes—I, too—somebody's waiting for me—I too have an appointment. Did you think that that was impossible?"

"In what a tone you say that! I thought simply that, in that case, you would have taken me into your confidence."

"Perhaps so. I can't tell all my sentiments so easily as you can."

"Then you have less confidence in me than I have in you."

"That is possible."

"But that is very unkind!"

"Tell me, how long will this new love of yours last?"

"My relations with Mademoiselle Rosette?—for you mustn't call it love."

"What is it, then?"

"It is a little liaison of no consequence—for amusement."

"Give it whatever name you choose. Well, how long will this little liaison of no consequence, for amusement, be likely to last?"

"Why do you ask?"

"Because I want to know."

"It's rather hard for me to answer. How is it possible to say? You see, I know nothing of the girl's temperament. Such liaisons sometimes end in a week; sometimes they last three months."

"All right. Then I will come again three months hence."

"What does this mean? Why do you leave me so?"

"Because it seems to me that I always arrive most inopportunistly and disturb you in the midst of your pleasures; and I shall do well not to intrude again, so long as you are—infatuated with this grisette."

"Really, Frédérique, I can't understand you! What connection can there possibly be between my follies, my amourettes, my momentary pleasures, and our delightful friendship?"

"Oh! you are quite right! Of course, there is not the slightest connection between me and your pleasures. Ah, me! I certainly do not know what I am saying to-day; my wits are all topsy-turvy. But, adieu! I repeat, I have an appointment; I must leave you. Adieu!"

"But I shall see you again soon?"

"Yes, soon."

She left the room. There were days when I was utterly at a loss to understand that woman's changing moods.

"Ah! here's Monsieur Pomponne! Just come this way, O faithful and, above all, obedient servitor!"

Pomponne hung his head and stood in front of me, like a Cossack awaiting the knout.

"What did I tell you when I sent you out this morning?"

"You told me, monsieur, that it would take me till two o'clock at least. But I hurried and got back earlier. Monsieur tells me sometimes that I am slow, and I wanted to prove that I could be quick."

"You have proved that you are a prying rascal—that's what you have proved! Another time, if you don't carry out my orders to the letter, I will discharge you."

"You didn't give me any letter, monsieur."

"Enough; off with you, or I may give you something else!"

The next day, at half-past five, I was at the place Mademoiselle Rosette had appointed; in a few moments, I saw my new conquest approaching; she did not keep me waiting, that was another excellent quality.

For this occasion Mademoiselle Rosette had made a toilet; she wore a green merino dress, a pretty shawl, a black velvet bonnet, with a tulle veil. It was all very becoming to her; moreover, her costume was suitable, without being pretentious; that fact denoted good taste.

I offered her my arm, and she smilingly accepted it. We walked toward the cab stand. I put her into a little *citadine*, and as we drove away I began the conversation with a kiss; that leads at once to intimacy. My companion accepted the situation with the best grace imaginable. We were very good friends in short order.

"Where are you taking me?" inquired Rosette.

"To a restaurant."

"Is it very far?"

"Near the Jardin des Plantes, opposite the Orléans station—the Arc-en-Ciel. It seems to me that if we get away from the crowd, we shall be more at liberty, more at home. You're in no hurry, are you?"

"Oh, no! that is to say, provided I'm at home at eleven o'clock."

"Then we have plenty of time before us. By the way, where do you live?"

"Suppose I don't choose to tell you?"

"It shall be exactly as you choose."

"I was joking. I live on Faubourg Saint-Denis, corner of Rue Chabrol."

"The deuce! that's well up in the faubourg! And you go back there alone, at night, when you leave your work?"

"To be sure!"

"And you're not afraid?"

"What should I be afraid of? Besides, I always have body-guards, men who follow me and protect me. But, speaking of that, monsieur, who was that lady who came to see you while we were polking? and who stayed there after I went, and looked at me as if she meant to count my eyelashes?"

"That lady is a friend of mine."

"I understand: she's your mistress!"

"I assure you that she is not. If she were, I should have no reason to conceal the fact."

"Oh! I don't know. There are some ladies who don't want to be given away—when they're married, for instance."

"Once more, I assure you that she is a friend, and nothing more."

"Oh! a friend! I know what that means! So she's an old one, eh?"

"Neither old nor new. Do you suppose that, if that lady were my mistress, she would be obliging enough, when she found me dancing with you, to sit down at the piano and be our orchestra?"

"Oh! but she played the polka fast enough to spoil our wind in a second. It was no use for me to call out: 'A little slower, please, madame!' she didn't listen to me, but banged and banged away! It was a sly trick to wind us both. Oh! I'm not so stupid as you think!"

"But I have never thought that you were stupid; far from it!"

"Really! tell me, do you think I am bright?"

"I think you are charming."

"That's no answer; I might be charming, and still be stupid. However, I don't care; as long as I please you, and you love me a little—I mean much; I want to be loved much—that's all I ask."

She said all this with an abandon, a vivacity, which proved, at all events, that she did not stop to pick her words.

We arrived at the restaurant; I need not say that I had taken my conquest to an establishment where there were cosily furnished private dining-rooms. I also think it needless to add that I began by dismissing the waiter, who attempted to insist upon serving us at once, by telling him that I would prepare my order and ring for him when we wanted to dine. I was very glad to have an interview with Mademoiselle Rosette, uninterrupted by the constant going and coming of a waiter.

At last we were left alone. I was able to converse at my ease with my pretty workgirl, to whom our conversation was equally agreeable and who sustained her part excellently. I was enchanted with Mademoiselle Rosette! Long live the women who do not make a thousand and one grimaces before coming to what they have never intended to refuse! Ah! if only one could believe that they did have that intention, and yielded to the power of sentiment, to the ascendancy of our passion alone! But it is impossible to believe that. Whenever a woman agrees to go to a private dining-room with a man, it means that she does not propose to be severe.

In due course, we dined; we had the most voracious appetites. We were as gay as larks; embarrassment and reserve had vanished. There is nothing superior to a little tender conversation for putting us in a good humor at once, and putting to flight that indefinable constraint which takes wing only when a woman has ceased to keep us at any distance.

Rosette and I were like people who had known each other for six months. She ate like an ogre and drank like a porter. She was a model grisette! a table companion of the sort that puts you on your mettle and excites you! Don't talk to me of the women who never have any appetite, who barely nibble at their food, and leave untouched all that you put on their plate. They call everything bad, and end by preventing you from eating. What depressing companions! With them, you spend quite as much—yes, more; for you never know what to order to stir them up, and you always dine wretchedly.

But with Rosette how different it was! how we made the oysters disappear, and the soup, and the beef-steak; the fish and game and vegetables and sweetmeats and dessert! She ate the last dish with as much gusto as the first. Oh! fascinating girl, I admired thee! I revered thee! I would have erected a column to thee, had I been Lucullus! But thou wert as well pleased with a charlotte russe! And thou wert right: columns remain, but charlotte russes pass away; and that was what we wanted.

We drank chablis, pomard, madeira, and came at last to champagne. Rosette confessed that she adored that wine; as for the others, I was pleased to see that she had a friendly feeling for them as well. She laughingly emptied her glass, saying:

"I'd have you know that I never get tipsy."

A moment later, she cried:

"Oh! but I say, I am drinking too much; I'm beginning to be dizzy!"

In another instant, she assumed a sentimental expression.

"O my friend!" she said; "if I should be drunk, what would you say to me? You might not love me any more! That would make me very unhappy!"

But I kissed her and drank with her, and her fears were succeeded by bursts of merriment.

The more one drinks, the more one talks, unless one happens to be melancholy in one's cups, and my grisette was not so constituted.

While we dined, she told me her whole history; I knew her family as well as if I were her cousin. She was an orphan, but her seven aunts took care of her. It seemed to me that their watchfulness resembled that of the Seven Sleepers. That is one of the inconveniences of having too many aunts: each of them probably relied on the others to keep an eye on Rosette.

Now her aunts wanted her to marry, and each one had a match in view for her; the result being that there were seven aspirants for the hand of my friend, who reminded me of the Seven Children of Lara. Thus Mademoiselle Rosette had only too many to choose from, to say nothing of the fact that she had several young men who were paying court to her, for the good motive, without the knowledge of her aunts.

"Perhaps you don't believe me! But I'll show you; I always have letters from some of my suitors in my pocket. I want you to read them; they'll make you laugh."

And Rosette set about emptying her pockets, which led us to the disclosure of a multitude of things, such as scissors, skeins of cotton, crusts of bread, visiting cards, copper coins, barley sugar, ribbons, braid, chalk, specimens of dry goods, orange peel, etc., etc. I told her that she should empty her pockets on the boulevard and shout:

"Here's what's left from the sale! Come, messieurs and mesdames, take your choice; this is what's left from the sale!"

Rosette insisted that I should read her letters from her adorers. I found in them the following sentiments:

"Ah! mademoiselle, what a sudden spasm I felt throughout my being when I saw your shadow on the curtain!"

Or this: "Fatality collects and heaps up like a block of granite on my breast the circumstances that compel me to idolize you."

I soon had enough of that; I refused to read any more and returned the scrawls to Rosette, saying:

"I'll wager that your lovers have long, flying hair, uncombed beards, and artist's hats?"

"That is true! How did you guess that?"

"My dear love, when a man writes in that style, he doesn't dress like other people."

The hour arrived when we must think of returning. The time had passed very quickly; that is the greatest praise one can give a tête-à-tête.

I put Mademoiselle Rosette in a cab again—she was slightly exhilarated—and said:

"I will escort you to Faubourg Saint-Denis."

She seemed to consider.

"Aren't you going home?" I continued.

"How stupid you are! Where do you suppose I'm going? But, you see, I have quite a choice; I can go and sleep at another one of my aunts', if I choose—it doesn't matter which, I have a bed with each of them; I might sleep in the Marais, for I have an aunt on Rue Pont-aux-Choux."

"Pardieu! that's convenient, isn't it? So, when you want to pass the night with your lover, you tell one aunt that you've been with another one, and so on. Oh! fortunate niece! I have known lots of nieces, but very few in so pleasant a position as you occupy."

"Oh! come, don't laugh at me! Let me tell you, monsieur, that my aunts see each other very often; and so, if I should lie and say I had passed the night with one of them when I hadn't, they'd soon find it out, and I shouldn't have a very nice time."

"Forgive me, dear love! I didn't mean to offend you!"

"Kiss me. When shall I see you again?"

"When you are willing."

"I'll come to see you Thursday, about two. Will you wait for me?"

"Most certainly."

"And you'll take care that your friend don't come and disturb us; if she does, I'll make a scene with her. I'm very jealous, let me tell you. You love me, don't you? Ah! you've made me tipsy, you see, and I don't know what I'm saying."

I reassured Rosette and left her on Faubourg Saint-Denis, where she had finally decided to go. She was a very attractive girl, her conversation was amusing, and her person most alluring. But I was sorry that she had a tent pitched in every quarter of Paris; one could never be sure where she had gone into camp.

XXXVI

A SCENE

I had known Rosette a month, and thus far had had no reason to repent. I had observed, to be sure, that the young woman did not always tell me the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth; but, after all, a lover should not act toward his mistress in the capacity of a juryman. Moreover, Rosette herself had told me, in a moment of effusiveness, that she lied a great deal and lied very well. It seemed to me that, after that, I was not justified in losing my temper when she told me a falsehood; for she might reply:

"I gave you fair warning!"

I often took Rosette to dine in a private dining-room. Knowing as I did what justice she could do to a hearty meal, it would really have been a pity not to give her an opportunity for practice; and as I myself am endowed with a lusty appetite, our little parties always afforded us pleasure: when love went to sleep, the stomach woke, and *vice versa*.

Rosette came to my rooms once or twice a week, and sometimes unheralded. When I was absent, she went into my chamber; I had told Pomponne that she was to be admitted at any time. When she had come and failed to find me, I always discovered it instantly, for she turned everything in the apartment topsy-turvy. She tossed about papers, books, combs, brushes, and soap; looked through all the drawers, and left nothing in its place; even the chairs I always found in the middle of the room.

"Couldn't you have put my room to rights a little?" I would say to Pomponne.

And Monsieur Pomponne would reply, with his sly smile:

"It was Mademoiselle Rosette who arranged monsieur's bedroom like that; I shouldn't venture to touch anything."

I had not seen Frédérique since the day she played for us to dance. She had not called upon me again. I had been several times to see her, but had not found her. Could it be that her friendship was really jealous of my love for a grisette? That would be absurd. Friendship should be indulgent to our weaknesses, and, after all, I had not promised Frédérique to be virtuous.

I could not understand her conduct in the least, but I was deeply grieved by it. I missed her; my follies with Rosette were simply transitory gleams of pleasure, while my delightful interviews with Frédérique filled my heart with a joy which had a morrow.

I was sitting one day, absorbed in serious reflections, when Frédérique entered my room. I cannot describe my sensation of pleasure. I ran to meet her, took her hands, and cried:

"Ah! here you are at last! I am very glad! I thought that you had forgotten me altogether."

She looked at me and smiled, as she rejoined:

"So you are glad to see me?"

"Unkind Frédérique! can you ask such a question? Why, I have been to see you several times!"

"I know it; my people told me."

"But you are never at home! What sort of life are you leading, pray, madame?"

"I go out a good deal, it is true."

"Have you been ill? it seems to me that you are a little pale."

"I am never very red. The women you see are so fresh and rosy, that you are struck by the difference."

"Ah! madame, I see no woman whom it gives me so much pleasure to look at as you."

"Really?"

She uttered that word with an accent that came from her heart. I made her sit down beside me. She looked all about the room, murmuring:

"Are you alone?"

"To be sure!"

"And I do not intrude?"

"Once more, I tell you that you never intrude."

"Oh! *never* is too strong. What if she were with you?"

"Who, pray?"

"Mon Dieu! you know well enough: your dancing damsel—your Rosette."

"Oh! my Rosette!"

"*Dame!* I think that I may fairly say *your* Rosette, for she must surely have become yours since the day— To be sure, she may be others' also, and in that case the possessive pronoun would be of doubtful propriety."

"Call her what you will, Frédérique; I attach little importance to that. But I am surprised to find that my liaison with that girl displeases you. Why is it so? I can't understand. You are too intelligent to believe that such amourettes can impair the pure friendship I have sworn to you."

Frédérique put her hand over her eyes and turned her face away.

"But you are mistaken!" she exclaimed. "It is not true! Your liaison with this grisette doesn't displease me at all. Upon my word! why should it, pray?—But I would have liked you to know five or six at the same time; that would be more amusing; I should enjoy that immensely."

At that moment I heard voices outside, and recognized Pomponne's.

"Monsieur is having a consultation with someone," he said.

"I don't care a hang for his consultation; I can go in any time, I can!" was the reply.

And an instant later, Mademoiselle Rosette opened the door and appeared before us. Frédérique turned pale, but she did not stir. I was annoyed that Rosette should have come just then. However, I had no reason for letting her see it; so I went to meet her, smiling as usual. But my grisette had assumed a furious expression, and she drew back from me, crying:

"Don't put yourself out, monsieur, I beg; you were so comfortable with madame! You weren't polking, to be sure, but you were engaged in something more interesting; anybody could see that."

I saw that Rosette was on the point of saying things most unseemly, and perhaps worse than that, to Madame Dauberny, and I felt my blood begin to boil. Frédérique, on the contrary, remained quite calm.

"Mademoiselle," I said, "I cannot believe that it is your intention to insult those persons whom you may chance to meet on my premises; I tell you at once that that does not meet my views at all, and that I will not endure it."

"Really? Perhaps I'll have to put on mittens when I speak to the princesses I find in monsieur's room! I guess not much! Humbug!"

"O Rosette! Rosette!"

"Let me alone; I propose to shriek all I want to, and get mad too! I don't believe in these *friendships* between ladies and young men. Bah! friendship that crawls under your bedclothes!"

"Be careful, mademoiselle!"

"I won't be careful! I'm your mistress, I am, worse luck!—If madame don't know it, I'm very glad to tell her of it, so that she'll know it now. Yes, I'm your mistress; but I don't propose to have you have others at the same time—old ones or new ones;—if you do, I'll raise a deuce of a row! Ah! you'll see!"

Frédérique, who seemed rather pleased than angry as she listened to Rosette, rose and said to her in a most affable tone:

"I was quite well aware that you were monsieur's mistress, mademoiselle; I beg you to believe that I did not doubt it for a moment, when I saw you in his room. I assure you that you are wrong, altogether wrong, to be jealous of me, who am not and never have been Monsieur Rochebrune's mistress. So that I do not deserve your anger—and to prove it, I am going to take my leave at once and surrender my place to you—which I would not do, I beg you to believe, if monsieur were my lover. Come! make your peace; be reconciled! I am distressed to have been the cause of this scene.—Adieu, Rochebrune; au revoir, my friend! Be sure that I am not at all offended with you for what has happened."

Frédérique left the room, smiling sweetly at me. I did not try to detain her, because I did not choose to expose her to fresh abuse from Rosette.

As for my grisette, she threw herself on the divan, crying:

"I don't care! I must admit that she's a good creature, after all. Ah! I wouldn't have been the one to go! You might have called up a dozen gendarmes, and I'd just have said: *Zut!*"

I paced the floor without a word; I was vexed and angry. After five minutes, Rosette exclaimed:

"I say, monsieur, when are you going to stop stalking around your room, like the Bear of Berne? Why, you ought to have begged my pardon ten times for the tricks you play on me! For it's a perfect outrage, the way you treat me!"

"If anyone ought to ask pardon, mademoiselle, you are the one; for, without any motive or reason, you have

insulted a most estimable lady, a person who should be out of reach of your suspicions and your attacks. I had told you before that there was nothing in my relations with her to arouse your jealousy; and because you find her in my room, where she has not been since the day of the polka, you make a scene, and say things to her that are worse than unbecoming. It is all wrong, and I am very angry with you."

"Hoity-toity! You're angry with me, are you? Ah! you're a nice man, you are! You are annoyed because I caught you in—vicious conversation, as the bewigged men say! After all, what did I say that was so mortifying to your fine lady? Nothing at all! Ah! if I had pulled her hair out or torn her dress, then you might say something!"

"That would have been the last straw! Do you suppose I would have allowed that?"

"If I'd taken a fancy to do it, you wouldn't have had time to stop me—my good friend. I wouldn't have asked your leave."

"Mademoiselle Rosette, you are very wrong-headed."

"That may be; but you can take me or leave me."

I said nothing, but continued to pace the floor. After a considerable time, Mademoiselle Rosette sprang to her feet.

"Well! so that's the way it is, eh?—Bonsoir!"

She rushed from the room, and I heard her slam one door after another till she was in the hall.

She had gone, and gone in a rage. No matter! I could not allow her to insult my visitors without the slightest cause. If I should allow it, with her temperament Mademoiselle Rosette would soon pass from words to deeds. I said to myself that she would calm down and come back to me. I did not believe that she was vixenish at heart. Those people who fly into a rage so quickly do not let the sun go down on their wrath.

XXXVII

ROSETTE'S SEVEN AUNTS

Several days passed and I heard nothing of my grisette. But I went to see Frédérique, whom I found at home, and who greeted me with evident pleasure.

I did not mention Rosette; but I saw in her eyes that she was burning to know the situation of my amour with her. At last, she could contain herself no longer.

"Well, my friend," she said, "you say nothing of your love affairs. I trust, however, that I am still your confidante; and you surely must have been content with my conduct the last time I came to see you."

"I did not speak of that, to avoid recalling unpleasant things; you were most kind, a thousand times too kind; but that did not surprise me, and I ask your pardon again for that girl, who didn't know what she was saying."

"I assure you that she didn't offend me in the least; far from it! her observations were so amusing, and her expressions so classic! But you are reconciled, I hope? My departure should have restored peace at once."

"No; that is where you are mistaken. We did not make peace. Rosette went away in a rage, and I haven't seen her since."

"Really? You surprise me. And haven't you made any attempt to see that fascinating grisette again?"

"No, not any."

Frédérique looked at me out of the corner of her eye. To change the subject, I asked her if her husband had returned.

"Not yet. You seem greatly interested in my husband's movements. I confess that that puzzles me a good deal."

"I beg you to believe that my interest in him has no connection with you."

"Oh! I am sure of that."

"Do you know that your husband's friend, he who called himself Saint-Germain, has lost his place?"

"I did not know it; but that explains why he comes here almost every day to inquire if Monsieur Dauberny has returned; indeed, he asked to see me once."

"Do not receive that man, madame; I take the liberty of giving you that advice."

"I will follow your advice, monsieur, which, by the by, is in perfect accord with my previous intentions. If I dared to give you advice, in my turn, I would say——"

"Well?"

"Oh, no! no! I won't say it! I prefer that you should follow the impulses of your heart; and then, too——"

Frédérique began to laugh, and I was somewhat annoyed; but she refused to say anything more. I took my leave, almost offended with her; but I pressed her hand affectionately.

Several more days passed, and still no news of Rosette. I was hurt by her desertion; she was very pretty, and she loved me, or, at all events, she pretended to, which often amounts to the same thing. If she was jealous, was not that a proof of affection? After all, I had let her go without saying a word, without trying to detain her.

"Come, come!" I said to myself; "no false shame! It is my place to make advances."

Rosette had said to me:

"If you should happen to have anything important to say to me, go to my aunt's—whichever one I am staying with—and ask for me. There's no danger; they won't see anything but smoke."

So I determined to hunt up Rosette, at her various aunts' abodes, praying that I should have less difficulty than Jason had in his quest of the Golden Fleece. Rosette, by the way, had not a golden fleece, and was to be congratulated therefor.

I hired a cab by the hour, and went first to Faubourg Saint-Denis, corner of Rue Chabrol; that was where Rosette had her legal domicile. I knew the house, having taken her there quite often. I went in and asked an old tailor, presumably the concierge, if Mademoiselle Rosette was with her aunt, Madame Falourdin. I had remembered that

aunt's name; as for the others, I had heard them named; but that conglomeration of more or less queer and unusual names had escaped my memory.

"Mamzelle Rosette?" replied the tailor, eying the seat of an old pair of trousers as a cook eyes eggs that are to be served in the shell; "Mamzelle Rosette? No, monsieur, I don't think she be to her aunt's, or I'd have seen her going out and coming in more'n once this morning. You see, monsieur, that girl's just like a worm as has been cut in two—always wriggling.—*Bigre!* that place is pretty nigh worn out!"

I saw that Rosette was recognized everywhere as being constantly in motion.

"So you think she isn't at Madame Falourdin's?" I said.

"I'd put my thimble in the fire on it. Ha! ha! To be sure, it wouldn't burn, being as it's wrought iron.—Oho! how thin this place is!"

The old fellow was inclined to jest. However, I must find out where to go in search of Rosette.

"Can you tell me, monsieur, where I shall find Mademoiselle Rosette?"

I added to my question the obligatory accompaniment of a piece of silver; but to my amazement the old tailor pushed my hand away, saying:

"That would be robbery, for I don't know where she is.—They want me to make a child's jacket out of this thing, and I couldn't make one gaiter!"

"But I must speak to that young woman."

"Well, then, go up to the third, Mame Falourdin; she'd ought to know where her niece is."

He was right; that was my only resource. Rosette had said to me:

"When you ask for me at one of my aunts', you must always say that you come from Madame Berlingot's finishing shop on Rue Pinon."—I bore that in mind.

There was but one door on the third floor, so that it was impossible to make a mistake. I rang. A tall, thin woman opened the door.

"Madame Falourdin?"

"That's me, monsieur. What can I do for you?"

"Is Mademoiselle Rosette with you, madame?"

"No, monsieur; what do you want of her?"

"I have come from Madame Berlingot's finishing——"

"I know, monsieur, I know! About a cashmere shawl, I suppose, that needs mending and must be mended right away?"

"I think that that's what it is, madame."

"Then, monsieur, you must be kind enough to go to her Aunt Riflot's, Rue du Pont-aux-Choux, No. 17. That's where Rosette is just now."

"Exceedingly obliged, madame; I will go there at once."

"Your servant, monsieur!"

I was not sorry to know that the finisher was supposed to send for Rosette to mend shawls; that would give me more self-assurance in my embassy.

I was driven to Rue Pont-aux-Choux. There I did not stop to parley with the concierge; I asked for Madame Riflot, and went up at once to the fourth floor. I found a very active and wide-awake little old woman, who did not keep still an instant, but was constantly on the move from the stove to the kitchen table and cupboard while she talked with me.

"I would like to say a word to Mademoiselle Rosette, if possible, madame."

"Rosette? my niece Rosette?—Ah! mon Dieu! I believe it's burning! yes, I believe it's burning!"

And the old woman ran and turned over the tripe that was frying on the stove.

"She is here, is she not, madame?"

"Rosette? my niece Rosette?—Have I got any parsley? have I got any parsley? It would be just like me not to have any parsley!"

"Will you kindly tell me if I may speak to her? Will you call her?"

"Who? Rosette? my niece Rosette?—A body don't have a minute to herself! It must be after twelve. Is it after twelve?"

I began to lose patience, and, being convinced that Rosette was not far away, I shouted at the top of my voice:

"Mademoiselle Rosette, you're wanted!"

At that, the infernal old hag stopped, looked at me, and began to laugh. When she had laughed her fill, she said:

"It's no use for you to call and yell, as she ain't here; you might just as well sing!"

"She is not here? You should have told me that at once, madame."

"You didn't give me time.—And my fire, my fire——"

"In that case, madame, will you be kind enough to tell me where I can find mademoiselle your niece? I wanted to see her about mending a shawl—at Madame Berlingot's."

"Rosette told me, the last time I saw her: 'I'm going to work at Aunt Piquette's, Rue aux Ours, No. 35.'—Well, have I got any embers, I wonder? Let's look and see!"

"Exceedingly obliged, madame."

That old woman set my nerves on edge! Thank God! I was clear of her at last! I made all haste to Aunt Piquette's, Rue aux Ours.

I found no concierge at the number indicated; but a neighbor told me that Madame Piquette lived on the fifth floor. *Fichtre!* the flights increased in number! If I should have to visit all Rosette's aunts, how high should I have to ascend, at that rate? But I hoped that I should find that intangible niece this time.

I rang at Madame Piquette's door. A woman appeared who was fully sixty years of age, but who wore a cap

overladen with flowers and pink ribbons. Where will not coquetry build its nest?

"Madame Piquette?"

"That's me, monsieur; take the trouble to come in."

And she made a formal reverence, as she stood aside to let me pass.

"It is useless for me to disturb you, madame; I have come to——"

"I certainly shall not receive you on the landing, monsieur; please walk in."

"But, madame, I have come for Mademoiselle Rosette, your niece, to——"

"You will offend me by staying out here, monsieur."

I had to give way. I went in, hoping to remain in the first room; but Madame Piquette pushed me toward a door at the farther end, making another reverence. I concluded to enter the second room, which with the first seemed to form the whole suite. And no Rosette! Could it be that I had made another fruitless journey?

"I come, madame, from——"

"Pray be good enough to sit down, monsieur."

"It is not worth while, madame. I wanted to see Mademoiselle Rosette, your niece——"

"You will mortify me by standing, monsieur."

I had no desire to mortify Madame Piquette, but I was inclined to regret little Aunt Riflot at that moment. At last we were both seated. Madame Piquette put a small rug under my feet. Did she think that I had come to pass the day with her? She glanced in the mirror, and rearranged her cap strings on her breast. That pantomime alarmed me; I looked about in dismay; but for some unknown reason, I did not let my eyes rest on Madame Piquette, who had partly unfastened her neckerchief. Mon Dieu! what was the woman thinking of? At last, she finished her manœuvring, and I hastened to say, without stopping for breath:

"I have come from Madame Berlingot's finishing shop on Rue Pinon, to ask Mademoiselle Rosette to mend a cashmere shawl."

Madame Piquette courtesied again; I glanced in the mirror and thought that she was preparing to remove her neckerchief. Great heaven! what was I about to see?

But, no; I had taken fright without cause; she rearranged her pink ribbons about her neck, and replied:

"It is with the deepest regret, monsieur, that I find myself compelled to inform you that Rosette is not here. I believe that she is at her Aunt Dumarteau's at this moment."

"Will you kindly give me Madame Dumarteau's address?"

"It's a long way, monsieur, a long way from here!"

"I have a cab, madame."

"In that case, monsieur, take the trouble to go to Rue Verte, Faubourg Saint-Honoré, No. 12."

"Exceedingly obliged, madame!"

"But if you would be pleased to rest a moment longer, monsieur, I should be charmed to——"

I listened to no more; I rose, left the room, and went down the stairs by leaps and bounds; I fancied that I could still see Madame Piquette baring her neck before me.

"Rue Verte, No. 12," I said to my cabman.—Oh! Rosette, what a dance you were leading me! But, no matter! As I had begun, I would persevere to the end.

"Madame Dumarteau?" I said to the concierge.

"Sixth floor, door at the left."

Sixth floor! I would have bet on it! And this was only the fourth aunt! What fate was in store for me?

I knocked at Madame Dumarteau's door, as she had no bell. A woman of some fifty years, with a morose face, half opened the door, and asked in a hoarse voice:

"What do you want?"

"Madame Dumarteau."

"That's me! Well?"

"I have come to see Mademoiselle Rosette, from——"

"Mamzelle Rosette ain't here."

"Where is she, then?"

"At her Aunt Lumignon's, Rue du Petit-Muse, Quartier Saint-Antoine."

"Very good! What number, please?"

But the lady had already closed her door in my face. Should I knock again, to find out the number? No; Rue du Petit-Muse was short, I knew, and I could inquire. My conversation with Madame Dumarteau was not long; she had not an amiable look, but I preferred her ill humor to Madame Piquette's coquetries. At all events, I lost no time there.

I started for Rue du Petit-Muse. If I had not known my Paris, Mademoiselle Rosette could have undertaken to instruct me. I told the cabman to stop at the corner of Rue Saint-Antoine, and went into one of the first houses, where I said to the concierge:

"Madame Lumignon?"

"This is the place, monsieur."

Faith! I was in luck. The next step was to inquire which floor; I was afraid that I could guess beforehand: I should surely be directed to the seventh.

"Which floor, concierge?"

"At the rear of the courtyard, to the left, ground floor."

Ah! I breathed again! The aunts were coming down in the world.

Madame Lumignon was a little hunchback with a bright eye and a shrill voice, like most hunchbacks. As soon as I mentioned her niece's name, she smiled.

"Ah! you want Rosette," she said; "for Madame Berlingot, I suppose? Yes, yes, I'm used to that; it's always the

same song! If I was evil-minded, I might suspect something! But I wash my hands of her. In the first place, Rosette don't pay any attention to us; she's such a wilful creature! So much the worse for her! I've warned her!"

"But, madame, she is wanted to mend a cashmere shawl."

"I know! I know! A fine thing, that cashmere shawl is!"

"Well, madame, is mademoiselle your niece with you?"

"With me! oh, yes! of course! When she comes here, she don't stay long enough to mould."

"Where can I find her, then?"

"At her Aunt Chamouillet's, perhaps; but I won't swear to it."

"Madame Chamouillet's address, if you please?"

"Rue Madame, No. 4, near the Luxembourg."

I took leave of the hunchbacked aunt, who looked after me with a cunning leer. I returned to my cab, and said to the driver:

"Rue Madame, near the Luxembourg."

"I say, monsieur, if you've got many more trips like this to make, my horse will leave us on the road."

"No; whatever happens, this is the last but one."

We reached Rue Madame with difficulty; the horse was at his last gasp. I unearthed Aunt Chamouillet. I was told to go up to the second floor, where I found a woman washing on the landing; and just as I was climbing the last stairs, that woman, who, I presume, had not heard me coming, turned and emptied a large pail of soapsuds on the staircase. I was drenched to the waist.

I swore like a pirate, whereupon the woman calmly observed:

"Why are the gutters all stopped up? It don't do any good to complain, they don't clean 'em out; and I must empty my water somewhere."

"But you might at least look before you empty it."

"Did you get any of it?"

"Parbleu! I am drenched!"

"That'll dry, and it don't spot."

"Madame Chamouillet, if you please?"

"That's me. Have you got something you want washed?"

"No, madame; I am sufficiently washed now! I would like to speak with Mademoiselle Rosette, your niece."

Madame Chamouillet had returned to her washing; she paid much more attention to her linen than to what I said to her.

"I come, madame, on the part of Madame Berlingot, on Rue——"

"All right, monsieur, all right!—How can anyone soil linen like that! Look, monsieur, I leave it to you!"

And she took from her tub a shirt, which she started to spread out for my inspection. I evaded that demonstration; but, as she put the shirt back in the tub, she threw a wet stocking in my face. I tried to take it calmly; I wiped my face and continued:

"Will you kindly tell me where Mademoiselle Rosette is?"

"Where Rosette is? How do you suppose I know? Oh, yes! on my word! As if anyone ever knows where she is!"

"What, madame! isn't she here?"

"No, monsieur.—It breaks my back to scrub this!"

"But where shall I go to find her?"

"Try at her aunts'."

"I have already seen six of them, counting you, madame. I have called on Mesdames Falourdin, Riflot, Piquette, Dumarteau, Lumignon, and yourself. Who is the one that's left for me to see?"

"Madame Cavalos, Rue de la Lune, No. 19. But I won't answer——"

As she spoke, Madame Chamouillet let a piece of soap slip out of her hands, and my waistcoat had the benefit of it. I had had enough; I fled from the laundress; I seemed to be pursued by soapsuds.

"Rue de la Lune, No. 19," I said to my cabman. Luckily, that took us back into my own neighborhood, and I was sure that this last quest could not be fruitless: Rosette must be there. That was the last of the aunts, and she had told me positively that when she was not with one of them I would find her with another. What a pity that I had not been sent to Rue de la Lune at the outset!

I reached the end of my journeyings. I was directed to Madame Cavalos's lodging on the entresol. I found a very stout, thickset, little old woman, who greeted me with an affable bow and waited for me to speak.

"Madame Cavalos?"

"Bonjour, monsieur! very well, I thank you."

"I wanted to speak to your niece, Mademoiselle Rosette."

"Yes, monsieur, I don't change much; that's what everybody tells me."

"I come from Madame Berlingot."

"You thought I didn't live so low? I used to be higher up, but I've moved down."

What did that mean? Madame Cavalos seemed to be stone deaf. I stepped nearer to her, and shouted at the top of my lungs:

"I want to see Mademoiselle Rosette, your niece!"

"You say you have come about my lease?"

That was most trying. The woman was a fool. I gave up speaking and made a lot of strange gestures, trying to arouse her curiosity at least. Motioning to me to wait, she left the room, and returned with an ear trumpet, which she held to her ear, saying:

"I ain't deaf; but some days I can't hear so well as others."

Poor old woman! she ought never to have laid aside her trumpet. I repeated my question, and that time she replied:

"My niece Rosette? Why, she ain't here, monsieur."

"What, madame! not here? Why, where on earth can I find her, then?"

"Oh! that's easily done, monsieur. She must be with her Aunt Falourdin, Faubourg Saint-Denis, corner of Rue Chabrol."

At that, I gave up all hope of finding my grisette; I had no desire to begin the circuit of the aunts anew; I had had quite enough of them. I bade my cabman take me home. It was five o'clock, and we had been on the road since noon! Ah! Mademoiselle Rosette! Mademoiselle Rosette! you had shown me aunts of all colors! What a day! Jason was certainly more fortunate than I: after many perils, he obtained the Golden Fleece; I had faced seven aunts, and had not obtained Rosette!

XXXVIII

THE DEALER IN SPONGES

As I entered my apartment, Pomponne came to meet me with his expression that denoted news.

"There's someone waiting for you, monsieur, who's been here quite a long while. But I didn't know that monsieur would be away so long; he did not tell me."

"Can it be that Rosette has come while I have been running after her?"

"No, monsieur; it ain't Mamzelle Rosette?"

"Is it Madame Dauberny, then?"

"No, monsieur; it's a person of our sex."

"Oh! how you annoy me, Pomponne! I ought to have gone to see who was there, instead of listening to you."

I went at once into my salon, and found Ballangier sitting in a corner with a book in his hand.

I was agreeably surprised to find that he was neatly dressed. He wore a gray blouse, but it was spotlessly clean; his trousers were well brushed, his shoes polished; he had a clean white collar and a black cravat. It was the costume of a well-behaved mechanic who was a credit to his trade.

He came to meet me, with a timid air, saying:

"I ask your pardon, Charles, for waiting for you; I did wrong, perhaps; but when I came, about two o'clock, your servant said you would soon be back; and so, as I was anxious to see you, I said to myself: 'As long as I'm here, I may as well stay.'"

"You did well, Ballangier, very well; I am very glad to see you, too. Let me look at you. From your dress, and the expression of self-content that I can read in your face, I am sure that you are behaving better now."

"That is true; at all events, I am trying to. I am working for a manufacturer in Faubourg Saint-Antoine—I had a letter of recommendation to him."

"From whom, pray?"

Ballangier twisted his cap about in his hands as he continued:

"From an excellent man I used to work for long ago, and who never despaired of me. They took me on trial, at first. The master had heard very bad accounts of me, but I worked so well that after a while he got to be less strict with me; then he increased my pay, without my asking, and now he says everywhere that he's satisfied with me."

"Ah! that is splendid, my friend. And you were glad to tell me all this, because you knew that it would give me great pleasure, weren't you?"

"Why, yes, I thought it would."

"Thanks, my friend, for thinking of that. Indeed, you cannot conceive how I rejoice to learn of the change that has taken place in you! But you will keep on, Ballangier; now that you have started on the right path, you won't leave it again, will you? Besides, you must surely be a happier man, now that you are earning your living, and can hold your head erect boldly, without fear of being arrested by a creditor, or assailed by a wife or mother whose husband or son you have led astray; without reading on the faces of honest folk the contempt that evil livers always inspire! Instead of that, you will be made welcome, made much of, courted by respectable families; a father will no longer dread to see his daughter, or a brother his sister, on your arm. You will be loved, esteemed, highly considered. Yes, highly considered; for there is no trade, no career, in which an honest man may not acquire that consideration which mere wealth, unaccompanied by probity, cannot acquire. Tell me if all this is not preferable to a life of debauchery, which makes you either a brute or a madman most of the time; to the false friendship of those wretches who know nothing but idleness, and sometimes something much worse, who extol all the vices, who try to cast ridicule on merit and hard work, because other men's merit gnaws at their envy-ridden hearts, and, being unable to attain it, they do their utmost to crush it?"

"Oh, yes! you are right, Charles: I am far happier! I reflect now; I feel that I am an entirely different man. I read a good deal; I am fond of reading, and it used to be impossible for me to read five minutes at a time."

"Read, you cannot do better; but select good books; bad writers are worse than false friends, for we have them under our hand every minute; their treacherous counsels lead feeble or excitable minds astray; there is no more dangerous companion for a tête-à-tête than an evil book."

"You must guide me; you must give me a list of authors whose works will be profitable reading for me."

"I will do better than that. Come with me."

I led Ballangier to my book shelves, from which I took Racine, Molière, Montesquieu, Fénelon, and La Fontaine.

"There, those are for you," I said; "take these books home with you, and read them carefully and with profit. Some

will seem to you a little severe and serious; but the others, while they instruct you, will make you laugh. Learn by heart the great, the immortal Molière. He castigated the vices and absurdities of his time; but as vices unluckily belong to all times, as men are no better to-day than they ever were, as we meet in the world every day *tartufes, précieuses ridicules, avarés, and bourgeois gentilshommes*, Molière, like all authors who depict nature, is and will be of all epochs.

"Rien n'est beau que le vrai; le vrai seul est aimable."^[A]

That maxim is earnestly denied by those poets who have never succeeded in being natural. They put a conventional jargon in the mouths of all their characters, and call that style! In their works, the peasant talks just like the noble; the man of the people uses as fine phrases as the advocate; the maid-servant indulges in metaphors like the *grande dame*; and they call that style! Posterity will do justice to all such stuff. Bathos sinks and is drowned, while the natural sails smoothly along and always rides out the storm."

"What! are all these fine books for me?"

"Yes; make a bundle of them and take them away."

"Oh! thanks, Charles!"

"When you have read them with profit, I will give you more."

"You are too kind! But I mean to make myself worthy of— Well, you will see. Meanwhile, I've brought this back to you."

He took from his pocket a small paper-covered package.

"What is there inside?"

"Twenty-nine francs."

"Why do you want to give me that?"

"Because I saw Piaulard and tried to pay him; but he was already paid; a—person had settled with him. You probably know that person, and I would like the twenty-nine francs to be returned."

"Well done, my friend! This act of yours proves the return of worthy sentiments. But you need not worry; the person in question was paid long ago. So, keep the money, and if you need any more to buy anything come to me."

"Oh! I am not short of funds now. I have never been so rich. I don't know how it happens."

"You don't know? Why, it's very easy to understand; you spend vastly less, and earn vastly more; that's the whole secret of living in comfort."

Ballangier tied up his books, we shook hands affectionately, and he went away content, leaving me very happy. What a contrast to our previous interviews!

The next day, I was still resting from my peregrinations of the previous afternoon, and stoically making up my mind to wear mourning for Mademoiselle Rosette, when the pretty brunette suddenly burst into my room, vivacious, sprightly, and gay as always. She came to me and held out her hand.

"Bonjour, monsieur! Are you still angry with me?"

"Angry? Why, it wasn't I who was angry; it was yourself."

"Oh! that's all over; let's not say any more about that; I don't bear any malice, and I don't know how to sulk. I say, did you go and ask for me at Aunt Falourdin's?"

"At Aunt Falourdin's? You put it mildly. If you should say at all seven of your aunts', that would be nearer the truth!"

"Oh! that's impossible! You went to the whole seven? you saw the whole assortment? Ha! ha! ha! Well, you must have had a merry time!"

Rosette was seized with a paroxysm of frantic laughter, during which she could only repeat:

"He saw my seven aunts! Poor, dear boy! he saw my seven aunts!"

"Yes, I saw them all; and all in one day!"

"That was your Waterloo! I am sure that it will remain engraved on your memory! I say, I'll bet that you'd rather go up the Marly hill seven times in succession than go through that day's work again, eh?"

"I believe you. There is one Dame Piquette, in particular, who lives on Rue aux Ours. Sapristi! I didn't feel at all comfortable in my tête-à-tête with her!"

"Did she make eyes at you? I'll bet she made eyes at you! She's an old coquette, who declares that she can't go out without being besieged. Oh! my poor Charles!"

"But all that would have been nothing, mademoiselle, if I had succeeded in finding you. It would seem that you accept hospitality elsewhere than with your aunts?"

Rosette made a little grimace, which I interpreted as meaning that she did not quite know what course to adopt; at last she said:

"I was with one of my friends. My aunts are always at me to get married, and that tires me; I shall end by dropping all of 'em."

"I should say that you were doing that already."

"Come, let's not say any more about that. We're not cross any more, are we? and you'll take me out to dinner, and we'll have a nice little feed—what do you say? Yes, you will, it's all settled; and we'll go into the country—it's a fine day—and roll on the grass."

How can one resist a pretty minx who proposes rolling on the grass? I was on the point of signing the treaty of peace with Mademoiselle Rosette, when the bell rang.

"My dear girl," I said to my grisette, "if it should happen to be the lady who was here the other day, I trust that you won't make another scene?"

"No, no, don't be afraid; I saw that I was wrong; she left me in possession with such a good grace! I don't bear your friend any grudge now."

At that moment, we detected a strong odor of essence of rose, and Rosette exclaimed:

"*Dame!* that lady uses plenty of perfumery! what a satchet bag!"

But the door opened, and no lady appeared, but Balloquet, in his best clothes and with fresh gloves.

"Oh! I beg pardon, my dear Rochebrune! You are with a lady, and your servant didn't tell me! I will go, and come again another day."

"No, stay, Balloquet, stay; mademoiselle will not object.—Isn't that so, Rosette? you are willing that my friend should stay?"

"To be sure! I'm no savage; company don't scare me."

And Rosette put her mouth to my ear and whispered:

"Is he a perfumer?"

"No; a doctor."

"A doctor! Does he treat his patients with essences? He gives out such an odor—you'd think he was the Grand Turk!"

Balloquet meanwhile said to me in an undertone:

"Good! I don't frighten this one away! She isn't like the little blonde."

"Oh, no! she's not the same sort at all."

Balloquet had been with us but a moment, when the bell rang again, and this time Frédérique appeared.

"The servant told me that there were three of you," she said, dropping carelessly upon a chair; "and that's why I ventured to come in. Did I do wrong, Rochebrune?"

"No, madame; you are always welcome. And mademoiselle here will take advantage of the opportunity to express her regret for the unseemly words she used to you the other day."

"Yes, madame," said Rosette, walking up to Madame Dauberny. "I was wrong; I'm hot-headed; but turn your hand over, and I forget all about it. Are you still angry with me?"

"Not in the least, mademoiselle," replied Frédérique, trying to smile; "I assure you that I had forgotten it entirely. But I trust that I shall not arouse your jealousy again."

"Oh! no, madame! Charles has told me that he never loved you, and that's all I ask."

Frédérique bit her lips. I, for my part, was conscious of a sensation that I cannot describe. I would gladly have horsewhipped Rosette, I believe, if it had been possible. Women have a way of adjusting things that often produces the contrary effect.

"Madame is acquainted with my sentiments, mademoiselle," I stammered, awkwardly enough; "she appreciates them——"

"Enough, my friend!" interposed Frédérique; "sentiments are to be proved, not put in words. But, mon Dieu! how sweet your room smells! There's an odor of—of rose; yes, it's surely rose;—is it not, mademoiselle?"

"Yes, madame," said Rosette; "that smell has been here ever since monsieur le docteur came in.—Do you bathe in essence of rose, monsieur?"

Balloquet, who was walking about the room playing the dandy, passed his hand through his hair as he replied:

"Not exactly, mademoiselle; but, in truth, I am very fond of the odor of rose; I sometimes perfume my linen with an essence that I get from Constantinople."

"Well, frankly, monsieur, you use too much of it; you smell too strong! I wouldn't like to eat a truffled turkey with you."

"Why not, mademoiselle?"

"Because I should smell nothing but rose, instead of the odor of truffles; and a truffled turkey *à la rose* wouldn't be good, I know."

"I think that I have had the pleasure of meeting madame before," said Balloquet, saluting Frédérique.

"Yes, monsieur; on a certain day, or rather night, when my presence was useful to both of you gentlemen."

"Ah, yes! the two wedding parties, wasn't it, madame?"

"Yes, monsieur; I only looked in at yours, but it seemed to be very lively."

"It was, indeed, madame; that was the Bocal wedding; it was very hot there!"

"The Bocal wedding!" cried Rosette. "Why, I know Bocal; he's a distiller on Rue Montmartre, and his daughter married Monsieur Pamphile Girie, dealer in sponges."

"That's the man; do you know him?"

"Oh, yes! that is to say, I know Freluchon; it's through him that I know all that."

"Freluchon!" said I; "it seems to me that I've heard that name."

"Freluchon was Monsieur Bocal's head clerk, and he was courting Mademoiselle Pétronille; and when she married that ass of a Pamphile Girie, she worked so well with her feet and hands, that Freluchon left Monsieur Bocal and went into the sponge trade; he became first clerk to Pétronille—you can guess the sequel! But it seems that Monsieur Pamphile has a mother who *sees everything* and *knows everything*, just like the late *Solitaire*; so Mamma Girie put a flea in her son's ear on the subject of Freluchon. Monsieur Pamphile wanted to discharge the clerk, but Madame Pétronille said he shouldn't. The husband and wife had a row; Monsieur Bocal tried to step in and take his daughter's part; Mère Girie pummelled Monsieur Bocal; they sent for the magistrate, the police, the neighbors, and the concierge; there was such a row that the omnibuses couldn't get through the street. As a result of that row, Pétronille left her husband and went back to her father; Pamphile neglected his shop to go on sprees; and Freluchon finally bought out his sponge business, and would like now to set me up in it with him; for I must tell you that my gentleman has forgotten his Pétronille and fallen in love with me, and buries me in billets-doux and sponges; on my birthday, he sent me one as big as a pumpkin. 'Monsieur,' says I, 'what use do you expect me to make of this immense marine plant?'—'Mademoiselle, I would like to cover you with it.'—And there you are! With the seven suitors favored by my aunts, that makes eight humming-birds who aspire to enter into wedlock with me."

A PARTY OF FOUR

Rosette rattled all this off almost without drawing a breath. We laughed at her story, and she was well pleased with her successful performance.

"But, by the way, Monsieur Charles, all that don't make me forget that you're going to take me into the country to dinner. And while we're on that subject—I've got an idea, and I'll tell you what it is; I tell all my ideas. Suppose we all four go and dine together, as we're in a mood for laughing; we'll have some sport and talk nonsense—what do you say?"

Rosette's proposition seemed to me so extraordinary that I had not as yet thought of any fitting reply, when, to my amazement, Frédérique exclaimed:

"For my part, I agree. I am at liberty, and, on my word, I shall not be sorry to have a little sport, especially as I got out of the way of it long ago."

"Ah! you're fine, you are! I love you with all my heart, now!" said Rosette, slapping Frédérique on the back. "And you, Monsieur Larose, why don't you say something?"

"I?" said Balloquet; "if you mean what you say, I'm game; nothing would suit me better."

"Do I mean it! I hope you don't think we're going to dine on air, do you? Well, my dear friend, don't you think my plan's a good one? you don't seem enchanted with it!"

"I? I beg your pardon; I will do whatever you wish."

"But," said Frédérique, "Rochebrune would have preferred to dine alone with you, mademoiselle."

"*Ouiche!*" cried Rosette; "as if we hadn't time enough to see each other! Come, is it settled?"

"It is settled, agreed, decided."

"Let's start, then; it's after two o'clock already."

"Go and call a cab, Pomponne, and we'll keep it the rest of the day."

"Ah! what *chic!* There's only one thing that annoys me now; and that will spoil my enjoyment at dinner."

"What's that?"

"If monsieur le docteur might smell less strong of rose! I should prefer I don't know what to that smell. Try going out in the street and walking in—no matter what!"

"There is a way of satisfying you, Mademoiselle Rosette," I said, walking up to Balloquet.—"Come, Balloquet, we are all friends here; don't be stiff about it, but allow me to offer you another pair of gloves, and take off those you are wearing. I venture to prefer this petition in the name of these ladies' nerves, and in the name of our appetites, which would vanish before this odor of rose."

Balloquet had a noble impulse: he took his gloves off and threw them out of the window. Rosette laughed till she cried.

"Ah! it was the gloves," she cried, "cleansed gloves, of course, of course! But your dealer cheated you; they clean them now so that they don't smell of anything."

Pomponne announced that the cab was waiting. While Mademoiselle Rosette stood before my mirror, busily engaged in putting on her bonnet, I went to Frédérique, and found an opportunity to say in her ear:

"You are not joking—you are really willing to dine with a grisette?"

"Why not? you are going to, yourself."

"But I am a man."

"Well! I am one of your male friends. Don't men sometimes take their friends with them on a pleasure party? But if it will annoy you too much, I will not go."

"Oh! do not think that, madame! But I was afraid—I thought——"

I had no time to say any more; Rosette came toward us, saying:

"The cab's waiting; shall we go?"

"Let us go," Frédérique replied.

I was embarrassed for a moment; I intended to offer my arm to Madame Dauberny, but she had already accepted Balloquet's, and Rosette took possession of mine.

"Come on, monsieur! What on earth's the matter with you to-day? Since you've seen my aunts, you're very absent-minded!"

We entered the cab. Rosette insisted that I should sit opposite her. I obeyed. It seemed strange not to desire that arrangement, but I should have preferred to be facing Frédérique.

The cabman asked us where we were going. We looked at each other and said:

"Ah! that's so; where are we going?"

"Let the ladies decide."

"It makes absolutely no difference to me," said Frédérique.

"In that case," said Rosette, "I propose Saint-Mandé; if we want to go as far as Saint-Maur, I know a delicious little walk; you only have to go up a little way and then down."

"Saint-Mandé it is!"

We started. Rosette was in insanely high spirits. According to her habit, she said whatever came into her head, and sometimes her reflections were very comical. Frédérique also seemed to be in an amiable humor. Balloquet rivalled Rosette in gayety; I thought that I could detect a purpose on his part to play the gallant with Madame Dauberny. I cannot say why I considered that very idiotic of him. Surely she was an exceedingly attractive woman! And why should not he, a devoted admirer of the sex, try to please her? But Madame Dauberny would never listen to Balloquet. While I said that to myself, I was conscious of a feeling of irritation. Had I any right to take it amiss that Balloquet should make love to Frédérique, to whom I was nothing more than a friend?

It followed that I was the only one of the party who was not hilarious. Rosette, noticing it, said to me from time to time:

"I say, my dear man, what's the matter with you, anyway? We are all talking and laughing—you're the only one who don't say anything. Can it be that you are really cracked over one of my aunts?—You must excuse him, madame, for he met my seven aunts yesterday, and that's quite enough to destroy his peace of mind."

I excused myself as best I could; I tried to laugh, but I made rather a failure of it; and the thing that vexed me most of all was that the more serious I became, the more Madame Dauberny laughed and jested. She held her own with Rosette in nonsense and droll remarks. Balloquet seemed enchanted; he became more and more attentive to his vis-à-vis, whose witty sallies completed the fascination begun by her beauty. For my part, I did not enjoy myself at all.

At last we arrived at Saint-Mandé, and left the cab at the gate leading into the wood. We went at once to Grue's, to order our dinner and engage a private room; then we strolled away in the direction of Saint-Maur.

Balloquet took possession once more of Frédérique's arm, which she laughingly accorded to him. It seemed to me that she laughed very freely with him. Rosette took my arm.

"Is it the habit to walk arm in arm in the country?" I asked, in an indifferent tone. "I thought that everyone walked—or ran, on his own account."

"For my part, I am very happy to be madame's escort," said Balloquet, with a smile.

"Do you mean that it's a bore to you to give me your arm?" asked Rosette, pinching me till I was black and blue.

"O mademoiselle! the idea!"

"What's that—*mademoiselle*? Call me *mademoiselle* again, and see what happens!"

"Mon Dieu! Rosette, you get angry about nothing!"

"About nothing! I want you to *thou* me! Let's not walk so fast."

"But the others are away ahead."

"Well! we shall overtake them in time. Don't be afraid of losing your way with me, you ugly monster!"

"When people go out together, it's for the purpose of being together."

"Oh! how mad you make me! I suppose we ought all to tie ourselves together, for fear of losing each other, eh? Besides, how do you know that they are not just as well pleased not to have us on their heels?"

"Why so?"

"*Why so* is delicious! If you can't see that your friend's making soft eyes at that lady, you must be near-sighted."

"Do you think so? He won't get ahead very fast."

"What do you know about it? Oh! these men! such conceit! Because she wouldn't have you, perhaps, you think she won't have anybody!—Let's not walk so fast!"

"That lady is very willing to laugh and jest; but with her it isn't safe to——"

"Ta! ta! ta! Bless my soul! she's a goddess, perhaps, and we must offer sacrifices to her!—Come, kiss me!"

"O Rosette! can you think of such a thing?"

"Yes, I do think of such a thing; kiss me at once!"

"Suppose the others should turn and see us—what should we look like?"

"We should look like two people kissing. What harm is there in that? Don't they know that you're my lover and I'm your mistress?"

"That's no reason. There is such a thing as propriety."

"Oh! I have no patience with you! Kiss me quick, or I'll shriek!"

I kissed her. Luckily, the others did not turn. I dropped my companion's arm on the pretext of looking for violets, and overtook our friends.

"What makes you walk so fast?" I asked Balloquet; "if you prefer not to stay with us, that's a different matter; but it isn't very sociable."

Frédérique burst out laughing, and Balloquet made signs to me which I considered foolish.

"See how the kindest intentions are sometimes misinterpreted," said Frédérique; "we thought that we were doing you a favor, by arranging a tête-à-tête for you with your pretty brunette."

"Oh! madame, you carry your kindness too far."

"So far as I am concerned," said Balloquet, "you needn't thank me; in remaining with madame, I acted entirely in my own interest."

Then he came close to me and whispered:

"My friend, she is adorable! Wit to the tips of her finger-nails; fine figure, lovely eyes, distinguished face, original disposition! I can't understand why you've never been in love with her. For my part, I'm caught; I'm in for it!"

"You are making a mistake; you'll waste your time."

"Why so? nobody knows! She laughs heartily at what I say."

"Well! what about that bunch of violets?" asked Rosette, as she joined us.

"I didn't find anything but dandelions and coltsfoot."

"Thanks! then you can keep your bouquet; I don't want it."

"Suppose we stroll back in the direction of our dinner?" said Frédérique.

"Yes, madame is right," said Rosette; "especially as walking's very monotonous. I have a lover who's in such low spirits to-day! Imagine, madame, that he's never suggested rolling on the grass with me!"

Frédérique cast a mocking glance in my direction.

"If my companion had made such a proposition to me," murmured Balloquet, puffing himself up, "I should have accepted with thanks; I would have rolled like an ass."

"Oh! but you're a gallant *à la rose*, you are! Why, I almost had to force monsieur to kiss me!"

"Oh! what things you say, Rosette!"

"What's that? Don't lovers always kiss? Do you suppose madame thinks that we pass our time whispering in each

other's ears?"

Madame Dauberny turned her face away to laugh. I wished that I were heaven knows where. I should certainly remember that excursion to the country.

We returned to the restaurant. There I tried to recover my good humor. In the first place, as the table was round, I was naturally seated between Frédérique and Rosette—no more with one than with the other. They served us a delicious dinner, with choice wines.

"Good!" said Rosette; "this was well ordered! These gentlemen have distinguished themselves! I give this pomard my esteem."

"Never fear," said Balloquet; "we shall have some ladies' wines too."

"What do you mean by ladies' wines? sweet ones, I suppose?"

"Exactly."

"I warn you that I can't endure your sweet wines, except champagne; and unless madame cares for them——"

"Not at all," said Frédérique.

"Strike off your sweet wines, then. Bah! they make me sick; I can't drink 'em! But these—just ask Charles how I punish 'em!"

"I should say that it isn't necessary to ask me," I said; "it's self-evident."

"Does that make you cross, my dear boy? Don't you like to have your Rosette hold her own with you to-day? Are you going to be in the sulks at table too? Ah! madame, my aunts have spoiled him, and no mistake; he was much nicer before he went the rounds of them."

Madame Dauberny nudged my knee and whispered:

"Be more agreeable, or she will make a scene with you."

I strove to put myself in harmony with the general merriment. Rosette chattered incessantly; Balloquet sang, with his eyes fixed on Frédérique; she laughed at my grisette's sallies, and from time to time told us some very amusing anecdotes.

"Ah! if I could tell stories like madame," cried Rosette, "I know what I'd do!"

"What would you do?" asked Balloquet.

"I wouldn't do anything else. I'd tell stories all day, and make them up all night.—Kiss me, Charles!"

"Sapristi! Rosette, are we going to begin that again?"

"Do you hear him, madame? He refuses to kiss me, the villain!"

"Mademoiselle," I said, in a serious tone, "I am sorry to be obliged to inform you that there are occasions when such liberties are permissible, and others when we must abstain from them; you should understand that."

Rosette pushed her chair away from the table, muttering:

"It wasn't worth while to bring me with you, just to say such things as that to me."

With that, she put her hand over her eyes and began to weep. The devil! That was the climax! I was in torment.

Frédérique tried to console Rosette, and said to me:

"Come, come, monsieur, don't make mademoiselle unhappy; she is right; you choose a very inopportune time to lecture her. Kiss her at once, and make peace with her."

I obeyed; whereupon Balloquet exclaimed:

"Mon Dieu! I would not wait to be asked twice, if someone would allow me to kiss her."

It was extraordinary what an ass the fellow seemed to me to make of himself!

Luckily, with Rosette laughter always followed tears. She speedily forgot her grievance, and thought of nothing but doing honor to the champagne, which made its appearance just then. Frédérique held her own with her, but did not lose her head. Balloquet, who was deeply impressed by the way in which those two bore themselves at table, tried to surpass them, got very tipsy, and nearly strangled himself pouring down champagne.

"Well done!" said Rosette; "that'll teach you to try to pour down wine like that; it seems to me such a stupid way! What's the use of drinking anything good, if you don't taste it, if you don't get the flavor of it? You throw it down your neck, as if it was a medicine you were afraid of smelling! How sensible that is! You might as well drink cheap claret; it would have the same effect as champagne."

Balloquet succeeded in ceasing to cough, and a moment later, when we were a little quieter than usual, he said to me:

"By the way, Charles, have you had any news of the man of the ring?"

"No, no, I haven't—found him yet. Why don't you drink, Balloquet?"

I was afraid that the young doctor would be guilty of some indiscretion, and I tried to change the subject. But Rosette chimed in:

"What's that? He said something about a ring. There must be a woman in that story, and I want to hear it."

"Yes, mademoiselle, yes; it is a story about a woman."

"But a very sad one," said I, interrupting Balloquet; "this is not at all a fitting time to tell it."

"Why not? I like sad things too; I like plays that make you cry. Oh! Monsieur Larose, do tell us the story."

"With pleasure, mademoiselle!"

I trembled lest Balloquet should disclose what I had concealed from Frédérique. He did not know that the man of the ring was Monsieur Dauberny; but if he should mention the name Bouqueton, Frédérique would know at once that the man was her husband. I tried to make signs to Balloquet to hold his peace; but he did not look at me, and began his tale.

Frédérique said nothing; but she watched us closely and did not lose a word of what the young doctor said. Stammering and hesitating a little, he told poor Annette's story; but he did not mention the assassin's name.

"What a ghastly story!" exclaimed Frédérique, with a shudder.

"It's horrible!" cried Rosette. "Oh! what an abominable man! But didn't the poor girl tell you his name?"

"Yes, yes," replied Balloquet, "she told us. The devil take the name! Would you believe that I can't remember it?—But you know it, Rochebrune, as you know the man."

"You know that villain, Charles? Oh! but you must have had him arrested, then?"

"No, I could not; we have no evidence."

"But what about that ring that he gave the poor girl?"

"That ring I have at home. I am keeping it carefully; some day, I hope that it will help me—to avenge the poor girl."

"And you won't tell us the man's name?"

"What good would it do? The whole thing is too shocking. The criminal's name had better remain a secret until the victim is avenged."

Frédérique did not say a word, but she kept her eyes fastened upon me all the while. The time for returning to Paris arrived, and I was not sorry. The story of Annette had saddened Rosette and made Frédéric very thoughtful. We returned to our cab. Balloquet continued to do the amiable with Madame Dauberny; I verily believe that he asked her permission to call to pay his respects. What a self-sufficient puppy! I did not hear her reply. Rosette pinched me, probably because I was not listening to what she said.

I wanted to take Frédéric home; Balloquet insisted, on the contrary, that Rosette and I should be set down first. We were on the point of quarrelling. Rosette said nothing, and I thought that she had fallen asleep. Madame Dauberny put an end to our discussion by calling to the cabman to stop on the boulevard. She hastily alighted, bade us adieu, and hurried away. But Balloquet instantly opened the door, crying:

"I won't allow that lady to go away alone; the idea! I am going to escort her!"

I tried to hold him back by seizing his coat tails. I told him that Madame Dauberny did not want his escort, that she preferred to go alone.

He would not listen to me. He leaped out of the cab, tearing off one whole skirt of his coat, and disappeared.

"What's the matter with you to-night, my friend?" said Rosette; "you interfere with everybody; you find fault with whatever we do, and tear people's coats!"

"That doesn't concern you."

"How polite my lover is to-day!"

"To which aunt shall I take you this evening, mademoiselle?"

"Faubourg Saint-Denis, as usual."

"By the way, you haven't told me yet where you were perching yesterday, when I had the kindness—I might well say, the folly—to look for you at all your aunts' lodgings."

"Do you want to make me unhappy?"

"Answer me!"

"I told you that I was with a friend."

"Oh, yes! at the sponge dealer's, perhaps?"

"What an outrage! Instead of saying such things, you would do well to kiss me. It seems that we don't get beyond compliments to-day!"

In truth, she was right; I had rebuked her enough all day; the least I could do was to compensate her at that moment.

XL

A SICK CHILD

I passed a wretched night. I was eager to know if Madame Dauberny had allowed Balloquet to escort her, and if he had made any progress in my friend's good graces. Why was I so eager to know that? I myself could not understand. As I was not that lady's lover, as I had never thought of mentioning the subject of love to her, ought I to take it amiss that others should mention it? I began to believe that one could be jealous in friendship as well as in love. If Frédéric should have a lover, that would lessen the attachment that she seemed to entertain for me; doubtless that was the reason why it pained me to think that she should allow anyone to make love to her. That was selfishness, I admit; but what was I to do?

I arose early. I was strongly inclined to call on Balloquet, but I had forgotten his address. I had an idea that it was Cité Vindé; but what should I ask him. Should I not cut a very absurd figure, going there to question him? No, I would not go. Still, I would have liked to know whether he walked home with Frédéric.

While I was hesitating, uncertain as to what I should do, Pomponne opened my door and announced with emphasis:

"Madame Potrelle, concierge or portress!"

The good woman came in, bowing and apologizing for disturbing me. I asked her what brought her there.

"Mon Dieu! monsieur, I have come again about that poor woman—Madame Landernoy. I wanted to know if monsieur's intentions were still the same."

"What do you mean? what intentions?"

"About the work—about her taking care of monsieur's linen."

"What difference does it make whether my intentions are the same, as that young woman is convinced that I have none but evil ones? as she believes that I am laying a trap for her, in concert with those scoundrels who deceived her? Faith! Madame Potrelle, one gets tired of being constantly suspected. If it is pleasant to do good, it is painful to come in contact with ingrates. In fact, I confess that your tenant had gone wholly out of my mind, and I assure you that you would not have heard from me again."

"Oh! mon Dieu! monsieur, I can understand that. But still, if you knew how miserable that young woman is at this minute! For near a month her child has been sick—suffering all the time; the little creature needs the fresh air; so the mother takes her child out to walk, and meanwhile she don't do any work; but her little Marie's health before everything! She was a sweet little thing. She's fourteen months old already—how time flies! Madame Landernoy goes without everything herself on the child's account; and now she hasn't got any work—or what little she does get is such poor stuff—eight sous a day! Think of taking care of a child with that! So I happened to think of you, monsieur, because you were always so kind to that young woman; and I've always judged you right, I have! And I says to Mignonne: 'I'm going to see Monsieur Rochebrune and ask him for some work.'—And this time she says: 'Yes, go! go!' For she looked at her little girl, who seemed to be in pain; and what wouldn't she do to get the means of helping her!"

"And she will go so far as to accept work from me?"

"Oh! you mustn't blame her, monsieur; misfortune makes people unjust so often! Does monsieur refuse?"

"No, certainly not. Look over my commode and my closets, and take whatever you choose."

The good woman made haste to examine my effects. She made up a large bundle of linen, hastily, as if she were afraid I would change my mind; then she rolled it all up in her apron, saying:

"Will monsieur take an account of what I've got?"

"No, Madame Potrelle, that is quite unnecessary; I know with whom I am dealing, and I am not suspicious myself."

The concierge thanked me, bowed again, and took her leave, saying that the work would be attended to immediately.

Is it conceivable that during all the time that Madame Potrelle was talking about her tenant, I thought of nothing but Frédérique and Balloquet? Ah! how small a thing it takes to give a new turn to our thoughts! We are kind or cruel to others only as it gratifies our caprices. That truth is most discreditable to mankind!

I had not fully determined what course to pursue, but I decided to go out; and at my door I found myself face to face with Balloquet, who was coming to see me.

"Ah! I am delighted to find you, my dear Rochebrune!"

"And I to see you. Shall we go upstairs?"

"It isn't worth while; we can talk as well, walking."

"Very good. What have you to tell me?"

"I was coming to talk to you about Madame Dauberny. Ah! my friend, what a woman! what a physique—to arouse passions!"

"I see that you are in love with her already. Well! did you overtake her yesterday?"

"Yes, I overtook her on the street. She didn't want to accept my arm, but I insisted, and she yielded."

"Ah! she took it, did she? And you escorted her home?"

"Naturally."

"And—and—how does your passion progress?"

"It's all over! oh! it's all over, absolutely!"

I made such a sudden movement that Balloquet cried:

"What struck you then? cramp in the leg? a twist in the tendon, perhaps? That catches you sometimes in walking."

"No, I—I turned my foot. But you said: 'It's all over!'—What is it that's all over? Do you mean that you are already the fortunate vanquisher of that lady?"

"No, no! not at all! just the opposite! I said it was all over, because she gave me my walking ticket, I mean my dismissal. Oh! but she did it in the most amiable, the most courteous way—impossible to take offence. You were quite right when you told me that I should waste my time."

I was conscious of a thrill of satisfaction, of happiness, that I could not describe. Poor Balloquet! I pitied him then. I pressed his arm affectionately, and said:

"Come, tell me the whole story, my friend."

"Oh! it didn't last long. I offered my arm, as I say, and she accepted it at last. On my way, I resumed my rôle of gallant—I believe that I even ventured upon a declaration of love. We drank quite a lot at dinner, you know.—Your Rosette would do well to marry a dealer in sponges!—In short, I was very animated, my words flowed like running water. She made no reply whatever.—'It's because she is moved,' I said to myself. We reached her door, and I asked permission to go upstairs for a moment. That was a little abrupt, I agree; but when one has heated the iron so hot —"

"Well?"

"At that, the lady halted in front of me and said, in a tone at once ironical and imposing: 'Monsieur Balloquet, the day is at an end; all that you have said to me thus far I have listened to as a sort of continuation of the impromptu excursion to the country which made us acquainted. During a day of follies, it is not against the law to say foolish things. To-morrow, it would be unbecoming. You are very agreeable, monsieur, and you are Rochebrune's friend; in that capacity, I shall always be glad to see you when chance brings us together. But let there be no more talk of love between us, monsieur; that is a passion to which I have said adieu. And if I should have a fancy to renew my acquaintance with it, I tell you frankly that I should not apply to you for that purpose. So, au revoir, and no ill feeling!'—With that, she held out her hand, pressed mine warmly, and shut her door in my face. Well, my friend, on my word of honor, I am not in the least offended with her; for she's no coquette; she doesn't lure you on with false hopes, but says to you at once: 'It's like this and like that!'—You know what to expect. I will be true to Satiné. Poor Satiné! But I'll tell her to put less rose on her gloves. Never mind; she's a fine woman, is Madame Dauberny; I can't understand why you've never thought of making love to her."

Did he propose to set up as an echo of Baron von Brunzbrack?

When Balloquet left me, I squeezed his hand so hard that I made him cry out. Really, he was a very good fellow, was Balloquet, and I was very fond of him! How in the devil could I ever have dreamed that Frédérique would listen to him? There was not the slightest bond of sympathy between them.

Now that I was no longer tormented by that business, I remembered Mignonne and Madame Potrelle, and how coldly and absent-mindedly I had listened to what that good woman told me. Mignonne's child was ill, and the poor mother was in need of a thousand things to nurse her properly! Suppose I should go to see her, to encourage her? She would receive me ill, perhaps; but, no matter! I no longer felt in the mood to take offence.

I started for Rue Ménilmontant. Madame Potrelle uttered a cry of surprise when she saw me; then she said:

"Mon Dieu! monsieur, have you come to take back the work that young woman needs so much?"

"No, no, far from it! But this morning I was—preoccupied, and I paid little attention to what you told me."

"That's so; monsieur wasn't like what he usually is; but, *dame!* everyone has his own troubles."

"I would like to see Mignonne, Madame Potrelle, and see for myself what her child's condition is. Do you think she will receive me?"

"Oh! yes, monsieur. She receives anybody now, if they say they know anything about children's health."

I ran quickly up the five flights. I stopped to take breath before mounting the last narrow, dark staircase. When I reached the top, I heard a sweet, melancholy voice singing:

"Veille, veille, pauvre Marie,
Pour secourir le prisonnier."

Mignonne's door was thrown wide open, for it was summer, and in that way she admitted a little air and light to her chamber, which, as we know, had no window but the round hole in the ceiling.

I stepped forward; Mignonne's back was turned toward the door; she was on her knees beside a cradle placed on two chairs. The cradle was covered with a pretty piece of flowered chintz; a flounce of the same material about the base concealed the little straw mattress on which children usually lie. It had almost a luxurious look, in striking contrast with the other contents of that poor chamber; but the most poverty-stricken mother always finds a way to adorn her child's cradle.

At that moment, Mignonne was trying to put the child to sleep by singing to her and rocking her.

I stopped in the doorway; she did not turn. She did not hear me; she had no eyes or ears for anything but her daughter. She was speaking to her:

"Well! don't we propose to go to sleep to-day, Mademoiselle Marie? Don't we propose to shut our lovely eyes? Oh, yes! we have very lovely eyes, but we must sleep, all the same; that will do us good! And then, mamma wants you to. Do you hear, dear child? mamma wants you to. Oh, yes! you hear me; you smile at me. Ah! she holds out her little arms, she wants me to take her! Mon Dieu! but it would do her so much good to sleep! But I must do what you want me to, mustn't I?"

She bent over the cradle and took up the child; then she stood up, and saw me. She cast a sad glance at me, in which I no longer saw any trace of alarm.

"Excuse me, madame," I said, stepping forward; "I ventured to come to see you, because Madame Potrelle told me this morning that your little Marie was ill. I studied medicine a little, long ago; I shall be happy if I can assist you with advice, which you may follow if you think it good!—Ah! she is very pretty, dear child!"

"Isn't she, monsieur?"

And Mignonne smiled when she saw me gazing at her daughter, who was really beautiful and already bore much resemblance to her mother. But her pretty features were drawn and worn, and denoted some internal trouble; her eyes too were sad, and it is with the eyes that children express their feelings before they have learned to talk.

"How old is she, madame?"

"Almost fifteen months, monsieur."

"She seems very big for that age, and I have no doubt that it is her precocious growth that makes her ill."

"Do you think so, monsieur? Yes, that must be one of the causes. She is very large for fifteen months; and yet she isn't stout, she isn't too big, like the children that are abnormal!"

"Allow me to feel her pulse."

I took the child's hand; the skin was dry and burning. Mignonne read in my face that I was not satisfied with that examination.

"She's feverish, isn't she, monsieur?"

"A little; growing fever; that ought not to alarm you."

"Oh! do you think she will get well, monsieur?"

"Certainly I do, madame. Her condition doesn't even seem to me serious enough for you to be worried about her."

"But, monsieur, it's more than a month that she's been like this; sometimes she's better for a day or two; then she laughs and sings—yes, monsieur, I give you my word that she sings, poor dear! To be sure, I don't suppose anybody but her mother can understand her. But then she falls back into this sort of prostration, the fever comes back, and she refuses everything. Mon Dieu! then I don't know what to do to bring a smile back to her lips. Do you suppose that she's in pain? The poor little things can't tell us where they feel sick. But she will get well, won't she, monsieur?"

"I have always believed, madame, whenever I have stood beside a man or woman whom the doctors had given over, that they might still recover, for I believe more in God than in man; I have more faith in divine Providence than in human skill, and I do not think that we know as yet all the resources of nature. But when the sufferer is a child, a creature so fresh and new in life, to despair of its recovery seems to me rank blasphemy; because in that young plant, just born, there must be the sap of youth and strength and maturity. Children become very ill in a very short time, and recover their health as quickly; their eyes, sad and haggard to-night, will laugh again to-morrow; often nothing more than a ray of sunshine is needed to effect that happy change."

"Ah! monsieur, you restore my courage!"

"You must never lose it when you are nursing a sick person. I suppose that you have a doctor?"

"Yes, monsieur; but he doesn't come often. He doesn't say much of anything. But I hope he'll come to-day; I expect him."

"Would you like me to send another one?"

"Oh! no, monsieur; I have confidence enough in this one."

"Adieu, madame! Don't grieve, don't fatigue yourself too much; remember that you must retain your own health in order to nurse your child. With your permission, I will call again to inquire for little Marie."

"Yes, monsieur."

I stepped forward and kissed the child on the forehead; her eyes fastened upon me in evident amazement. Mignonne, too, looked closely at me when I kissed her little one. But she made no objection, and responded sadly to my salutation as I left the room.

I went downstairs, and found the concierge watching for me, combing one of her cats the while.

"Well, monsieur, did you see my tenant and her little sick girl?"

"Yes, madame; I did my best to revive hope in Mignonne's heart. Her child is not well, still I think she isn't in danger. What does the doctor say?"

"*Dame!* the doctor shakes his head; he always says when he goes away: 'We shall see.'"

"He doesn't compromise himself. Meanwhile, take this money, Madame Potrelle, and see to it that the young woman and her child want nothing."

"Oh! how kind you are, monsieur! But all this money— Why, how much have you given me? A hundred and fifty francs!"

"That's an advance on the work Mignonne is going to do for me."

"An advance! But she'll never take such a sum of money, monsieur!"

"That is why I give it to you. Pay for the medicines; there's no need of Mignonne's knowing anything about it."

"But, monsieur, suppose she should ask me how I got it?"

"Arrange it to suit yourself, Madame Potrelle; say that the druggist doesn't charge anything for medicines furnished to sick people who live under the eaves; lie, if necessary; there are cases where lying is no sin. And when this is gone, come to me at once and get more—without saying anything to Mignonne."

"Ah! monsieur, what you're doing— Well! if anyone should ever speak ill of you in my presence, he'd get Brisquet in his face. This is Brisquet I'm combing."

"Au revoir, Madame Potrelle! I'll come again in a few days to hear about little Marie."

XLI

THE REWARD OF WELLDOING

Several days passed, and I had not been again to see Mignonne. Rosette had called upon me several times; but my pretty grisette talked too much about Monsieur Freluchon, the dealer in sponges; which led me to think that our relations would not last much longer.

Madame Dauberny was slightly indisposed; she sent for me to come to her, and I lost no time in complying. She seemed touched by my zeal. She was charming with me; she asked me about Rosette, but laughingly and without irony, as before; then she said, shaking her head:

"I am no longer afraid that that girl will make you lose your common sense and forget our friendship."

"Have you ever been afraid of that?"

"Why, yes. My friendship is too selfish. It is wrong, I realize that; but I am jealous, which a friend has no right to be. Scold me, monsieur."

"On the contrary, I forgive you—the more freely because I seem to have the same conception of friendship that you do; for—"

"For what? Go on!"

"Well! I too am jealous of the affection you bestow on others. And on that trip to the country, when Balloquet made love to you—that vexed me terribly."

"Really? Did you suppose for a moment that I would listen to that man?"

"Why not—if he had pleased you?"

"If he had pleased me—very good; but you know perfectly well that he could not please me—seriously. And so your friendship is jealous, too?"

She lowered her eyes as she asked that question. I took her hand and pressed it affectionately. At that moment, her maid entered and said:

"Monsieur Dauberny, who has just arrived, wishes to know if he may come to inquire for madame's health."

Frédérique was thunderstruck. She glanced at me, murmuring:

"He has come back! What a misfortune! I had flattered myself that he would never come back. But, after all, we must submit to our fate. After five months' absence, I dare not refuse to receive him; for his visit is solely one of politeness, no doubt. Remain, my friend; your presence will give me strength to endure Monsieur Dauberny's. Will you do me this favor?"

"If you authorize me to do so, madame, I will remain."

Frédérique told her maid that she might admit Monsieur Dauberny. I was intensely agitated by the thought that I should soon be in that man's presence; but I strove to conceal my agitation beneath a calm and indifferent air.

Monsieur Dauberny appeared in a moment. He was rather tall, but had grown too stout for his height. His face, the features of which were, generally speaking, regular, wore nevertheless an expression of brutal libertinage, and when his eyes tried to express merriment they became sea-green, watery, like those of a wild beast. He appeared to

be about fifty years of age; his hair was thick and curly. He was neatly dressed, but seemed to have difficulty in carrying his great weight.

He was apparently surprised to find a man in his wife's apartment. However, he gave me a rather curt nod, to which I replied by an almost imperceptible inclination of the head and a manner so frigid that he was impressed by it and immediately bowed again much lower.

I confess that I felt incapable of bending my head before that monster. At that instant, the fate of poor Annette recurred to my memory; I remembered her bruises, her horrible suffering! I remembered that shocking scene on the outer boulevards! I felt that I could not remain longer in that man's presence. The blood rushed to my face; I was on the point of giving way to my wrath and hurling myself upon the villain! While I was still master of myself, I took my hat and left the salon.

"Are you going, Rochebrune?" said Frédérique.

"Yes, madame, yes; I beg pardon—but an important engagement—pray excuse me!"

I said no more, but went away, turning my head to avoid bowing to Monsieur Dauberny.

What would Frédérique think of my behavior toward her husband—of that abrupt departure? I did not know; but if I had stayed longer, I should have broken out; and before her, in her apartment, that would have been a mistake.

Pomponne was watching for my return; he came to meet me, crying:

"Monsieur, the old concierge—I know now that she's a concierge—from Rue Ménéilmontant has been here, not with the young woman who came once and ran off as if someone was going to assault her—a very pretty blonde——"

"Well, Pomponne, well! What did Madame Potrelle say?"

"Ah! yes, that's the concierge's name; it had escaped me. She said: 'Be good enough to ask Monsieur Rochebrune to come as soon as possible—to-day, if he has a minute—to my young tenant; for she's in great trouble.'—I was going to ask her why the young woman was in trouble, but she didn't give me time; she went away again, saying: 'I'm in a hurry, I ran all the way.'—To be sure, if she had run all the way from Rue Ménéilmontant——"

I listened to no more from Pomponne. I left the house at once and hurried to Mignonne's abode. I found the concierge below.

"What is there new, Madame Potrelle? Do you want money?"

"Oh, no! it ain't that, monsieur; but that poor mother—her child's much sicker. The doctor told me there wasn't any hope, but I haven't told Madame Landernoy that, for it would kill her too, she's so unhappy already! I don't know what to do to encourage her, and I thought of you, monsieur."

I made no reply, but went up to Mignonne's room. My heart was very heavy; still, I felt that I must try to bring back a little hope to her heart.

I arrived under the eaves. The door was still open and Mignonne was kneeling by the cradle, as at my previous visit; but she was not singing; everything was perfectly still. The young mother, with her eyes fixed on her child, seemed to be watching for some gleam of hope on her face or in her breathing.

I stepped into the room; Mignonne did not even turn her head.

"Excuse me, madame," I said, approaching the cradle; "will you allow me to examine your little girl?"

The young woman glanced at me, with eyes dim with tears, and murmured:

"Oh! monsieur! just see how she has changed, poor child, in the ten days since you saw her! Just look at her!"

Poor little one! My heart sank and my chest heaved when I saw the shocking ravages that disease had wrought in so short a time. When I saw her, ten days before, she was pale and thin; but her pretty features had not changed. Now, her little face was all wasted away; her head, like her body, seemed shrunken; her mouth, which she kept tightly closed, her little features, constantly distorted by nervous contractions—everything indicated great suffering; and yet she was still sweet and pretty. Ought such angels to suffer? What crime can they have committed?

I took the child's hand; it was still burning. The mother gazed anxiously at my face and said:

"Monsieur, do you still hope?"

"I told you that I should always hope."

"Oh, yes! you are right; but for that, I should die."

"Does she complain? Can you guess where she feels pain?"

"Alas! she doesn't complain, poor child! But she groans and cries, and I can't soothe her any more. Oh! monsieur! I can't soothe her any more!"

Mignonne paused a moment to weep. I did not try to check her tears. They do much more harm when stored up than when they are freely shed.

In a moment she continued, pointing to the child:

"Look! see how she keeps her teeth clenched all the time. Oh! that is what frightens me!"

"What does the doctor say?"

"He ordered her some medicine. But she won't take anything, she won't drink. That is the hardest part of it!"

"Yes, for if she drank a little of it, it would probably allay the fire that is consuming her."

"But what am I to do if she won't drink it—when she cries if I insist? I can't force her, can I, the dear little pet?"

"Will you let me try, madame?"

"You, monsieur! Do you think you can succeed any better than I?"

"I shall go about it differently."

"With her teeth always clenched—I'm afraid she'll break the cup when I hold it to her mouth."

"For that reason, I do not mean to try with a cup. Have you a small spoon?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"Please let me have it, madame."

Mignonne gave me a small iron spoon, and a cup containing the sedative draught ordered by the doctor. I filled the spoon and offered it to the child, who refused to take it; but I succeeded in partly opening her gums for an instant with my left hand, and poured the contents of the spoon into her mouth. The little one cried bitterly; but she

had swallowed a few drops of the potion, and that was all I wanted.

Mignonne watched me in amazement, almost in terror; for a moment she was afraid that I would hurt the child. But she soon calmed down, and seemed pleased with the result I had obtained.

"You saw how I did it," I said; "you must act in the same way, when you want her to take a little of the medicine."

"Oh! monsieur, I don't know whether I can; I don't know whether I can be as quick as you; and then I shall be afraid of hurting the dear angel."

"I did not hurt her."

"That is true. And see, look at her, monsieur; it seems as if she were breathing better! Oh! if that really has done her good!"

"It is more than likely."

"Oh! monsieur, if you would stay a little longer, and give her some more by and by?"

"I will gladly do it, madame."

"I am abusing your good nature, monsieur; but I'm afraid I can't do it as well as you."

"I am in no hurry, madame; my time is at my own disposal. I have often made a bad use of it, and I will try to atone partly, here with you."

The child seemed to be dozing, and I did not disturb her. But, after half an hour or more, when she began to be uneasy again, I repeated my manœuvre and made her swallow another half-spoonful of the potion.

I remained some time longer talking with Mignonne, doing my utmost to restore her courage and hope. Then I went away, saying:

"Until to-morrow!"

The next day, I went again to see the little invalid, and passed a large part of the day with Mignonne; for my conversation served to revive her courage, and she thought that no one could succeed so well as I in making the child drink. Little Marie's condition showed a slight change for the better. The doctor was greatly surprised, and the mother's hopes revived. It seemed to me that I too loved the poor little girl. One becomes attached to children so easily!

A week elapsed; I had not allowed a day to go by without passing several hours in Mignonne's room. I thought that she still retained some suspicion of my intentions; but, as she considered that I understood taking care of children, she said to me each day when I left her:

"It would be so kind of you, if you would come to-morrow!"

I had not called on Frédérique again, nor had I seen Rosette. What must they think of me? But on returning home one afternoon, about four o'clock, I found both my friend and my mistress established in my salon.

I saw at once, by the expression of their faces, that they were angry with me.

"Ah! here you are, are you, monsieur?" said Rosette. "You're getting to be very rare—very hard to find, for this is the third time I've been here—so help me! I don't know whether your Jocrisse told you?"

"My Jocrisse did not tell me."

"And madame here has been as many times as I have, it seems, and hasn't had any better luck."

"What, Frédérique! you have taken the trouble to come here? I am terribly sorry."

Frédérique smiled, but with the mocking expression that I knew so well, saying:

"What does it matter that I have been here? You weren't very solicitous about my health, I judge, as you haven't been to inquire about it since the day you left so abruptly. I understand that there is nothing very agreeable in my husband's presence; still, from regard for me, you might have put up with it a little longer."

"You see, madame," said Rosette, "monsieur has other intrigues, new passions, beside which my love and your friendship are nothing at all! He hasn't a minute now to sacrifice to us; he passes all his time, all his days, with his new flame on Rue Ménilmontant. She can't be anything very distinguished, living in that quarter; but we must know a little of everything!"

I saw that Pomponne had been chattering and inventing fables.

"Ah! so you have been told that I go every day to Rue Ménilmontant?" I said, with a tranquillity that seemed to add to their irritation.

"Yes, monsieur; to see a young and pretty blonde. You like blondes now, it seems! You like 'em of all colors, don't you?"

"And this blonde whom I go to see is my mistress, is she?"

"Oh, no! she may be your laundress, who knows? And you go there to watch her iron your shirts! Ha! ha! ha! Why don't you tell us that? it would be more amusing."

"I won't tell you that, because I have no reason to lie."

"Oh! of course not! To be sure, you're your own master, you can do what you think best. It seems that she came here one day—your blonde—and ran away as if the devil was after her. Oh! how sorry I am I wasn't here that day, when she honored you with a visit! I'd have led her a pretty dance! I'd have sent her mazurking down the stairs! But, who knows? perhaps I shall meet her one of these days. As you pass all your time with her now, it's probable that it will soon be her turn to come here. Just let me meet her! You see, I'm not very gentle when I'm jealous! I'll box that woman's ears; yes, monsieur, yes, I'll box her ears!"

I listened to Rosette without winking. Frédérique said nothing, but kept her eyes on me.

"You're not so wicked as you try to make people think, Rosette," said I, trying to take her hand, which she snatched away. "If you should find the young woman you speak of here, you would not insult her, I trust; for it would be as absurd as your insulting madame."

"What do you say? Do you want to make us believe that the blonde is just a friend of yours? Oh! my boy, that may do for once. Madame Frédérique here is your friend, but you don't pass all your time with her, I believe.—Does he, madame?"

"Oh! I see very little of monsieur!" rejoined Frédérique, with a gesture of annoyance; "and when by chance he does condescend to pay me a visit, he seizes the first pretext to retire. I know that friends ought not to stand on

ceremony; but it would be possible to be more frank and outspoken."

This was said in a tone which indicated that she was seriously offended. Suddenly Rosette darted at me, as if she meant to claw my eyes out, crying:

"Come, monsieur, who is this woman that you pass all your time with? How long have you known her? what do you do at her house? Answer! answer! Answer, I say! I am not your friend, and I want you to stand on ceremony with me!"

"First of all, mademoiselle, I might refuse to answer questions asked in such a way. You want to know all that I do? Are you entitled to? Do I know all that you are doing, when I am looking vainly for you at your seven aunts'? But, nevertheless, I propose to gratify your curiosity, because I shall be very glad to justify myself at the same time in the eyes of my friend Frédérique, who thinks that she no longer has my full confidence."

"That is to say, you condescend to answer me on madame's account? That's very polite to me! But, no matter! go on, monsieur."

"This girl, to whose room I have, in fact, been going regularly for some days, and who lives on Rue Ménilmontant, is not my mistress. Your conjectures with regard to her are altogether false; she is a poor girl, who was virtuous, and who was seduced——"

"How clever! As if all girls weren't virtuous before they're seduced!"

"But I know what I am talking about; I mean that she had not the taste for pleasure or idleness which sooner or later leads a girl on to her ruin."

"Ah! very good; I understand! She'd have been a saint, if she hadn't sinned."

"If you don't mean to let me speak, Rosette, it is useless to question me."

"I beg your pardon, monsieur; I'll hold my tongue."

"This girl became a mother. Her seducer had deserted her."

"Indeed! but what has all this rigmarole to do with you? Is it any of your business, if you're not the seducer?"

"I learned indirectly of this young woman's misfortunes; I became interested in her, I gave her work, and tried, so far as was in my power, to relieve her distress. What is there so surprising in that, mesdames? Why do you look at me with such a peculiar expression?"

"Go on, my dear boy, continue your touching story. And now you pass your time with this young woman; because she's teaching you to knit, perhaps."

I could not restrain a gesture of impatience. It is disheartening, when one has tried to do a little good, to be incessantly suspected of the opposite. I sprang to my feet and exclaimed:

"I go to see that young woman every day now, because she is in despair; because she would lose her reason, in all probability, if she had no one to keep up her courage; because this is no time to abandon her! Believe me or not, as you choose, mesdames; but so much the worse for you, if you believe me incapable of doing a kind action from disinterested motives!"

"I have never believed that of you, Charles," said Frédérique, coming to my side; "but it seems to me that one who believed that she had your full confidence may well be surprised to learn that your attention is engrossed by a young woman whom you had never mentioned to her."

"As for me," cried Rosette, "I'm not so gullible as madame; I don't take any stock in your innocent, unfortunate, persecuted woman! All you need is the credulous and cruel husband! I saw a play like that once. I don't say that you don't help this lovely blonde of yours; on the contrary, I believe you help her too much. No doubt you were touched by her woes; but why? Because you're in love with her."

"That is not true, Rosette; I tell you once more, you are all wrong."

"I beg your pardon—one more question, and answer it honestly: is this woman pretty?"

"She is very good-looking."

"There! I was sure of it!—Take notice, Madame Frédérique, that these benevolent gentlemen never protect any women that aren't good-looking. As for the ugly ones, I don't know how it happens, but they never unearth them. They can groan in corners as much as they choose, there's no danger that anyone will hunt them up.—Total result: I don't take any stock in your story, and I believe I shall do well to yield to Freluchon's entreaties and couple up with him.—You've seen his sponge shop on Rue du Petit-Carreau, haven't you, madame? Don't you think it's rather neat?"

"Very," replied Frédérique; "the counting-room especially struck me as remarkably elegant."

"Ah! how fine I'll look in it!—Adieu, Charles! You've been playing tricks on me, and I'm going to get married!"

Rosette departed, and I confess that I did not try to detain her; what she had said had stung me to the quick. As for Frédérique, I saw that in the bottom of her heart she shared the grisette's unjust suspicions. She stayed a moment longer with me, but said almost nothing; then she too left me, and when I pressed her hand it hardly responded to the pressure. So that is how we are believed when we tell the truth! If I had lied, I am very certain that they would not have been so incredulous.

XLII

A CONSOLATION

I did not recover at once from the sensations caused by the two visits I had received. I knew that my liaison with Rosette would not last long; and when a thing is bound to end a little sooner or a little later, one is prepared for it. Moreover, since my peregrinations among the aunts, I had not had the slightest confidence in Rosette.

But Frédérique! That she should look coldly on me because I had busied myself in behalf of a young woman who was in trouble surprised me, I admit. She was kind-hearted herself; why was she unwilling that other people should have that good quality?

I was tempted for a moment to go to her; but I reflected that it would be almost equivalent to asking her forgiveness for doing a kind action without her leave. I felt that I must retain my dignity. So much the worse for those who see evil everywhere and in everything!

All this reflection and hesitation detained me at home much later than usual, and the day was far advanced when I arrived at Rue Ménéilmontant. Madame Potrelle was not in her lodge, which was deserted. I hastened upstairs; but my heart was oppressed by a melancholy presentiment: was the poor child worse?

When I reached Mignonne's room, I found there, besides the unhappy mother, the doctor, the concierge, and a neighbor.

Mignonne was weeping and calling her daughter; at last she fell back on her chair, speechless and motionless.

"Little Marie is no more," said the doctor, in a low voice; "she died only a minute ago, after a slight convulsion. The child could not recover; I knew it all along; but the poor mother will not have it that she is dead. Still, we must take her away."

Poor mother! poor child! I had arrived too late! I could not have prevented that catastrophe, and yet I was deeply grieved that I had delayed so long. The old concierge leaned over Mignonne and burst into tears; the other woman did the same. I walked to the cradle and looked in. Poor little girl! the last struggle had gone gently with her, for her face was not changed; on the contrary, it seemed that with death she had found peace and rest, that she was happy in having ceased to suffer. Her sweet face seemed to smile; I stooped to kiss the forehead of that angel who had made so brief a sojourn on earth.

Mignonne, who was apparently absorbed by her grief, when she saw me, sprang to her feet, pushed the doctor away, and came to me, crying:

"Here you are! here you are! How late you have come! But you will make her drink, won't you? You will bring the dear child back to life; for she isn't dead! oh, no! God has not taken my daughter away from me! Here, here, take her; why don't you make her drink? Open her lips; you see that she doesn't cry, that she doesn't refuse!"

And she stooped over to lift the child, covering her with tears and kisses. Then she suddenly uttered a loud shriek and pressed her to her heart.

"Cold! cold!" she cried. "Why is that? Warm her, monsieur, warm her, I say! You can see that she is dying!"

It was a heartrending scene. Even the doctor could not restrain his tears. But luckily Mignonne lost consciousness. We took advantage of that moment to carry her away, the doctor and I. The neighbor who was present lived on the same street, two houses away; she offered to take the young mother in and keep her as long as her condition required.

We placed Mignonne in a large armchair; several obliging people lent a hand, and we carried Mignonne to the neighbor's house before she recovered consciousness. The doctor accompanied her, and said that he would not leave her. Madame Potrelle remained, to pray beside the dead child. I left the house, as sad and gloomy as a stormy day. I sought a solitary quarter, for the sight of the world oppressed me.

"What had that young mother done," I said to myself, "that she should be deprived of her child, who was her only comfort and joy on earth?"

A fortnight had passed since little Marie's death. I had not as yet had the courage to go to see Mignonne; I was afraid that the sight of me would make her unhappy, for it would inevitably remind her of her daughter.

But did not she think of her always, poor woman? Not by striving to banish a memory from the heart do we succeed in resigning ourselves to it with less bitterness; on the contrary, grief is pacified and soothed by speaking freely and often of those we have lost.

I had called at Madame Daubigny's, but was told that she had gone into the country for a few days. Of Rosette I heard nothing at all.

One hot summer's day, I decided to go to see Mignonne. I had left her in charge of decent people who were deeply interested in her. The doctor had promised to see her constantly, and that was why I had postponed my visit. We often have courage to bear our own troubles, but find it wanting when we must face those of other people.

When I arrived at Madame Potrelle's lodge, I found the good woman there. I hardly dared to question her. She divined my hesitation and anticipated my wishes.

"Madame Landernoy has been very sick, monsieur; for five days, we thought she would die; but she has finally recovered her health, or at least the consciousness of her misfortunes; for I don't call it health myself, when she cries all the time and only eats so as to keep up her strength. At last, about four days ago, she insisted on coming back to her own little room upstairs. The neighbor didn't want her to; but the doctor said: 'She mustn't be thwarted, it will make her worse.'—So she's come back. Oh! monsieur, if you could have heard her sobs when she saw the child's cradle; and now she keeps her head bent over it all the time, as if she was looking for her; and she says: 'It's all I've got left of her. I can't cry anywhere but over her cradle, for I don't know where she is—I haven't got anything of hers. Nobody can find the poor woman's child, and I can't go and kneel by her grave!'—Ah! monsieur, it is very painful to hear that, and to see that poor young thing crushed under the weight of her grief, and refusing, sometimes for whole days, to budge from her little one's cradle!"

I made no reply, but went up to Mignonne's room. I found her door closed. I could hear nothing; profound silence reigned. I knocked gently on the door. After a moment, I heard Mignonne's sweet voice:

"Who is there?"

"It is I, madame; pray let me come in."

She evidently recognized my voice, for she opened the door at once. She looked earnestly at me, and said, pointing to the cradle with a heartrending expression:

"Why do you come now? She isn't here any longer; you can't do anything more for her; and I—oh! I don't need anything now."

She fell, exhausted, on a chair. But I stood in front of her and said, in a respectful and firm tone:

"I have one more duty to perform. Be good enough to come with me, madame; take your bonnet and shawl, and come with me, I beg. I ask it in your daughter's name."

Mignonne gazed at me in surprise; but I had no sooner mentioned her daughter, than she rose, hastily put on what

she needed, and was ready in a moment.

I went downstairs first, and she followed me. Mère Potrelle stared when she saw us pass her door; but I did not stop. I had come in a cab, which was waiting at the door. I asked Mignonne to get in, and she complied without asking any questions. I took my seat beside her; the cabman knew where to take us, and we drove away.

Mignonne did not open her lips, and I respected her silence. Thus we traversed the distance that separated us from the cemetery of Père-Lachaise. Our cab stopped at the gate of that place of repose. I alighted first, and gave my hand to Mignonne. When she recognized the place where we were, she seemed to feel a sudden shock; her eyes brightened, she looked into my face, then eagerly seized my hand and walked beside me, never relaxing her grasp; I felt her hand tremble in mine.

I led her for some time through the paths between the graves. At last, I stopped on the summit of a hill where there was a sort of enclosure formed by a number of cypresses. I led her into that enclosure, where there was a monument as simple as the body beneath it. It was a flat stone, lying on the ground, with a white marble column standing at its head. On that column was an angel flying away from a cradle, and at the base these words only:

HERE RESTS MARIE LANDERNOY

That modest monument was surrounded by newly planted flowers, and the whole was enclosed by a low iron fence. I opened the gate, of which I had the key, and pointed to the stone, saying simply:

"Your daughter is there."

The young woman, who had followed me in silence, but trembling nervously for a reason which I could well understand, gazed vacantly at the little cenotaph at first; but when she read her daughter's name on the marble, she uttered a cry, fell on her knees as if to thank heaven, then rose again, weeping, threw herself into my arms, and pressed me to her heart, murmuring:

"My friend! my friend! And I was suspicious of you! Oh! forgive me! I love you dearly, now! My daughter is lying there; I can come now and pray upon her grave, and tend and renew the flowers that surround it. Ah! I breathe more freely now; you have given me courage to keep on living."

"I have something else here," I said, taking from my pocket a carefully folded paper, which I handed to Mignonne.

The young woman took the paper, and a flush of joy overspread her face; she covered her daughter's hair with kisses, then threw herself into my arms once more.

"Oh! thanks! thanks, my friend! I have not lost everything; I have something of her! Her soft, fine hair—I have it all, and it will never leave me! Ah! you have almost made me happy! Let me thank you again."

She laid her head on my shoulder and wept profusely; but the tears were soothing and assuaged her grief.

Then she knelt beside the gravestone. I walked away in order not to disturb her meditation and her prayers.

At last, after spending a long time beside her daughter, Mignonne returned to me; but she was no longer the same woman as when she left her room. Her sombre grief, her wild glance, had given place to an expression of pious melancholy and placid resignation.

I took her back to her home; on the way, I tried, not to combat her regrets, but to make her understand that the most unhappy of mankind are not those who are taken away from this world.

When we returned, Madame Potrelle looked at us, and was surprised beyond words at the change that had taken place in her tenant; but she dared not question us. Mignonne ran to the good woman and kissed her.

"Oh! I am no longer so wretched as I was! I have just been praying at my daughter's grave; I've got the key; there are flowers all around it; I am going to take care of them. Marie will be glad. See, I have all her hair; and it's to him, to monsieur, my best friend, that I owe it all! Ah! you were quite right when you told me that I made a mistake to distrust him!"

I bade Mignonne adieu, in order to escape Madame Potrelle's eulogium. The young woman offered me her hand, saying:

"Now I will come myself to get the work you are good enough to give me. You will allow me to do it, won't you?"

"I do more than that, I beg you to; and, in the interest of your health, I urge you to look carefully after all my linen; for there is nothing like work to distract one's thoughts."

Mignonne speedily fulfilled her promise; she appeared one morning, alone; she desired to show me that she no longer had any suspicion of me. I talked a few minutes with her. We spoke of her daughter, the subject in which she was most deeply interested. The people who are afraid to speak of those they have lost are the ones who wish to forget them at once. When one does not wish to forget the dear ones who are no more, why should one shrink from speaking of them?

Then I went out, after saying to her:

"The keys are in all the drawers. Look over everything, and take away what you choose. That is your affair; and my servant has orders to obey you like myself, if you need anything."

Several weeks passed thus. At first Mignonne came every four or five days, then a little oftener, then every other day; and I frequently found her established in my quarters, and working there; for she had said to me one day:

"When there isn't much to mend, perhaps one shirt, or one waistcoat, it is hardly worth while to carry it home, if it doesn't annoy you to have me do it here."

And as it did not annoy me in the least to have her work in my rooms, as I observed with delight that her grief was more calm, more resigned, and that when she was busily employed there she had much more distraction than in her own chamber, I urged her to work there whenever it was convenient for her to do so.

Pomponne alone seemed very much puzzled because that young woman did her sewing in my apartment when I was not there; especially as Mignonne was not talkative, and as I had forbidden him to presume to ask her any questions.

CONJECTURES

I called again to see Frédérique, but she had not returned from the country. Did she propose to spend the summer there? It seemed to me that she might have told me where she was going, and have asked me to pass some time with her.

I was unhappy over Frédérique's absence; but, above all, I was hurt by her manifest indifference. I would have liked to scold her; I would have liked to tell her that I was very angry with her. Where was she? what was she doing? whom did she see now? Madame insisted upon my telling her everything, but she told me nothing.

One day when Mignonne was working in my salon, and I, contrary to my custom, had not gone out, the doorbell announced a visitor. Mignonne rose at once, saying:

"I will go, monsieur."

"Why so, Mignonne? Stay, I beg you; you are not in my way; and if my visitor has anything to say to me in private, I will take him into my bedroom, that's all. There is not the least reason why you should go."

Mignonne resumed her seat, and Ballangier entered the room. He was still in cap and blouse, but his dress was irreproachably neat, and his hands very white. When he saw a young woman installed in my apartment, he started back in surprise, and would have gone away.

"I beg pardon! I didn't know that you had company. Pomponne told me I might come in."

"Why, of course; come in, come in! You mustn't let madame frighten you away. Take a seat, and let us talk."

Ballangier decided to sit down. Mignonne went on sewing and kept her eyes over her work.

"Well! have you still plenty to do? are they still satisfied with you? I am sure that they are; I can read it in your eyes."

"Yes; my employer is perfectly satisfied with me. If you knew how rich I am now! I am actually saving money! Can you believe that I have seventy-five francs put by?"

"Well done, my friend! As soon as a man has succeeded in saving something, it's like a snowball. It isn't so hard as people think to become well to do. Often nothing is necessary but determination; but it must be constant and immovable."

"Oh! that's the way it is with me now; there's no danger of my stumbling. Why, when I see a drunken man, it makes me blush for shame, and I say to myself: 'How could I ever take any pleasure in making a beast of myself like that!'"

"And your reading?"

"That gives me a great deal of entertainment, too. But there are some things I have to read over two or three times, because I don't understand them right away."

"Would you like me to give you some more books?"

"Thanks, not to-day. I am doing an errand for my employer, and I had to pass your door; that's why I took the liberty of coming up."

"You did well, for it's a pleasure to me to see you now."

Ballangier smiled, then glanced furtively at Mignonne. We talked for some time; then he rose, saying that he must hurry, because his employer was waiting for him. I walked into the reception room with him, and there, after bidding me adieu, Ballangier murmured:

"She's mighty pretty, that little woman sewing in there!"

"Yes, she is pretty; and, what's better still, she's respectable."

"Ah, yes! Is she a lady?"

"I'll tell you another time who she is."

When Ballangier had gone, I returned to Mignonne, who went on with her work and said nothing. Still, I would have bet that she was surprised to hear me, a young man of fashion, addressed thus familiarly by a man in cap and blouse.

Pomponne handed me a huge envelope which the concierge had just brought upstairs. The enclosure was printed; evidently a wedding invitation. I read:

"Mesdames Falourdin, Riflot, Piquette, Dumarteau, Lumignon, Chamouillet, and Cavalos have the honor to announce the marriage of their niece, Mademoiselle Rosette Gribiche, to Monsieur Jules-César-Octave Freluchon, dealer in sponges."

Ah! it was very amiable on Rosette's part to send me an announcement of her wedding. But something was written at the foot of the sheet:

"You are requested to attend the ball, which will take place at Chapart's, Rue d'Angoulême; I rely on you for the polka."

Ah! there I recognized my saucy grisette. She was quite capable of insisting on dancing all night with me; and I was not at all certain that she would not demand something else. But I would not accept her invitation, I would not go to her wedding feast. I would be more sensible than she was. I would not swear that, later on, I might not do myself the pleasure of buying a sponge of her. Meanwhile, I wished Monsieur Freluchon all happiness, and I was convinced beforehand that it would be his.

One evening, when I went home, Pomponne said to me, rubbing his hands gleefully:

"Monsieur had another visitor to-day. Mon Dieu! monsieur had only just gone out, when Madame Dauberny came."

"Madame Dauberny? Oh! how sorry I am that I didn't see her!"

"She came in; in fact, she waited for monsieur quite a long time, talking with your seamstress."

"What do you mean by my seamstress? In heaven's name, can't you say Madame Landernoy?"

"As that lady sews for monsieur, I thought she was his seamstress."

"No matter! what did Frédérique say when she went away? Will she come again to-morrow?"

"Oh! no, monsieur; she won't come again to-morrow nor any other day; for she said to me when she went away: 'You will tell your master that I shan't come again.'"

"She said that she wouldn't come again! That's impossible, Pomponne; you are mistaken; Frédérique could not have said that."

"Beg pardon, monsieur; I'm sure she said it, because it surprised me; and I said to her: 'Why! is madame angry with monsieur?'"

"Oh! I recognize you there! Always inquisitive and chattering! Well, what did she say to that?"

"She said: 'That's none of your business!'—I didn't say any more."

I could not understand why Frédérique should have said what Pomponne had reported to me. If she had come often to see me without finding me, it might be conceivable; but, on the contrary, I had been more than ten times to inquire for her while she was in the country.

"No matter!" I thought; "I will go to see her to-morrow, and obtain an explanation of all this, I hope."

The next day, as soon as I had finished breakfast, I hastened to Madame Dauberny's. At last, she was at home! Her maid ushered me into her room.

I found Frédérique enveloped in a morning gown. Her lovely hair, falling in long curls on each side of her face, was without ornament. She was very pale, and her manner was cold and constrained; she greeted me with a smile that was not sincere, and said:

"Ah! is it you, Charles?"

"Yes, it is I. You came to see me yesterday, and I am extremely sorry that I was absent. But that fact does not seem to me a sufficient explanation of your saying to my servant that you would not come again. What did that mean? I have been here ten or fifteen times to see you since you went into the country, where it never once occurred to you to write me, to tell me where you were. I could not write to you, for I had no idea in what direction you had gone. But I came, nevertheless, again and again; for I could not tire of coming, when I hoped to see you!—Tell me, what is the matter? what have I done? Why are you offended? for you are offended, I can see by the cold way in which you receive me."

Frédérique listened to me attentively. She forced herself to smile and offered me her hand, saying in a faltering tone:

"All that you say is true—I have no right to be angry—and I am not any longer."

"But you are!"

"No, I am not."

"Why did you tell Pomponne that you would not come again?"

"Why—because—as you have a woman installed in your rooms now—I thought that my visits could only——"

"Upon my word, I can't understand you! Because a person comes to my rooms, a person who looks after my linen, takes it away and brings it back!—What has that to do with our friendship?"

"Is she the—the young woman in whom you took such a deep interest?"

"Yes, madame. She has lost her child, her little girl, who was her only joy! It seems to me that that is an additional reason for trying to lighten her sorrow."

"Oh! most assuredly! It seems, too, that you have done wonders for her, for she says everything good of you! she extols you to the skies! Never fear, my friend, she is truly grateful!"

"But that ought not to seem extraordinary to you, who maintain that ingratitude is the most shocking of vices."

"No, no! I see nothing at all unusual in all that."

"Mon Dieu! Frédérique, you drive me mad! Do you know that, to hear you, one would think you were unkind and unfeeling, and yet I know that you are not."

"She is very pretty, that young woman!"

"I told you that before. And because she is pretty—is that a reason for not doing anything for her?"

"Oh! quite the contrary! That is a reason for being deeply interested in her, for having her come to work in one's own rooms, and pass her days there.—Ha! ha! ha! Really, Rosette wasn't so foolish as I: she guessed the truth at once."

"What do you mean by that, Frédérique?"

"I mean that you love that young woman, that you are in love with her, that you mean to make her your mistress! Oh! mon Dieu! it's all simple and natural enough, and I don't blame you. You are free, and so is she; you are perfectly entitled to—to live with her, if it suits you to do so! But what I don't like, what pains me, is that you always make a mystery to me of your sentiments and your intrigues; that I never learn your secrets except from others; that you haven't confidence enough in me to tell me of your new amours. That is what angers me. For, you see, being neither your mistress nor your friend, I am nothing at all to you! So I cannot see the necessity of continuing our acquaintance."

My heart sank; I felt, not anger, but sorrow, genuine sorrow, to find that I was unjustly judged by a woman to whom I would have been glad to lay bare my whole heart, to whom I longed to tell my most secret thoughts, hoping to read her heart as she would read mine. That reproach of a lack of confidence in her touched and wounded me; as I was not guilty, I would not even try to justify myself.

I took my hat and prepared to go.

"Are you going already?" exclaimed Frédérique.

"Yes, madame. I consider it useless to remain longer with a person who believes neither in my words nor in my affection. I thought that you were able to judge me fairly, to appreciate my feelings. I was mistaken. Some day, I doubt not, you will realize your error. Then, madame, perhaps you will come to me and offer me again that friendship

of which you now think me unworthy; and you will find me, as always, happy to deserve such a favor."

Frédérique looked at me; I believe that she was on the point of rushing toward me; but she repressed that impulse, which came from her heart, and I went away, determined to make no attempt to see her again. I had learned that one can no more rely on a woman's friendship than on her love; that there must inevitably be a strain of inconstancy or caprice in all their affections.

On the day following my visit to Madame Dauberny, Mignonne came as usual to bring back my linen; but, contrary to her custom, she took another package and prepared to go away again at once.

"Don't you propose to stay and work a while to-day?" I asked her. She seemed embarrassed, and hesitated before replying; at last she faltered, lowering her eyes:

"Monsieur—it is—I am—I am afraid that staying here so often to work—I am afraid I am in your way."

"What is the source of that fear to-day? Haven't I told you that I could receive in my bedroom anybody with whom I wished to be alone?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"Why this fear, then? What new idea have you got into your head?"

"It didn't come into my head."

"Whose, then, pray?"

"Monsieur—the fact is—that—it was day before yesterday that a lady came to see you. Didn't your servant tell you?"

"Certainly he did."

"That lady sat down; she stayed a long time with me, and examined me very closely. She had a strange way about her. When she mentioned you, she said just *Rochebrune*, or *Charles*. She is very intimate with you, it seems."

"Well! what then?"

"After looking at me so hard that I didn't know which way to turn, she began to talk to me. She asked a lot of questions about the beginning of our acquaintance. She asked me how long I'd known you, and—and—oh! a lot of things I don't dare tell you. I just told her the truth—all you had done for me, and all I had to be grateful to you for. You are not angry, are you, monsieur, because I told her all that?"

"Why should it make me angry?"

"The strange part of it was that the lady didn't seem pleased to hear me say all—all the good of you that you deserve! She kept shrugging her shoulders—I saw it plainly enough! And at last she cried: 'This is all very noble, it's magnificent; but it's easy to see what the end of it will be. When a young woman installs herself in a young man's bachelor apartment, there must be in the bottom of her heart a sentiment stronger than her care for her reputation; it must be that she isn't afraid to be looked upon by the world as that young man's mistress.'"

"She said that?"

"Yes, and then she went away, saying: 'I don't want to make you unhappy, mademoiselle; I simply mean to give you a little advice.'—Oh! but she did make me awfully unhappy!"

"And is that the reason why you don't propose to work here to-day?"

"Oh! it isn't on my own account, monsieur; it's on yours. That lady says it will keep all your friends from coming to see you. I wouldn't for the world have you quarrel with anyone."

"You cannot believe anything so absurd, Mignonne! Say, rather, that you are afraid to be looked upon as my mistress—that it has occurred to you that—"

"O monsieur! for heaven's sake, do not finish! After all you have done for me, the memory of my daughter alone would be enough to make me worship you. What do I care for anything the world can say? Do I know the world? Have I any reputation to preserve? Would life have any charm for me, were it not for you, who attached me to it by giving my daughter a last resting place? You, and the memory of Marie, that is all the world means to me! What do I care for all the rest? Oh! if it does not displease you to have me stay, tell me so again, monsieur, and I swear to you that I will obey you with happiness and joy."

"In that case, stay, Mignonne."

The young woman hastily unrolled the work she was about to take away; she took her needle and set to work in her usual seat, after looking at me with a smile.

She at least showed undiminished confidence in me.

XLIV

LOVE ON ALL SIDES

Mignonne continued to come to my rooms. I found already that my living expenses had diminished materially. I asked her to have an eye to a thousand and one details of housekeeping, to which I never paid any attention; she did it with a zeal and an intelligence that astonished me. I was like Ballangier, I was becoming too rich; and yet, nothing was ever lacking; on the contrary, I was as comfortable as I could wish. I discovered that a woman is very useful in a house.

Mignonne's health was fully restored, and she had recovered her fresh color; she never laughed, but a sweet smile sometimes played about her lips. I was delighted with the change and congratulated her on it.

"It is your work," she said.

When we talked together, she always spoke of her daughter; she went to see her almost every day, and I often saw in her belt a flower which she constantly covered with kisses. I guessed where she had plucked that flower.

Ballangier came to see me, and did not find me; but he found Mignonne, and Monsieur Pomponne told me that he

sat in front of her more than an hour, without opening his mouth.

"How do you know that?" I demanded, pulling Pomponne's ear; "did you listen at the door?"

"I couldn't listen, monsieur, as they didn't say anything."

Oh! these servants! Is there no way of finding one who is neither inquisitive, talkative, a liar, nor a gossip? When they are not all of these together, they are phoenixes!

"You received a visitor for me, did you?" I asked Mignonne.

"Yes, monsieur, that young mechanic; for he seems to be a mechanic."

"Yes; he's a cabinetmaker. What did he say to you?"

"He talks very little. But he told me enough for me to understand that you are his benefactor, too; that he owes you a great deal."

"No, I am in no sense his benefactor. What I did for him was a duty. But he behaved very badly at one time; for a long while he led a life of idleness and dissipation. He was deaf to my entreaties and remonstrances. In those days, his presence was as distasteful to me as it is agreeable now. He has turned over a new leaf, become a respectable man once more, and a good workman; I have given him all my friendship again, and some day I hope—I hope that he will make a good husband. Then, if Ballangier could fall in with a woman like you, Mignonne, gentle and virtuous and hard-working, and if he could win her love, he would be altogether happy."

Mignonne had become serious. She looked at the floor, murmuring:

"Oh! as for me, monsieur, you know very well that I can never think of marriage! You know that I have been a mother!"

"If you concealed nothing from the man who loved you, you would still be worthy of an honest man's love and esteem. Ought anyone to be so severe as that, Mignonne? Who has not sinned—more or less?"

"However, monsieur, I shall never have any occasion to tell my story, for I shall never marry."

"We cannot foresee the future."

"Oh! I can safely take my oath to that!"

I insisted no further, for it seemed to be a painful subject to the young woman. Probably, engrossed as she was by her daughter's memory, she did not choose to admit that anyone could divert her thoughts from her, even in the future.

Nothing from Frédérique. She did not come to see me, and I certainly should not go again to her. So it was all over; we had quarrelled—and for what? More than once, unconsciously perhaps, I had walked in the direction of her house and found myself in front of it; but at such times I made haste to retrace my steps. I would have been glad, however, to know if she were in Paris, or if she had gone away again. If chance should bring us together, surely we could not pass on the street without speaking. But I did not meet her.

By way of compensation, I did meet Ballangier near my own house. He was on his way to see me; but as he had met me, he said that he would not go upstairs. Something made me think that he would have preferred to go up. I noticed a certain constraint in his manner. He asked about Mignonne, but he did it with the air of one who dared not reveal all of the interest he took in that young woman. Poor Ballangier! it was not difficult to divine what was going on in his heart; he was not an expert dissembler.

Another day, I met him again near my abode, and he made haste to tell me that he had not come out without the permission of his employer, who was still content with him, because he always worked two hours later at night when he left his work in the morning. I looked him squarely in the eye, and said:

"You don't tell me everything, my friend. You are concealing something from me at this moment!"

He blushed, became confused, and stammered:

"Concealing something? I? Why, I don't think so!"

"You are not very sure, are you? But I'll tell you straight away what it is: you're in love!"

This time he turned pale.

"In love? with whom, pray?"

"With whom? Why, with that young woman whom you have seen several times at my rooms, and whom I call Madame Landernoy—or Mignonne."

"Oh! nonsense, Charles! you are mistaken. I consider her very good-looking, to be sure; and then, her manner is so sweet and so modest! But I certainly shouldn't presume to fall in love with her, especially as—as you might not like it! For, you see, you have a right to love her, you have done so much for her, and you give her work to do."

"My friend, if that is all that prevents you, you may fall in love with Mignonne at your pleasure; for, so far as I am concerned, I look upon her as a sister; I have never dreamed of loving her in any other way; and for the very reason that I have been of some service to her and that she has enough confidence in me to come to my rooms to work, I should feel bound in honor not to love her otherwise than as a sister."

Ballangier's face became radiant. He seized both my hands and squeezed them hard; he would have cut capers in the street, if I had not prevented him.

"Is it possible?" he cried. "You don't love her! you don't think of loving her! Oh! if you knew what a weight you have taken off my breast!—For I do love her, Charles; yes, I do love that young woman! love her, do I say? why, I idolize her, I am mad over her! It took me all of a sudden when I first saw her, it struck me here! Since then, it's impossible for me to think of anything else. But I wouldn't ever have told you; I wouldn't ever have told her, either. You'll forgive me; for I thought that, with her always in your rooms—I thought you couldn't help loving her—but nothing of the sort! You see, I've never been in love before; I've known a lot of street walkers—but as to love, not a bit of it! And now, what a difference! And how proud I am to be a decent, hard-working man again! Perhaps I might take her fancy. Do you think she'll ever love me, Charles? Oh! if she could love me!"

I strove to calm him; then I began by telling him Mignonne's whole story. He listened attentively, muttering from time to time:

"Poor girl! the villains!"

When he knew all, I asked him if he still deemed Mignonne worthy to be his wife.

"Do I think her worthy? Yes, indeed, poor girl! The least she's entitled to is to find a man who'll make up for all the injury others have done her. But suppose I should begin by killing this Fouvenard? by smashing this Rambertin?"

"No, no, Ballangier; we must forget those wretches. If an opportunity should offer, I don't say——"

"Ah! how quickly we'd seize it! how we'd trounce those fellows!"

"Now, all that you have to do is to try to please Mignonne; but even in that you must act with great circumspection, and, above all, with patience! That young woman, engrossed as she is with thoughts of her daughter, would take fright at a single word of love. You will need time to touch her heart. You must gain her confidence. In short, I cannot undertake to say that you will win her love; that is your affair; for you understand that I cannot intervene. I know enough of Mignonne's temperament to be sure that that would be no way to succeed with her."

"Oh! never fear, Charles; I am very reserved, very shy. I will wait, I will wait as long as it's necessary. The hope of winning her some day will give me courage. I am going to read a lot; to try to educate myself, and to be less awkward in my talk; for she talks mighty well, and she has a very distinguished air. You'll see, Charles, you'll see! You will be better satisfied than ever with me!"

Ballangier left me, drunk with joy. I prayed that he might be happy in his love, and determined that I would do all that lay in my power to help him.

I had just left him, and was walking along, musing upon what he had said to me, when someone halted in front of me. It was Dumouton, the debt-ridden man of letters. He had no umbrellas this time, but he carried under his left arm an oval box, of bronzed tin, which seemed to be carefully fastened.

"Bonjour, Monsieur Rochebrune! I recognized you at a distance. You didn't see me, for you were lost in thought. Are you pretty well?"

"Very well, thanks, Monsieur Dumouton."

"Were you thinking out the plot of a play? You seemed very much preoccupied."

"Oh, no! I don't write plays, myself."

"You are very wise! It's a wretched trade since so many people have begun to dabble in it."

I attempted to salute Monsieur Dumouton and leave him; but he detained me, saying with an embarrassed air:

"I beg pardon! I would like to say another word to you, as I have happened to meet you. It's like this. First of all, you must know that one of my children is sick; he's been—out of sorts for a week. And then, we were without a certain household utensil—mon Dieu! why not say it at once—a syringe! We needn't be more prudish than Molière, need we?"

"Surely not; you are perfectly justified in saying a syringe."

"So I said to my wife: 'We must have a syringe!'—'Buy one,' said she. Very good! that's what I did this morning. I bought a *clyso-pompe* with a constant flow—a new invention. It's exceedingly convenient; it comes in a box; this is it that I have under my arm. Who'd ever suspect there was a syringe in it? It might be lace, or prunes."

"Or even a pie."

"You are right; there are pies of this shape. And it's so easy to use; no one has any idea what it is. Why, you can even use it at the theatre, in a box. I know a lady who made a bet that she'd do it at the opera, during a ballet; she won her bet."

"Did she have witnesses?"

"Probably."

"I must confess that I should have cried off."

"In a word, I bought this delightful *clyso-pompe*. Well! Monsieur Rochebrune, would you believe that our child, whom his grandmother had accustomed to the old method, positively refused to adopt the new? Impossible to make him try the *clyso-pompe*! Children are so obstinate! And as my wife spoils him, she bought him an old-fashioned syringe. The dealer who sold me this box refuses to take it back, and I am trying to dispose of it—at a loss, of course. If you happened to want such a thing——"

"No, Monsieur Dumouton, I am sorry that I cannot oblige you as I did in the matter of the umbrella, but I won't buy your *clyso-pompe*."

"You are making a mistake. It's always useful."

"It is of no use for you to insist. But go and see our mutual friend, Monsieur Rouffignard. Who knows? perhaps he will be very glad to relieve you of this instrument."

At the name Rouffignard, Dumouton's face lengthened, and, without another word, he bowed and disappeared. I was sure that he would not try to sell me anything more.

XLV

SECOND-SIGHT IN WOMEN

It was three days after I had received Ballangier's confidence, and in the morning when I was still alone, that Pomponne announced Madame Dauberny.

I could not believe my ears; but at the same instant Frédérique hurried into the room, with the amiable, fascinating expression, the proud yet sweet glance, that always attracted and vanquished me; and, before I had recovered from my surprise, she ran to me, took my hand, then threw her arms about me and kissed me two or three times.

I began by letting her do as she chose, because I found it very pleasant; but I gazed into her face, my eyes questioned her. She met them fearlessly and said:

"Yes, Charles, I was wrong! Reproach me all you choose, overwhelm me with the harshest words—I deserve it, yes,

I deserve it! you could not say too much. But here I am! I have come back to you, to ask your forgiveness, to swear to you that hereafter I will have no more caprices, that I will believe all that you say—all, do you hear? That I will approve of everything you do, that my friendship will no longer be selfish or exacting, and that it will be unchangeable! Indeed, do you suppose that it really ceased even for a moment? Oh! no, you never thought so, did you, Charles? You hadn't such a bad opinion of me, had you?"

I was bewildered by what I heard. I would have liked to ask her why she had been angry, and why she was so no longer, but she put her hand over my mouth, crying:

"No reproaches, my friend, since I agree that I was wrong and beg your pardon! Are you not willing now to throw a veil over the past?"

"Oh, yes! I am, indeed! Besides, you have come back, and I am so happy to find you once more as you used to be, that I don't care to seek for the explanation of my good fortune. But we, or rather you, are no longer angry, are you, Frédérique?"

"I have sworn it, my friend. Tell me, what are you going to do to-day? Would you like to pass the day with me?"

"Would I like it! You anticipate my dearest wish."

"The weather is magnificent; what do you say to a ride? We can go and hire some horses at the riding school, where I usually hire; they have some very good ones."

"A ride? delightful!"

"Then get ready quickly, monsieur. I will wait for you in your salon."

She left the room. I hastily finished dressing, and joined her in the salon.

"Your young seamstress doesn't seem to be here to-day," said Frédérique, with a smile.

"No, she came yesterday. She doesn't come regularly, every day, but just when she pleases."

"My friend, I was most unjust to that young woman. Such things as I said to her! Really, I don't know what had got into my head that day!"

"As you're sorry for it, you mustn't think any more about it."

"Oh! I shall try to make my peace with her, all the same. Let us go and have our ride, my friend."

We were soon in the saddle, and started off at a gallop. Frédérique rode with all the grace, assurance, and fearlessness of a circus rider. We went in the direction of the forest of Meudon, and Fleury. In that region one is more alone than in the Bois de Boulogne; the country is more rural, the landscape more diversified, and you can draw rein from time to time and indulge in pleasant converse.

We passed a delightful day. At night we dined together at a restaurant, like two bachelors—that is to say, we dined in the main dining-room. And when we parted, Frédérique said:

"Not for long!"

The next day, when I returned home after doing several errands, I found Mignonne in her usual place.

She bade me good-morning as usual, but her glance seemed less frank than it usually was. We all have days when we are inclined to melancholy; perhaps she had just come from her child's grave.

I chatted with Mignonne as usual. I fancied that I could see that she was waiting for Pomponne to leave us alone. But when I had company, that servant of mine always found some excuse for constantly going in and out and appearing every minute or two in the room where we were. I have known him to leave a pin on the mantel, as a pretext for returning, and, when he came for it, to leave another in its place. I had to call to him sternly: "When will you have done with that nonsense?"—He realized that I was losing patience, and he came no more to fetch his pins.

At last, Mignonne decided to speak.

"Has that lady who was here the other day been to see you again, monsieur?" she asked hesitatingly.

"Yes, Mignonne, she has. We had had a little dispute, but we are reconciled now. She has a hot head, but an excellent heart."

"Did she tell you that it was wrong of you to let me work here?"

"On the contrary, she said several times that she was very sorry that she had said things to you that might have hurt you, and that she hoped to make her peace with you."

"Oh! mon Dieu! that isn't worth while, monsieur."

Mignonne said that in a peculiar tone; then she returned to her work and did not utter another word. Soon the door opened and Frédérique appeared, as affable, smiling, and fascinating as on the day before. She shook hands with me and nodded pleasantly to Mignonne, who returned her salutation much less graciously.

I was sitting at the piano, jotting down an air that had come into my head. Frédérique insisted that she would not disturb me; and while I was trying to pick out an accompaniment for my air, I saw that she went to Mignonne and tried to talk with her.

I played a little for Frédérique, who sang very well when she chose to take the trouble. Mignonne, perhaps because she was not fond of music, seemed to take little pleasure in listening to us.

Frédérique passed a large part of the day with me, and Mignonne went away earlier than usual.

A fortnight passed. Frédérique continued to come frequently to see me. Her mood with me never changed, her glance was always sweet; the most perfect harmony reigned between us.

As for Mignonne, I was disturbed to see that her features had resumed their expression of gloomy melancholy, that the roses which had reappeared for a time on her cheeks had again given place to pallor. And I was distressed by that change, of which I could not guess the cause.

Ballangier came twice. I urged him to remain, and gave him a seat near the pretty seamstress. Then I easily made an excuse for leaving them together, in the hope that they would become better acquainted. But both times Ballangier said to me, when he went away:

"It will be a long job; she's still just as sad as ever, and she doesn't look at me at all; in fact, I'm not sure that she listens when I am talking to her. But, never mind, I'll be patient, and I'll have love enough for two, if necessary."

One evening, when Frédérique had come during the day, and, not finding me, had passed several hours with Mignonne, I was much surprised to receive a note from her containing these words only:

"I have something to say to you, my friend, something important. I shall expect you."

What could she have to say to me, of such urgency? However, I knew Frédérique well enough to know that when she had anything to say, it was perfect torture to her to have to wait till the next day; so I went to her at once.

My friend was in a very dainty *négligé*, which reminded me of the night I had supped with her. She smiled sweetly, as I entered the room, and gave me her hand, saying:

"I was sure that you would come at once. You realized that I don't like to wait! Come, sit here by my side, and we will talk like two good friends."

I did as she bade me. She began by putting her hand on mine.

"My friend," she said, "it is rather embarrassing for me to tell you what I have to tell. I trust that you will not take my words in ill part, that you will not be angry, as I was. But, above all things, be persuaded that I am perfectly sure that I am not mistaken."

"What a preamble! I thought that you and I could afford to go straight to the point; I have never liked the circumlocutions with which advocates confuse their arguments instead of stating them simply."

"You are right; I will come to the point. To-day, my friend, I went to your rooms; you were absent, but that young woman, Mignonne, was there, working hard as usual."

"Ah! so Mignonne is your subject, eh?"

"Yes, Mignonne. I sat down beside her, although my presence was by no means agreeable to her. It did not require much discernment to see that. Haven't you noticed it, too, Charles? Haven't you noticed that when I appear her face changes and her eyes become sad? that she hardly replies to what I say to her?"

"Yes, I have noticed all that. But I have seen nothing more in it than a bit of spite because of what you said to her one day."

"Oh! there's something besides her remembrance of that. To-day, I determined to have it out with her. I succeeded, by several adroit questions, in making her betray the secret of her heart, which, by the way, had been no secret to me for a long time."

"Well! what is this secret?"

"You won't be angry, Charles? At all events, you are not in the least to blame for it. So I begin by telling you that I am not offended with you for it."

"Oh! how cruel you are with your reflections, Frédérique!"

"Well! Mignonne loves you dearly. That is the secret that makes her melancholy and embarrassed—especially when I am there; because she has imagined, foolishly of course, but still she has imagined that you love me, that I am—your mistress! If she had heard Mademoiselle Rosette repeat your remark—that you would never love me—she wouldn't entertain that absurd idea."

"Ah! Frédérique, you know very well that——"

"Don't interrupt me, my friend; besides, we are not talking about that, but about Mignonne. When she sees me come in, when I am with you, her eyes fill with tears, and she looks at the floor so that we may not see them. Yes, my friend, you can believe my extensive experience, believe my heart, which is never mistaken—that young woman has a profound affection for you. That which was only gratitude at first has become love! She is accustomed to see you almost every day. Perhaps she does not herself realize the strength of the sentiment that draws her toward you; but she yields to the fascination she feels; and that love will acquire greater force in her heart, if you yourself do not try to uproot it."

Mignonne in love with me! It seemed improbable to me at first; but as I recalled a multitude of trivial circumstances, I became less incredulous.

"Why, I have never lisped a word of love to her; nothing in my conduct can have given her any reason to think that I was in love with her."

"I know that, my friend; oh! I am certain of that!" cried Frédérique, pressing my hand. "But probably that is just why she loves you! Women are made that way; it's a congenital defect in them. If you had spoken of love to Mignonne, it is very probable that she would have taken offence at it, and would have ceased to come to your rooms. But when she found that you always treated her like a sister, confidence returned—she reproached herself for her distrust; well, at all events, she loves you, that is certain! We all know that that sentiment is not governed by reason."

"Well, Frédérique, if you have guessed right, if that young woman does love me—which would distress me greatly, I confess—what do you advise me to do? Of course, you do not want me to cease to help the unfortunate creature, to abandon her?"

"Why, no; of course not!"

"If I tell her not to come to my rooms any more—she is very sensitive, like all unfortunate people, and she will go away forever."

"Are you willing to rely on me, my friend?"

"I ask nothing better."

"I will tell you what, it seems to me, would cure the whole trouble—but I am afraid you will not like my plan."

"Oh! how terrible you are to-day with your reticences!"

"Listen! While I was absent from Paris, you didn't know where I was, did you?"

"No; you didn't tell me."

"As you didn't ask me, I thought that you were not interested. Well, monsieur, I was at a charming country house that I had hired—and it is still mine, because I took it for a year, all furnished and equipped. I had nothing to do but to go there, and that was not much trouble; for the house is at Fontenay-sous-Bois, close to Vincennes—only two leagues and a half from Paris. I was not very far away, monsieur, as you see. So that I came often to Paris, and knew everything that happened here."

"And you propose to send Mignonne to your country house?"

"No, not that. In the first place, she would probably refuse to go to any house of mine. You must do the opposite of

that—you must—that is, if it won't be too much of a bore to you—pass some time yourself in that retreat. It is only the last of July, and the weather is fine. But perhaps country life is tedious to you?"

"Not at all! But you will go with me, of course; you will keep me company?"

"Most assuredly! Must I not do the honors of my house?"

"Your plan is delightful, Frédérique, and I accept with the greatest pleasure!"

"Really! you are really willing to go into the country with me? The prospect doesn't alarm you—you're not afraid of being bored?"

"Is that possible, with you?"

"Oh! how good you are, and how happy I am! But, never fear, my friend; I will try to arrange it so that the time won't seem too long to you. In the first place, it is a lovely spot, the whole neighborhood is charming; you would think that you were a hundred leagues from the capital. However, it is no desert, for there are several pretty estates in the neighborhood; but I don't care much for visiting neighbors, myself, especially in the country; for when you have once allowed your neighbors to call, they are always at your door, and that gets to be horribly tiresome. But wait till you see my house—it's an immense place, like a little château. The garden is very large and well shaded; there's a lake in which I have the right to fish—only there are no fish in it. There's a billiard room, and all sorts of games. And then, when you are bored beyond endurance, or when you have any business in Paris, we are so near—you can be here in an hour."

"I am at your orders, Frédérique. Let us start! let us start as soon as possible! I look forward with delight to living in the country with you."

Madame Dauberny pressed my hand with all her strength and kissed me on the forehead.

"Listen! listen!—Oh! mon Dieu! here I am beginning to address you familiarly again, as I used to."

"Oh! I am very willing."

"No, no! I won't do it! Listen, my friend: you must tell Mignonne that you are going to pass some time in the country; that is a perfectly natural thing for you to do; ask her to continue to come to your rooms as usual, to superintend your household; you might even give her to understand that you rely on her friendship to look carefully after your interests. She will be flattered by that mark of confidence. You need not tell her how long you expect to be away—nor whom you are going to visit. You are not accountable to her, after all. But, my friend, you mustn't come to Paris too often to see her; for that would destroy the effect of your sojourn in the country."

"I understand that perfectly."

"Then we must hope that absence—common sense—— That young woman will realize sooner or later that she does wrong to love you with love."

"Surely she will! And then, if another man calls to see her, now and then——"

"Ah, yes! That's the very thing! Perhaps he will succeed in winning her love!"

I stared at Frédérique in amazement, for I had never mentioned Ballangier's passion for Mignonne to her. She blushed and began to arrange her hair; that was her usual resource when she did not want to be examined.

"Who do you think may succeed in winning Mignonne's love, pray?"

"Why, the man who is paying court to her—that young man who comes to see you sometimes."

"How do you know that, Frédérique?"

"Wonderful cleverness on my part! Did I not meet him one day when he was going to see you?"

"And you guessed that he was in love with Mignonne, simply from seeing him come to my rooms?"

"He has changed greatly, and to his advantage, that young man."

"Ah! you recognized him, did you?"

I watched Frédérique closely, for a multitude of ideas had suddenly rushed into my mind; something told me that Madame Dauberny knew more about Ballangier than she chose to tell me. I think that she must have divined my thoughts, for she rose hastily and said:

"It is getting late, my friend. We start to-morrow—is that settled?"

"I ask nothing better."

"Bring your servant; we have room enough for him. I have only a gardener and my maid there. Will Mignonne come to you to-morrow?"

"I think so, as she didn't come to-day."

"Wait for her and tell her that you are going to the country; then come to me, and we will start together."

"Very good. I will go home to make my preparations, and to-morrow I will call for you. *O rus! quando te aspiciam?*"

"I can guess what that means. You will see the fields to-morrow, my friend."

On reaching home, I gave orders to Pomponne to prepare for our departure. I might take very few things to Fontenay, and send him to Paris whenever I needed anything. But that was just what I wanted to avoid, because I was acquainted with Monsieur Pomponne's loquacity.

It was ten o'clock when Mignonne arrived. Since Frédérique had opened my eyes to the young woman's secret sentiments, I had dreaded that interview; I was deeply moved, and it grieved me to think of causing her pain. Poor child! from whom I was fleeing because she loved me! We run after so many women who do not love us!

Mignonne seemed to me even paler and more depressed than usual. However, she smiled when she saw me. I went to meet her and held out my hand.

"Mignonne, I was waiting to say good-bye to you."

She looked anxiously at me, did not take the hand I offered her, and faltered:

"What! to say good-bye? Are you going on a journey?"

"Oh, no! I am just going into the country—not very far away. I am not leaving you for long."

"Ah! you are going to the country? You have never said anything about it. Is it something you have just thought of?"

"I have been thinking of it for several days. I am in the habit of going into the country every year for a time; it does

me good."

"If it's for your health, you are wise. I will go away, then, and come again when you return—when you send me word."

"No; on the contrary, if you wish to please me, to do me a favor, you will continue to come here. I am taking my servant with me, but I will leave you my keys, which you will hand to the concierge when you go away. I intrust the care of my establishment to you! There are many things to be done here. I would like to have my curtains renovated, and the furniture of my salon and bedroom covered. You will find money in the desk. Be good enough to attend to all these details. I take the liberty of looking upon you as if you were my sister; does that offend you?"

"Offend me! no, indeed! You are too kind to me! you always find pretexts for keeping me busy, for heaping kindnesses on me. Oh! I see it plainly enough!"

"Don't say that. On the contrary, it is due to you that my house has assumed an orderly, comfortable aspect that it never had before."

"Will it be long before you return to Paris?"

"I don't think so. But sometimes, when one has no business to attend to——"

"Of course, and when one is enjoying one's self. Are you going to visit—friends?"

"Yes, I am going to see several friends—to make a round of visits. By the way, Mignonne, I wanted to say— That young man whom you have seen here several times—Ballangier—will probably come while I am away."

"I will tell the concierge not to let anyone come up, as you won't be here."

"That is all right, so far as most people are concerned; but I want Ballangier to be excepted from that prohibition. I take a very deep interest in that young man. He used to have none but evil acquaintances in Paris; he must not find a house closed to him where he can learn only profitable lessons. And then, too, my library is at his disposal; he may take whatever books he chooses. So you will please be kind enough to admit him. He's a fine fellow, and I am sure that he will do his utmost to deserve your esteem."

"Very good, monsieur," Mignonne replied, in a cold and constrained tone; "your orders shall be followed."

"But I am not giving you orders; I am simply expressing a wish, that's all!"

"And if any letters should come for you, monsieur, where shall I send them?"

"I don't expect any. At all events, my servant will call and get them from the concierge."

"Oh! you will send your servant to Paris, but you won't come yourself?"

She hastily lowered her eyes, but I saw that they were full of tears. I made haste to grasp her hand, which she did not withdraw, and pressed it affectionately.

"I shall see you soon, Mignonne," I said. "Keep a sharp eye on my house!"

And I hurried away, driving Monsieur Pomponne before me, for he seemed determined to return to the room where Mignonne was, probably to pick up a pin.

XLVI

FONTENAY-SOUS-BOIS

We arrived at Fontenay about three in the afternoon. Frédérique's country house was a little beyond the village; it was not isolated, for there were several pretty villas in the neighborhood; but it was far enough from the centre of population for us not to be annoyed by the singing of drunken men, the noise of children, and the barking of dogs. An iron fence surrounded a beautiful lawn bordered by flowers in front of the house. At the left was a small building, entirely separate from the main house, and Frédérique said to me as we passed it:

"That is where you are to sleep, my friend; there's a very nice little chamber over the billiard room, and you will be absolutely at home there, free to go in and out without disturbing anyone."

"But I didn't come here to live alone! And you?"

"I live in this huge structure. I will show you my apartments. But, never fear, my friend, I didn't bring you here to banish you from my presence. You will not be compelled to return to your own quarters except to sleep.—Adèle, take Pomponne to the pavilion at once, with his master's traps."

Adèle was the lady's-maid. She was an excellent girl, who deigned to assume the functions of cook in addition to her own, in the country. Monsieur Pomponne followed her, peering inquisitively into every clump of bushes.

Frédérique showed me the house, which consisted of two stories, with six sleeping-rooms. It was furnished with taste, and would easily accommodate a large family.

"What are you going to do with so much room, all alone as you are?" I inquired.

"In the country, my friend, I find that one needs plenty of space. I saw this house, and it took my fancy; the rent was not high, so I hired it. I could not make it smaller; besides, you see that I am not alone now."

"You will still be alone in your great caravansary, since you relegate me to a separate building!"

"Ah! my friend, what about the proprieties? Is it not a very bold step at the best for me, a married woman, to bring a young man to stay at my house in the country? The world doesn't know that we are only Orestes and Pylades, Damon and Pythias. But I don't care a snap of my finger for what people may say!"

"And your husband?"

"My husband! I fancy that he doesn't even know that I am in the country.—You have seen the house, now come and see the garden. But wait a minute! wait! my rustic cap! Oh! it is so nice to be comfortable!"

She substituted for her city bonnet a little straw cap with a visor, which she wore a little on one side; she was captivating so. I found in the hall several hats for the country, of different shapes.

"Take your choice," said my hostess.

"What! are these part of the furniture?"

"No, I brought them all for my own use—to try—you know, I dress like a man sometimes."

"So you told me; but I have never seen you in masculine costume."

"I'll put it on some morning, to stroll about the fields with you. Oh! I look like a scamp then, I tell you! Come, monsieur, choose a hat."

I donned a gray felt, with a pointed crown and a broad brim, in which I must have resembled an Italian bandit; all I needed was the ribbons. Frédérique escorted me to the garden. It contained nearly two acres, and was laid out in an original fashion. There were none of the customary, broad, straight paths; on the contrary, they wound and twisted about in all directions—a veritable labyrinth. Shade trees, shrubbery, and thickets combined to make the garden a fascinating spot, which appeared four times larger than it really was.

Our first day passed very quickly. I was installed in the small pavilion, and was very comfortable there; but it seemed to me that I should prefer to be in the main house, under the same roof with Frédérique. My friendship for her developed so rapidly that when I was fifteen minutes without seeing her I felt that something was missing: I had never loved a mistress as I loved that friend.

When I woke for the first time in that house to which I had come so unexpectedly, I was conscious of a feeling of contentment, of secret happiness, which I could not describe. Was it pleasure because I was in the country with a person who manifested such sincere friendship for me? Was it satisfaction because I had acted wisely in going away from Mignonne and being careful not to take an unfair advantage of the sentiment I had inspired? Or was it simply the change of air?

I went to a window that looked on the garden, and I heard a voice calling me a sluggard. Frédérique was already up. She wore a white dress, cut like a blouse, with a blue sash. I had noticed that blue was her favorite color. Her little straw cap was on her head, and her beautiful glossy black hair fell in dense curls on both sides of her face.

It seemed to me that I had never seen her so lovely, so alluring. Ah! it is a fact that in the country, amid the green fields and trees, everything that appeals to our senses moves and excites us more keenly than elsewhere.

Frédérique put her arm through mine and we strolled about the garden. For the first time, I was conscious of a peculiar sensation at the contact of her arm with mine. Was it really the first time that I had experienced that sensation? No. But that morning it seemed sweeter to me; and yet, for some unknown reason, I was no longer so light-hearted, so at my ease with her; I was almost afraid to look at her. What thoughts were these that came into my head? I dared not heed them.

Madame Daubery had never been so amiable, so gay, so kind, so sparkling. I thought that I knew her; but to be able to appreciate fully all the resources of her wit, all the charm of her society, and all the seductiveness of her beauty, I found that it was necessary to be alone with her in that charming retreat.

The time passed with extraordinary rapidity; and yet there were but we two. We made frequent trips in the saddle or on foot about the surrounding country. The horses that we hired were very ugly—but what did we care? We did not go out to exhibit ourselves. When the weather was bad, we played and sang, or I drew some landscape that I had sketched, while she read aloud to me. Every morning she said:

"My friend, if you want to take a trip to Paris, don't hesitate; you can come back this evening; but don't go to your own rooms, if Mignonne is there. As we have undertaken to cure that young woman, we must not cause a relapse."

"Do you mean that you are tired of me?" I would say; "would you like to be rid of me for to-day?"

Her only reply was to give me a light tap on the cheek, and nothing more would be said about Paris.

A fortnight passed. Suppose that in seeking to cure Mignonne I had made myself ill? That is what I was beginning to ask myself; for the more I saw of Frédérique, the more strongly I felt that it would be impossible for me to renounce the pure and unalloyed happiness that I enjoyed with her. I was no longer the same man; in the midst of my pleasures, I had attacks of melancholy. When Frédérique fixed her eyes on me, I became embarrassed, almost timid; but when she was not looking at me, with what joy I gazed at her! with what bliss my eyes feasted themselves upon every detail of her person! Was it love that I felt for her? I dared not confess it positively to myself, but I was terribly afraid that it was. Yes, I was afraid; for if I loved her with love, and she loved me with friendship only, I must constantly endure the torments of Tantalus in her presence; if I loved her with love, I should not always be able to control myself; and my feelings since I had been with her in the country, the perturbation that I felt when she put her arm through mine, the flush that rose to my face when I happened to place my hand on her knee—everything warned me that a time would come—and perhaps soon—when I should forget respect and social conventions—when the friend would vanish and be succeeded by the lover! How many times, when we were walking together along a narrow path, had I been tempted to press her to my heart! to steal a kiss from her lips! But I remembered the night that I had supped with her, when we had agreed to be good friends, when she adopted the familiar form of address, and granted me the same privilege.—Excited by the fumes of wine,—or perhaps already assailed by the first flames of the passion that was destined later to consume me,—I had kissed her passionately. She had taken offence; that kiss was the signal for our rupture; she forbade me to enter her doors again. Suppose that she should do the same now! She manifested the utmost confidence in me, because she believed me to be simply her friend, because she was persuaded that I would never have any other feeling than friendship for her. Suppose that upon learning that I really loved her she should take offence anew, leave me, deprive me of her presence! That thought froze the blood in my veins, and was sufficient to recall me to my senses whenever Frédérique's lovely eyes were on the point of making me forget myself.

Two old bachelors who lived in the nearest house were the only guests she had received thus far; the brothers Ramonet were very pleasant, and played billiards or whist with us when the rain compelled us to stay indoors.

Several times I had had occasion to send Pomponne to Paris. I told him to say to Mignonne that I was visiting my friend Balloquet, at Fontenay; I did not know whether he had obeyed my orders strictly, but I doubted it.

One evening, when the bad weather compelled us to resort to cards,—which, by the way, I would have been glad to dispense with, but Frédérique, whether because she was afraid that I would be bored, or from pure coquetry, took care that our tête-à-têtes should not be too frequent,—the elder Monsieur Ramonet observed, as he was dealing:

"We have a new neighbor. The small house close by—on the right."

"With the terraces, in the Italian style?"

"Yes. It has been let."

"It must be very recently," said Frédérique, "for all the shutters have always been closed until now."

"It was only three days ago. A lady has hired it."

"Is she alone?"

"Alone, except for a maid. But it's a very small house, almost no room at all. It's very pretty, though; I went over it once?"

"Have you seen the new neighbor yet?"

"No, but my brother has.—Haven't you, Jules, seen the lady who has hired the little house?"

"Yes, when I passed there this morning, she was at the window on the ground floor; I bowed, and she returned my bow most affably. She's very pretty—a young woman, with an air of distinction."

"Ah! did you see all that at a glance, Monsieur Jules?"

"Why, yes, madame! Oh! one glance is all I need; however, I bestowed more than one on her."

"And, of course, you know already who she is, what she does, what her name is?"

"No, not yet; but I shall know all those things to-morrow. She must be a widow; for the house would be too small for a lady with a husband and family. Being neighbors, we will call on her one of these days—eh, brother?"

"To be sure."

"You have that privilege, messieurs. As for myself, as I pay very few visits, I think that I shall not make this lady's acquaintance."

After the brothers Ramonet had gone, Frédérique, who seemed more thoughtful than usual, suddenly said to me:

"You are not bored here, are you, my friend?"

"How many times must I tell you that I am enjoying myself immensely; that I have never known such happy days as those that have just passed?"

"And you don't regret Paris?"

"I regret nothing."

"And you don't care about making the acquaintance of new neighbors?"

"Certainly not; indeed, I think sometimes that the brothers Ramonet are in the way."

"Ah! how good you are to be so happy with your friend! Good-night, Charles; until to-morrow!"

She gave me her hand, and looked at me with such a charming expression that I was ready to cover her hand with kisses. Ah! if I dared confess what was taking place in my heart! But she would have had no choice but to be angry and order me to go. I preferred to hold my peace and remain with her.

XLVII

THE NEIGHBOR

On the following morning, Frédérique and I were in the salon on the ground floor; I was trying to extort some melody from a wretched piano, and she was laughing at my impatience, when her servant appeared and informed her that a lady desired to see her.

"A lady!" exclaimed Frédérique, in surprise; "but I don't expect any lady. Where does she come from?"

"It seems that she is the person who has hired the little house near by."

"And she thinks that, being a neighbor, she owes me a visit. Well, I will receive her, if it must be; but I propose to show her in short order that I don't choose to be intimate with my neighbors. Admit this lady who is in such a hurry to see me!"

The maid retired. I turned toward the door, curious to see the neighbor, who was said to be pretty; Frédérique continued to sit nonchalantly on the couch. A lady appeared; I made a gesture of surprise, and Madame Dauberny uttered a cry; we recognized Madame Sordeville.

Armantine seemed amazed to find me there; but she recovered herself at once and ran toward Frédérique, saying:

"It is I! You didn't expect to see me, did you? You had no idea that I had become your neighbor?"

"Why, no, surely not; I had not the slightest suspicion of it!" replied Frédérique, in a tone that was not precisely affectionate; "but who told you—how did you know that I lived in this house, where, by the way, I have been only a short time?"

"Mon Dieu! servants, you know, find out instantly who one's neighbors are, and, in the country especially, that is the first thing one thinks about."

"I promise you that I think very little about it."

"My maid said to me this morning: 'Madame, this fine house next to us is let to Madame Dauberny.'—I needn't tell you that, when I heard your name, I asked for other particulars; I soon concluded that it must be you, so I lost no time in coming to see you and embrace you. Did I do wrong?"

"No, indeed! certainly not!"

The ladies embraced. I was not fully persuaded that their kisses were sincere. Frédérique was much disturbed; she changed color every second. Madame Sordeville was still pretty and as great a coquette as ever; I saw that instantly. She soon turned to me and said:

"When I came to see my friend, I did not expect, I must say, to find Monsieur Rochebrune here. That is an additional pleasure!"

I contented myself with bowing coldly. Frédérique, who was watching me, said:

"Yes, Monsieur Rochebrune consented to pass some time with me here. I thought at first that he would not make a

long visit, but he said to me lately that he did not regret Paris at all."

"That is the truth, madame; you have made me love the country."

Armantine bit her lips, and continued:

"You receive a great deal of company here, no doubt? It's so near Paris!"

"Why, no; on the contrary, I receive no one. Except for two gentlemen who live near,—and them we see only once or twice a week,—we are always alone, Charles and I."

Armantine frowned slightly with vexation, but instantly tried to change the frown into a smile. It was the first time that she had heard Frédérique call me Charles, and that evidence of familiarity did not seem to cause her the keenest pleasure.

"So you have left your place of retirement at Passy?" said Madame Dauberny, after a pause.

"Oh! a long while ago—I was bored to death there. One sees too many people in that region, and I prefer solitude now. I came here to take a house, because I thought it would be quieter, more like the country."

"But, still, if you are bored——"

"It is sometimes unwelcome visitors who bore one. One is happier alone with one's memories."

As she said this, Armantine cast a melancholy glance in my direction. Frédérique noticed it, and she at once rose, saying:

"Come, inspect my house and garden.—Will you come with us, Charles?"

"No, madame; I have some letters to write."

I bowed, and returned to my pavilion. I had an idea that Frédérique was quite willing that I should not attend them; besides, those two old friends might have innumerable things to say to each other after so long a separation, and I did not wish to intrude.

The presence of that woman, with whom I had been deeply in love, had caused some disturbance in my mind, I admit; but it was of very brief duration; it was surprise, the emotion due to the evocation of the past, and there was nothing in my heart that at all resembled love for her. Armantine was still very pretty, there was no denying that; but her eyes, sometimes so expressive, and her seductive smile, could not efface from my memory the disdainful, insolent air with which she left me that day on the Champs-Élysées.

I remained in my room all day. When I returned to the salon, Frédérique was alone. I sat down beside her.

"Has your friend left you?"

"Yes. Did you hope to find her here?"

"I? Why do you ask me that?"

"You answer my question with another; that is very convenient. But do you think that I should regard it as a crime if it gave you great pleasure to meet a woman whom—whom you once adored—whom you still love, probably?"

"Oho! so you think that I still love her, do you?"

"What would there be extraordinary in that? When a passion has not been—satisfied—there is no reason why it should end."

"And you think, do you, that it should end as soon as it is satisfied?"

"I think—that I am only your friend, whereas Armantine——"

"Well?"

"Mon Dieu! I don't know what I am saying! That unexpected visit, the idea of having her for a neighbor——"

"You must have been glad to see your friend again?"

"Oh, yes! of course, I am delighted! She will probably come every day; as she knows that you are here, she certainly won't miss a day."

"Ah! you think that she will come on my account?"

"On yours—or mine—I'm sure I don't know. However, we shall see."

Frédérique sighed. All the rest of the evening, she was sad and pensive; for my part, I too was preoccupied. We parted earlier than usual, and she did not look at me as she did the night before, when she said:

"Until to-morrow!"

On the following day, I proposed to Frédérique that we should take a long walk; she assented, and we started. We had not walked fifty yards, when we saw Armantine coming toward us. I noticed that she was dressed more coquettishly than on the day before. Frédérique could not restrain an angry gesture as she muttered:

"Ah! it seems that she was watching us! This bids fair to be amusing!"

"Are you going to walk?" asked Armantine, looking at me.

"It looks rather like it," replied Frédérique.

"Will you allow me to go with you? As I don't know the country at all, I am very glad to find guides."

"You have the right to come with us. But I warn you that I am a good walker, and Charles and I take very long walks."

"Oh! I can walk very well!—Besides, if I get tired, I fancy that monsieur will kindly give me his arm."

"It will be at your service, madame," I replied, with cold courtesy.

But Frédérique, who had my arm at that moment, instantly dropped it, saying:

"In the country, people walk singly; that's the most convenient way."

I looked at her in surprise, for we were not accustomed to walk so.

We started again. Armantine went into ecstasies over the scenery; she kept exclaiming every minute:

"Why, it is perfectly lovely here! I am delighted that I came; I am immensely pleased already!"

Frédérique said nothing, or replied only by a few curt phrases. I carried on the conversation with Madame Sordeville, who constantly asked me for information about the region, and was never at a loss for questions which enabled her to talk with me. I fancied that I could see that Frédérique was irritated by it; but I could not be discourteous to the other, who talked to me incessantly.

Our walk was gloomy enough. Frédérique was the first to suggest returning. Thereupon Armantine complained of being tired. It was impossible to avoid offering her my arm, which she eagerly accepted. I offered the other to Frédérique, but she refused it. I wondered what the matter was.

Armantine left us at her door, having informed her friend that she would pass the evening with her.

Frédérique was pale and excited; I asked her the cause of her anger, and why she had refused my arm.

"In order to leave you alone with the object of your love!" she replied, with a piercing glance that seemed to seek to read my inmost thoughts. That glance gave birth to a hope so delicious that a thrill of joy ran through my whole being; but I dared not dwell upon that thought. I should be too happy if I had guessed aright.

Armantine passed the whole evening with her friend. She worked, while we played and sang. Frédérique asked me to sing a ballad; I complied, and apparently acquitted myself creditably, for I saw that Armantine listened to me with amazement; and when I had finished, Frédérique said:

"That was very good, Charles; you were more successful than at Armantine's reception."

I laughed at the remembrance of my false note; but Madame Sordeville lowered her eyes and did not laugh.

She came the next day and the next; nor was there an evening that she did not pay her friend a visit. Frédérique received her with formal rather than affectionate courtesy; she had altogether lost the playfulness and spirit that made our tête-à-têtes so delightful. When I was alone with her, she said little; when Armantine was there, she said nothing at all. But Armantine pretended to pay no heed to the melancholy or capricious humor of her friend; she was fond of talking, and she often sustained practically the whole burden of what could hardly be called conversation.

Very often she bestowed a melting glance on me, but I pretended not to notice. She always seated herself near me. If we walked in the garden, she walked by my side and talked to me in undertones, as if she had something to say to me that she did not wish Frédérique to hear. Frédérique observed all her manœuvring, and sometimes I saw her expression change two or three times in a minute. At such times, my heart beat violently, and I was tempted to throw myself at her feet and say:

"It is you, you alone, whom I love!"

But suppose that all that was nothing more than what she called the selfishness of friendship! She was such a peculiar creature! I should be so confused if I had misinterpreted her feelings! What would she think of me? That my self-esteem led me to see on all sides women who adored me!

One morning, after passing an hour with us, Armantine remembered that she had something to do at home, and left us. I rejoiced to be left alone with Frédérique, which had come to be a rare occurrence of late. I proposed a walk in the fields, but she refused on the ground of indisposition, a sick headache, and left me abruptly, to go to her room.

Why that ill temper with me? If her friend's constant presence irritated her, was I responsible for it? Had I sought Madame Sordeville's company? On the contrary, she must have seen that in my intercourse with that lady I kept strictly within the limits of the most rigid courtesy. As I said this to myself, I left the salon and the house, hoping to find a solution of my conjectures while walking.

I paid no attention to the direction I took. What did it matter, as I had no definite goal in view? But chance willed that I should turn to the right instead of the left; and to reach the woods I had to pass Armantine's house.

I did not notice it, but was walking on, musing deeply, when suddenly I heard my name called. I raised my eyes and found myself in front of Madame Sordeville's house. She was at a window on the ground floor; it was she who had called me, and, as I looked up, she bowed affably to me.

I returned her salutation, and was going on; but she called out:

"Won't you do me the favor to come in a moment, Monsieur Rochebrune? I have long wanted to have a moment's conversation with you; but at Madame Dauberny's it is impossible; for she doesn't leave you for an instant. As chance has brought you to my door, will you not grant me this favor?"

To refuse would have been discourteous and in wretched taste. Although one has ceased to be in love with a woman, one must still be polite to her, unless one is a wild Indian; and I had no desire to be looked upon as such.

So I went into Madame Sordeville's house; I continued to give her that name in my mind. She came to meet me, ushered me into the room, sat down, and pointed to a chair near hers. I took it and waited to hear what she had to say to me. She hesitated and seemed embarrassed; but she looked at me often, and her flashing eyes seemed to try to force me to speak first. Despite the fire of her glance, despite the dangerous play of her eyes, I remained dumb. At last, Armantine decided to begin the interview:

"When I went to call upon Frédérique, monsieur, I did not expect, I confess, to find you there, and especially to find you established there as if you were at home."

"What do you mean by that, madame?"

"You must understand me. The familiarity now existing between you and my friend is evident enough; indeed, she makes no attempt to hide it! But, I repeat, I did not expect that—not that I presume to reproach you, for I have no right to do so. You love—you do not love—that happens every day. As for my friend"—Armantine dwelt significantly on the last word—"as for my friend, it seems to me that I might be a little offended with her without laying myself too much open to blame. Her conduct toward me is hardly that of a really sincere friend. In leading you on to make love to her, to become her—her lover, in short, she has not acted with delicacy, and——"

At this point, I interrupted her.

"I don't quite know what you mean, madame," I said; "I begin by informing you that I am not Madame Dauberny's lover, that I am simply her friend. But even if I were in love with that lady, and she should do me the honor to reciprocate my feeling for her, wherein, I pray to know, could it offend you, or even interest you in the least, madame?"

Armantine was silent for a moment; she sighed, and murmured at last:

"I see that you have not forgotten the way I left you one day on the Champs-Élysées. I was wrong, monsieur, very wrong; I have often regretted it since. But do you not know that women sometimes have caprices, moments of irritation, which they themselves cannot understand? It may be that I am more subject than other women to such freaks. But, when I confess my sins, will you continue to bear malice?"

Armantine was really very fascinating; while "confessing her sins," she indulged in a thousand coquettish little

manœuvres which would have turned many a man's head. But I was in love with another woman, and that love must have been most sincere, for Armantine's tender glances had no effect whatever on my heart.

"I bear you no ill will at all, madame," I said, with a smile. "That episode faded from my memory long ago, and I supposed that it was the same with you. You owe me no apology; indeed, as you know, time changes the aspect of many things. To-day, it seems to me that that old story does not deserve a moment's thought from either of us. Au revoir, madame! With your permission, I will continue my walk."

I rose and bowed. Armantine was speechless, utterly crushed; she did not look at me, she did not even respond to my salutation.

I had just left the house, and was about to resume my walk, when I saw Frédérique standing a few steps away, with her eyes fixed upon me. I walked hastily toward her. Her pallor terrified me; the fixed stare of her eyes cut me to the heart. I tried to take her hand; she snatched it away.

"What is the matter?" I asked.

"Nothing."

"What were you doing here?"

"I wanted to see you come out of her house. I was certain that you were there."

"At Madame Sordeville's? It was the merest chance, my going in. I was passing, and——"

"You have no need to apologize, or to try to invent excuses. I have told you a hundred times that you were your own master, that you might have ten mistresses if you chose, that I did not claim any right to interfere with your affections. But I do not like to have people lie to me, deceive me, disguise their thoughts."

"I have done none of those things, Frédérique; and if you will listen to me——"

"Later—not now. Adieu!"

"Are you going to leave me? Won't you come to walk with me?"

"No! I have something to do, I am going home."

"I am going home, too."

"No; continue your walk, I beg you. It would annoy me if you should go home with me. You see that my nerves are all on edge, that a trifle upsets me. Leave me, my friend; au revoir!"

She hurried away; I feared to vex her by following her. She was there in the road, watching for me; she wanted to see if I was with Armantine. And that sadness that I read in her eyes, and that she tried in vain to dissemble—was not that jealousy? If she had no warmer feeling than friendship for me, would she be jealous of Armantine? Even though I were mistaken, even though the result were to break off our relations again, I determined that I would no longer make a secret of my sentiments, of my consuming love for her. I resolved that I would tell her all, that very day. It was no longer possible for me to be content with the rôle of a friend.

I wandered about the country a long while, recalling every trivial circumstance in Frédérique's conduct that could possibly encourage my hope that she had something more than friendship for me. The dinner hour had arrived, when I returned to the house.

I found nobody in the salon. I went into the garden, but Frédérique was not there. I called Pomponne, who came with a letter in his hand.

"Monsieur called me, and I was looking for monsieur; what a coincidence!"

"Where is Madame Dauberny?"

"She has gone, monsieur."

"Gone! What do you say, idiot?"

"I say, monsieur, that we're the masters of the house. Madame Dauberny has gone away with Adèle, and here's a letter she left for monsieur."

I took the letter, hastily tore it open, and read what follows:

"MY FRIEND:

"I am going away from this house, which has lost all its charm for me since Armantine has been my neighbor and has passed all her time with us. I say with us—I imagined that it was still that happy time when there were only we two! That time passed too swiftly. I realize that I am a selfish creature, and that it is natural that you should be happy in having found again a woman whom you once loved dearly, and whose presence has rekindled the fire which was not extinct. So, be happy with her. Remain at my house, my friend; remain there as long as you please, and believe that I go away without murmuring, but not without regret."

I had hardly finished reading the letter, when I called my servant.

"Pack my valise, Pomponne, and your own things; we are going back to Paris."

"Going back to Paris! When, monsieur?"

"Instantly! make haste!"

"What about dinner, monsieur? We haven't dined, and I know it's all ready; Adèle told me so when she went away."

"We will dine in Paris. I do not propose to remain another half-hour in this house. Come! you should have had everything ready before now."

Fifteen minutes later, we were on our way to Paris in the first *coucou* I could find; for there are still *coucous* at Fontenay.

I reached Paris about seven in the evening. As I entered my house, the first person I saw was Ballangier, in a neat brown frock-coat and a round hat; his attire was noticeable for a sort of coquetry which indicated that the desire to please was still his first thought.

He grasped my hand, crying:

"Ah! here you are at last! I am so glad to see you! I have so much to tell you about all that has happened in the six weeks since you went away! For it is six weeks since you left Paris."

"Is Mignonne in my room now?"

"No; but she sometimes passes the whole day there and a large part of the evening. She enjoys being in your room."

"Come up with me and tell me all about it."

Ballangier accompanied me to my apartment; I got rid of Pomponne by telling him to get his dinner wherever he chose; and when I was alone with my friend, I asked how his love affairs were progressing.

"In the first place, my dear Charles, when I came here, three days after you went away, I was very much surprised to learn that you were in the country; I was going away, sadly enough, when the concierge said to me: 'There's somebody upstairs, and my orders are to let you go up.' I didn't wait to be informed twice; something told me that I should find Mignonne here. Sure enough, she was here; she was working, but she was very sad—indeed, I believe she was crying. She received me coldly. I sat a long while looking at her, without saying a word, and she didn't speak, either. At last I began to talk about you, of all that I owed you, of my affection for you. Then she listened to me and answered. On my next visit, I talked again about you; I saw that that was the only way of making her talk a little. I asked her if she knew where you were; she said, with a sigh, that she knew perfectly well, but, as you had made a secret of it, she didn't think that she ought to tell. I continued to come from time to time; and when I couldn't call during the day, on account of my work, I made up for it by waiting for her in the evening at the corner of the street. I watched for her to come away from your house; I didn't dare to speak to her, for fear of displeasing her, but I followed her at a distance till she was safely at home; and as she lives on Rue Ménilmontant, my pleasure lasted some time. You will see, Charles, what an excellent idea it was of mine to act as her escort. For several days I had noticed a middle-aged man prowling about the street, a well-dressed man, but very fat; and I fancied that he too was on the watch for Mignonne; for he walked very near her—when he could keep up with her, that is, for she quickened her pace at his approach.—'Parbleu!' I said to myself, about a week ago; 'I must find out about this matter. I'll just keep out of sight and see what this fellow's intentions are.' The weather happened to be bad that night, and there were few people in the street. I waited; my man soon appeared, and he waited too. After a few minutes, Mignonne came out of the house. Then I saw my man, who was lurking in the darkest part of the street, speak to Mignonne, put his arm round her waist, insult her, in short, in spite of her entreaties and her shrieks. I tell you, his punishment wasn't long in coming! In three seconds I was on the fellow; I had grabbed him by the throat, thrown him into the gutter, and hammered him with feet and hands. I believe that I should be punching him yet, if Mignonne hadn't begged me to let him alone. You can imagine that I offered her my arm then to take her home, and she didn't refuse it. The poor child was so frightened! She thanked me a hundred times more than I deserved; and since then, I'm not sure, but it seems to me that she's more friendly with me."

"Well done, Ballangier! that incident ought surely to have helped on your prospects. You have rendered Mignonne a great service, and she is grateful."

"A great thing that was! to punch an impertinent blackguard's head! Anybody would do as much for a poor little woman who's being insulted—unless he has no blood in his veins! How is it with you, Charles, are you all right? Have you left the country for good?"

"I don't know; that depends. Look you, my friend, I too am in love, and I don't know yet whether my love is returned."

"Oho! Do you mean it? you are in love, too? Oh! she'll love you, I'll answer for that; it is impossible for anyone not to love you!"

"God grant it! Meanwhile, I will admit that I haven't dined; and as it's the fashion in our day for lovers to dine, because dieting would not advance their affairs, I propose to regale myself. Have you dined?"

"Oh! long ago. I came here to wait for Mignonne, but she must have gone away earlier than usual."

I was in a hurry to dine, because I intended to go immediately after to Madame Dauberny's; as she had returned only a few hours ahead of me, it was impossible that she should not be at home.

Ballangier went out with me; he would have left me when we reached the street, but I asked him to walk with me as far as the boulevard; and on the way I learned with pleasure that his conduct was still all that could be desired, that his love did not cause him to neglect his work, and that he had become one of his employer's head workmen.

We had almost reached the boulevard, when, as we passed a brightly lighted shop, Ballangier started back, touched my arm, and said, pointing to a man who had just passed us:

"There he is! That's the man! He didn't see me, but I recognized him."

"Who is he?"

"The man I thrashed so soundly for taking liberties with Mignonne."

I looked at the person whom Ballangier pointed out to me; his figure impressed me, it reminded me of someone. I ran back and overtook him, then turned about and faced him. I was not mistaken: it was Monsieur Dauberny.

I do not know whether he recognized me. He must have been surprised by the way I stared at him; but he simply frowned and went his way, quickening his pace. I let him go, and returned to Ballangier, who had stopped and was waiting for me a few steps away.

"Well, Charles, you wanted to see that man; you succeeded, didn't you?"

"Yes, and I recognized him perfectly."

"Recognized? The deuce! do you know the old reprobate?"

"Ah! if he were no worse than that! But he's an infernal villain! You did well, I assure you, to deliver Mignonne from his persecutions. Poor girl! If you knew of what that man is capable!"

"Really?"

"Continue to watch. The sight of that man makes me tremble for her! But the day of reckoning must come some time!"

"Explain yourself! Do you want me to run after the fellow and arrest him?"

"No, no! that's not the way I must deal with him. But we will watch him, and an opportunity will soon come—with that man they must come frequently—and then——"

"Then we will annihilate him, won't we?"

"Au revoir, Ballangier! I must dine. But, I repeat, watch over Mignonne more carefully than ever."

"Oh! you have no need to urge that on me."

I entered a restaurant, dined in hot haste, and went to Madame Dauberny's house.

"Madame is not in," said the concierge.

"You mean that she is not receiving, for she must be at home; did she not return from the country to-day?"

"Yes, monsieur; madame returned to-day. But I assure you that she went out this evening, not very long ago; and I believe I heard someone say that she was going to the Opéra."

"To the Opéra?"

"Yes, monsieur; Mamzelle Adèle told us that her mistress was going to the Opéra."

I was determined to find her. If I allowed that evening to pass without having an explanation with her, she would be quite capable of leaving Paris on the morrow; she would escape me again, and for a long time perhaps. I decided to go to the Opéra. Frédérique was not one of those women who are afraid to go to the theatre alone; more than once I had heard her say:

"Why do I need a companion? When the fancy takes me to go to the theatre, I send and hire a box, and I go. In my box, I am alone, I am at home, and no one has the right to come there to annoy me."

I arrived at the Opéra; I went into the orchestra and stood at the entrance, from which I examined one side of the auditorium. I did not see Frédérique. I walked to the other side of the orchestra; there was a large audience, and several men were already standing at that entrance. I slipped in behind them and began my inspection. That time my search was short: I saw her, alone, in a *baignoire*, leaning back a little. Was she listening attentively to the performance, or was she absorbed by her thoughts? Before joining her, I gave myself the pleasure of gazing at her for several minutes.

Suddenly one of the men in front of me began to speak, so loudly that I did not lose a single word; indeed, I was speedily convinced that he intended that I should hear.

"I say, do you see that lady yonder, in one of the *baignoires*—all alone in her box?"

"In a pearl-gray dress, with black hair, and long cork-screw curls?"

"Exactly. What do you think of her?"

"Not bad—a Spanish type of face; but a little pale."

"Perhaps that may be grief at losing me."

"Oho! is she——?"

"Yes, my dear fellow, she's an old flame of mine; she's still a——"

I did not allow Saint-Bergame to complete his sentence; if I had not recognized his voice, I should have guessed his identity from his language. I grasped his arm, and said to him in an undertone:

"Monsieur, the man who has been a woman's lover and tells of it is a conceited ass; the man who insults her in public is a coward!"

Saint-Bergame turned, eyed me from head to foot with an insolent air, and rejoined in a loud voice:

"Ah! you constitute yourself that lady's champion, do you? To be sure, it's your turn now."

I could not contain my wrath; I struck him in the face. Saint-Bergame tried to rush at me; but our quarrel had attracted general attention; someone threw himself between us, and I noticed then for the first time that Saint-Bergame's companion was Fouvenard.

We left the hall; several persons tried to adjust our difficulty, but I satisfied them that their mediation was useless, and that we knew perfectly well how the affair must end. I joined Saint-Bergame, who, with Fouvenard, awaited me in a corner of the vestibule. The latter stared at me in amazement, murmuring:

"What! is it you? What is this quarrel about?"

"There are no explanations to be given, messieurs. At what hour to-morrow?"

"At nine o'clock—no, ten o'clock, at Porte Maillot," said Saint-Bergame, who was trembling with anger. "I don't like to rise early. I shall have time enough to kill you."

"Very good, monsieur! Your weapon?"

"The sword."

"That is all."

"I shall have monsieur and another second with me."

"It seems to me that monsieur would suffice."

"You evidently do not fight often, monsieur, and are not familiar with the customs of duelling."

I did not consider it necessary to reply to this new insult.

"Very good; I will have two witnesses," I said, and walked away.

I returned to the hall and was going toward Madame Dauberny's box, when a lady rushed up to me. It was Frédérique. She took my arm and led me away, saying:

"Come! let us go! let us go!"

I followed her from the building. She almost made me run; she squeezed my arm convulsively; I spoke to her, and she did not reply; but she wept, and hid her face in her handkerchief. At last we arrived at her house. Then she threw herself into a chair and her sobs burst forth anew. I knelt at her feet; I took her hand and begged her to tell me the cause of her grief.

"The cause? the cause? You ask me that when you are to fight to-morrow—for me?"

"I am to fight?"

"Oh! no falsehoods! I recognized you at the entrance to the orchestra. You struck Saint-Bergame."

"Yes, for he insulted you."

She took my head in her hands and kissed me again and again, crying:

"Ah! that was well done! Thanks, my friend! I expected nothing less from you."

"Well! in that case, why these tears, this grief, when I am going to punish a man who had insulted you once before? I found this evening an opportunity that I have been looking for ever since our drive in the Bois de Boulogne."

"Oh! of course, this duel would be an everyday affair, if— Mon Dieu! it is my fault! always my fault! Why did I leave the country? why did I come back to Paris? All this would not have happened, if I had stayed at Fontenay. But you, my friend—why did you come back—why did you follow me? Why didn't you stay with that woman whom you love—and who has no idea of spurning you now?"

"You are all astray, Frédérique: it was to stay with the woman I love that I returned to Paris; it was to be with her that I followed you; for the woman I love—not with friendship, but with love—the most sincere, the most passionate love—with a love that will end only with my life—is you—you! Yes! though you banish me from your presence again, I can no longer content myself with the title of friend, beneath which I have with difficulty concealed all that I felt for you!"

"He loves me! he loves me!" murmured Frédérique, gazing at me with an expression of the purest ecstasy in her lovely eyes. Then, giving way to her emotion, lacking strength to say more, she fell into my arms. I will not try to describe my bliss. One cannot describe what one feels so keenly.

When we had recovered the faculty of speech, Frédérique said to me, with her head resting on my shoulder:

"The least that I can do is to reveal all my secrets to you now; there must be no more secrets between us. I felt drawn toward you the first moment that I knew you. There are, I have no question, certain bonds of sympathy which we cannot understand, but which draw us toward those whom we are destined to love. But at that time you were engrossed by Armantine. Remember that I refused to allow you to call on me. I had no idea that you would fall in love with me, but I felt that your presence would be dangerous to me. I saw you again at Armantine's, depressed and disheartened by her coquetry; I determined to console you by offering you my friendship; I was acting in perfect good faith then, I proposed to be your friend and nothing more—when that kiss that you gave me while I was pretending to doze, that kiss which set my whole being on fire, proved to me that I had other sentiments for you than those of a friend. But you loved Armantine; I did not choose to be simply a passing caprice to you, so it was necessary to break off our relations altogether. And that is what I did, without ceasing for an instant to think of you. Later, I learned what Monsieur Sordeville was, and I lost no time in urging you not to go again to his house; you did not follow my advice, being still in love with Armantine.—Then came the scene on the Champs-Élysées; I had had nothing to do with bringing it about; but I am too honest not to confess that her treatment of you gave me some little hope. We met again, and again I offered you my friendship; but I had much difficulty in concealing the true state of my heart. Your liaison with Rosette made me unhappy, but I soon realized that it was not love. When I saw that other attractive and interesting young woman in your rooms, fresh torments assailed me, and I was very happy when you consented to go away from Mignonne. Finally, at Fontenay my secret was at my tongue's end every day; for I fancied that your eyes expressed something different from friendship. Then we fell in with Armantine again, and she recommenced her coquetries with you. Ah! that was too much! I no longer had the strength to carry on the struggle; I came away, fully determined to part from you forever. But you would not have it so; it is I whom you love. Ah! my friend, my bliss at this moment more than makes up for all the torture I have endured!"

For more than an hour we abandoned ourselves to the ecstatic joy of two hearts which for the first time have declared their mutual love. But suddenly Frédérique's brow darkened, and she looked sadly into my face, crying:

"Mon Dieu! my happiness has made me forget. It is not a dream—you are to fight to-morrow!"

"Yes, I am to fight to-morrow, at ten o'clock. But that fact cannot prevent my being the happiest of men to-night."

"Is there no way of enjoying perfect happiness on earth? I was so happy, so happy! And you are to fight to-morrow!"

"I shall be the victor, and I shall have avenged you! My happiness will be even greater—if that is possible!"

"Oh! yes, yes, we must hope so! With what weapons do you fight?"

"Swords."

"Ah! Saint-Bergame chose that weapon, of course. I have often heard him boast of his fine swordsmanship."

"I struck him, so he had the choice of weapons."

"True; but are you a good fencer?"

"I know how to defend myself."

"We will see about that."

She left me and went into her dressing-room, whence she soon returned with a pair of buttoned foils and handed one to me.

"Let us see, my friend, if you really know how to defend yourself," she said.

"What! can you handle a sword?"

"Very well, according to Grisier, who was my teacher. Didn't I tell you that I received a man's education? Come, monsieur, on guard, and look out for yourself!"

I took the foil. I thought, at first, that all I needed to do was to parry carelessly a thrust or two. But Frédérique soon undeceived me; she was sharp and persistent in attack, quick in parrying. Twice I was touched, and she exclaimed:

"Ah! so that's how you defend yourself, is it? Why, poor fellow, you will let him kill you! Attack—attack, I say!"

These words recalled me to myself; my self-esteem was aroused. We continued for some time, and at last I touched her. She dropped her foil and embraced me, saying:

"That's all right! that will do! But you must be careful; you must not be taken unawares. Whom shall you have with you to-morrow?"

"You remind me. I shall get Balloquet. I can rely upon him, and I must go this evening and leave a letter for him. But I must have another second. Those fellows insist on having three on a side. Whom in the devil shall I get?"

"Don't cudgel your brains, my friend. Your other second will be at your rooms at nine o'clock to-morrow."

"Do you know of someone?"

"Yes."

"Ah! I'll wager that you are thinking of Baron von Brunzbrack?"

"Perhaps so. However, I'll be responsible for your second. Now, write to Balloquet at once. Do you know the long-bearded individual who was with Saint-Bergame?"

"Oh! yes, I know him! And if I could fight with him too, it would be an additional gratification."

"Why, what has he done to you?"

"Nothing to me. But I told you, did I not, that Mignonne was vilely insulted and then abandoned by her seducer? Well, it was that dastard, that low-lived scoundrel, that Fouvenard, in short, who was with Saint-Bergame at the Opéra this evening."

"Go, my friend, and carry the note to Balloquet; make sure of him, and I will answer for the other second. Then go home and rest. Until to-morrow!"

"You will come to my rooms to learn the result of the duel?"

"Yes, you will see me. Until to-morrow!"

I pressed her to my heart. I was proud of her courage. She continued to smile as she looked after me. I found Balloquet's abode, not without difficulty, gave my letter to the concierge, and went home to bed. She loved me! I was so happy, that I had not a thought to spare for my duel.

XLIX

A DOUBLE DUEL

I woke early. It seemed to me that the events of the preceding night were a dream. But, no—she loved me, she was mine, and I was to fight a duel!

At half-past eight, Balloquet arrived, all out of breath.

"What's up, my dear Rochebrune?" he cried. "You wrote me not to fail you, to drop everything—and here I am! Is there a duel on the carpet, by any chance?"

"Just that! I have a duel on hand for this morning, at ten o'clock, at Porte Maillot. I tell you beforehand, my dear Balloquet, that the affair cannot be adjusted; I struck my opponent at the Opéra last night."

"The devil! it's a serious business, then. What caused the quarrel?"

"It is about a lady, my friend."

"A lady! I understand! that is to say, it's for her lovely eyes."

"If I should tell you her name, I'll be bound that you also would fight for her."

"Oho! do I know her, pray?"

"Madame Dauberny."

"Madame Dauberny! *Fichtre!* But, tell me, are you in love with her now?"

"I have always been, my dear Balloquet; but I dared not confess it to myself, or tell her, for fear I should be repulsed."

"Like me! But it would seem that you haven't been repulsed. I was in love with her for a moment, after a good dinner. She sent me about my business, and I haven't given her a thought for a long time. But I am none the less enchanted that you have chosen me for your second. She's a charming woman, and, although she didn't listen to my nonsense, 'pon my honor! I'd be very glad to fight for her."

"Give me your hand, Balloquet. I expected nothing less from you."

"What is the weapon?"

"The sword."

"Have you one?"

"Yes; here it is."

"Are there to be only we two?"

"I am expecting my other second."

"Who is he?"

"Frédérique has undertaken to send him to me. I fancy that it will be a certain Prussian baron, an excellent and honorable man."

I had finished dressing just as the clock struck nine. I was already beginning to fret over the baron's non-appearance, when my door opened and a slender, graceful young man, of most attractive aspect, stood before us. I looked at him several times, before I exclaimed:

"Frédérique!"

"Myself, my friend."

"What's that? Why, yes, on my word, it's Madame Dauberny!"

"Why are you in this disguise?"

"What! can't you guess? I am your other second."

"You! Can you think of such a thing, Frédérique?"

"I thought of it instantly, when I knew that you were going to fight for me."

"But it's impossible! A woman cannot act as second. I cannot consent to it.—Isn't that so, Balloquet?"

"It certainly isn't customary, and——"

"Listen, messieurs: I have but one reply to make—I propose to do it! If you don't take me with you, I will follow you and be there, all the same. All argument is useless. I propose to be your second."

"But my adversary's seconds will laugh when they see a woman."

"Never fear, they won't laugh long. But let us go, messieurs; we must not keep them waiting. I have a cab below."

I saw that it was useless for me to try to change Frédérique's resolution. We started. I took my sword; but I found a pair of foils without buttons in the cab. Frédérique had thought of everything. We talked little on the way. However brave we may be, we are always assailed by a multitude of reflections when about to fight a duel.

We reached the rendezvous. Saint-Bergame was already there, with Fouvenard and a little man who did not seem to enjoy the occasion at all. I went forward first, apologizing for my delay. Balloquet was behind me, and Frédérique a little farther back.

Saint-Bergame simply bowed and walked away, saying:

"Let us look for a suitable spot."

The little man suggested that we might fight behind the restaurant.

Fouvenard recognized Balloquet, and they exchanged a formal bow. We went into the woods, and in a few moments came to a small cleared space. I removed my coat, and Saint-Bergame did the same. Then Frédérique came forward with the foils, and my opponent at once exclaimed:

"What is this? Is Madame Dauberny one of your seconds?"

"Yes, monsieur," replied Frédérique, with dignity; "for if Charles and his friend do not avenge me, then I will avenge myself."

Saint-Bergame indulged in mocking laughter, and Monsieur Fouvenard deemed it fitting to join him.

"Ha! ha!" he said; "a woman for second! Why, this is charming! I would be glad to cross swords with the lady myself."

"Well! so you shall, if you're not a coward," retorted Frédérique, offering him one of her foils.

He was still pleased to jest and draw back, saying:

"Nonsense! I would with pleasure, if it were a fan; but a foil—my dear lady, you wouldn't know how to handle that!"

"Indeed! I shouldn't know how to handle it?"

As she spoke, Frédérique laid her foil across Fouvenard's face, leaving a red mark which seemed to cut it in two. The bearded man flew into a rage; he seized the weapon she offered him, exclaiming:

"I no longer recognize your sex, and I will not spare you."

"And I will avenge my sex, and poor Mignonne!"

At the name of Mignonne, Fouvenard turned pale; but he prepared for the combat. Balloquet proposed to the little man that they should imitate us; he declined, saying that he considered it ridiculous for seconds to fight.

When I saw Frédérique cross swords with Fouvenard, I shuddered; I trembled for her safety.

"Come on, monsieur," said Saint-Bergame; "I didn't come here to admire madame's prowess; on guard!"

His words recalled me to myself. We began to fight. Saint-Bergame attacked me with violence. While defending myself, I listened to the other combatants. I fancied that Fouvenard uttered a cry of triumph. My adversary made the most of my distraction; I received a thrust which passed through the upper part of my left arm. That wound irritated, exasperated me; I attacked Saint-Bergame fiercely, and he soon fell at my feet; my sword had entered his breast.

I turned and looked for Frédérique. She had not been fighting for some time; in a few seconds, she had knocked Fouvenard's sword from his hand and wounded him in the side. He fell on the turf, and although his wound was trifling he had declined to fight any more.

The little man went to call one of the cabs. Balloquet assisted in placing Saint-Bergame inside, and he was so seriously wounded that the young doctor thought it best to accompany him and his seconds. I returned to Paris alone with Frédérique, who twisted a handkerchief round my arm and begged Balloquet to come to us as soon as possible.

In the cab, she put her arm around my neck, and insisted that I should rest my head on her shoulder. She gazed at me, gazed at me incessantly. Dear Frédérique! it seemed to me that we loved each other all the more dearly from having just escaped a great danger.

When we reached my lodgings, we found no one there but Pomponne, who wept when he saw that I was wounded. I had much difficulty in making him understand that it amounted to nothing. I lay on a couch; Frédérique seated herself beside me and made lint, expressing surprise at Mignonne's absence; for she relied upon her to nurse me zealously when she should be obliged to leave me. In about three-quarters of an hour Balloquet arrived.

"Monsieur Saint-Bergame is in for a long siege," he said, "if he escapes at all. He has his own surgeon, so I left him. As for Fouvenard, he will be all right in a fortnight; but what irritates him most is that blow across the face with the flat of the foil. That was so well laid on, that it is probable that our seducer will carry the mark of it all his life. *Fichtre!* madame, there's some strength in your hand!"

"Now, Monsieur Balloquet, please examine Charles."

Balloquet looked at my wound and dressed it, declared that there was not the slightest danger to be apprehended, but that it would be as well for me to keep my bed for a few days. I was about to obey my doctor, albeit with regret, when the doorbell rang violently. I supposed that it was Mignonne; but Ballangier appeared, pale as death and so excited that he could hardly speak.

"In heaven's name, what's the matter?" I asked; "what has happened?"

"Ah! a terrible misfortune, a—— Mon Dieu! are you wounded?"

"It's almost nothing. Pray go on."

"You urged me yesterday to watch over Mignonne. When I left you, as I was still disturbed by what you had said, I walked in the direction of her home. When I reached Rue Ménilmontant, although I was persuaded that Mignonne had not gone out, as she had not been at your rooms at all that day, something impelled me to go and ask the concierge. 'Madame Landernoy isn't in,' she said; 'she went out this morning to go and work at Monsieur Rochebrune's, on Rue Bleue, as usual.'—I knew that she hadn't been here, so you can imagine my anxiety. I told that to the concierge. She shared my uneasiness. We waited. The evening passed, and the night, and Mignonne did not return. This morning I went to Père-Lachaise, where Mignonne often goes to visit her little girl's grave. I inquired there. The gate-keeper said that he did see her yesterday morning; he knows her well, she has such a gentle, courteous way! After passing half an hour, as usual, at her daughter's grave, she went away—to come here, no doubt. But since then she hasn't been seen."

"Mon Dieu!" cried Frédérique; "what can have happened to her?"

"What has happened to her!" cried Ballangier, clenching his fists frantically; "ah! I suspect, and so does Charles! There's a man—a vile scoundrel—who looks respectable, unfortunately; he's been watching Mignonne a long while. I thrashed him some time ago, but it seems that that didn't sicken him. I ought to have killed him then and there! When you come away from Père-Lachaise toward Paris, there are some deserted streets, nothing more than alleyways, where you don't meet anyone even in broad daylight. We don't know which streets Mignonne usually took, but he knew, no doubt; he must have been on the watch for her and abducted her, forced her into a cab. Here in Paris, with a little money one can always find a hundred vagabonds, miserable wretches, who are ready to do any rascally thing. It must be the man we met last night who has carried Mignonne off—it can't be anyone else; and you remember, Charles, when I pointed him out to you, how he was sneaking along, looking furtively on all sides, as if to see whether anyone was following him. And when he saw that you were looking at him, he scuttled away fast Oh! to think that if I had followed him then, I should know where Mignonne is! For he was going to her, I am sure of it! But you know the man, Charles; you told me last night that you knew him; you said: 'The day of reckoning must come some time.'—So tell me who he is, tell me where I can find him and kill him if he doesn't give Mignonne back to me!"

Frédérique and Balloquet gazed anxiously at me. Should I name that man? name him before her? Why should I spare the monster? Why should not his wife, as well as I, have the right to despise him utterly?

"The man who was watching Mignonne," I said, at last, "was your husband, Frédérique; it was Monsieur Dauberny."

Ballangier was stupefied. Balloquet was no less surprised. Frédérique, on the contrary, simply nodded her head, muttering: "I suspected as much!"—Then she said:

"But it isn't enough to be convinced, to know that it was he? How are we to prove it? How can we discover in what place, in what out-of-the-way corner of Paris, he has concealed Mignonne? If you should ask him, he would deny having had any hand in the young woman's disappearance."

"Just let me find your husband," I said; "tell me where I can see him and speak to him, and I am sure that he will deny nothing to me."

Frédérique looked at me in surprise; then she rose hurriedly, saying:

"I will go home at once; my presence will not rouse his suspicions. I will find out what he did yesterday and to-day; I will find out whether he is at home. If he is, I will send word to you instantly; and to prevent his going out, I will go to his apartment, I will ask for an interview on business—in short, I will keep him at home."

She said no more, but left the room at once. Then I said to Balloquet:

"You remember Annette—and that Bouqueton?"

"Yes, yes! Well?"

"Well, that Bouqueton was Monsieur Dauberny."

"What! the villain who——"

I put my finger on my lips and pointed to Ballangier, who was sitting with his head in his hands; it would have been cruel to add to his suffering. Balloquet understood me; but he could not sit still; he paced the floor excitedly, muttering:

"Ah! mon Dieu! but, in that case, we must make haste; we mustn't lose an instant! Poor young woman! Oh! it is ghastly to know that she is with him!"

We counted the seconds. Ballangier went again and again to the window. At last he cried:

"Here she is; she's coming back!"

"What a pity!" said Balloquet; "that means that her husband isn't at home."

Frédérique entered and dropped into a chair, exhausted and gasping for breath.

"Monsieur Dauberny isn't at home," she said; "but he passed the night there."

"He passed the night at home?" cried Ballangier.

"Yes; the concierge is certain of it; he saw him go in last evening, before dark, quite early in fact, and he is perfectly positive that he didn't go out again."

"His meeting with us must have made him uneasy," said I; "if he was going to where he is detaining Mignonne, he was afraid of being watched and followed; so he probably went home."

"That is probable. But he went out early this morning, saying that he was going to pass some time in the country, and might be away three weeks. Where shall we look for him? Where can we hope to find him now?"

We were in despair. Ballangier, who was in a most desperate frame of mind, was still ignorant of all that Balloquet and I feared for Mignonne, who, I was sure, would not yield to Monsieur Dauberny's desires.

For a long while we were silent, each cudgelling his brains to think how we could find Monsieur Dauberny's trail. Suddenly Frédérique cried:

"Ah! there is one hope!"

We all looked anxiously at her.

"During that trip of Monsieur Dauberny's, some time ago, one of his intimate friends, Monsieur Faisandé, came

often to inquire for him. One day, he found only Adèle at home, and he said to her: 'If Dauberny returns soon, tell him to come at once to Monsieur Saint-Germain's, at Montmartre—a small house, with a green door, on the left-hand side of the square.'

"At Montmartre!" cried Ballangier; "he was going in that direction last night."

I rose and held out my arm to Balloquet, telling him to bind it up with a handkerchief.

"Come, messieurs, come," I cried; "this is a dispensation of Providence, let us not lose a minute!—You cannot go with us, Frédérique, but you will soon see us again, and something tells me that we shall bring Mignonne back with us."

Ballangier threw his arms about my neck and kissed me. Frédérique bound up my arm, whispering:

"You are wounded, and you are going out—when you need rest!"

"Oh! if my recovery is a little slower, that makes no difference. I want all those whom I love to be as happy as I am!"

"You are right, my friend. Go, but remember that I am waiting for you."

I took from my desk the ring that came from poor Annette; on it I rested all my hopes. I pressed Frédérique's hand, and we started. We took the first cab we saw, and I said to the driver:

"Montmartre, the public square. Take us there quickly, and you shall have five francs an hour."

We went like the wind, but the road seemed very long. At last we reached the square. I told the cabman to stop, and we all three alighted and turned to the left.

"That must be the place!" cried Ballangier, pointing to a small house of poor aspect, with a narrow green door.

"Stay in the square," I said to him, "and keep your eye on the house. If anyone comes out, run after him. You and I, Balloquet, will go in."

I knocked at the little green door; it was opened and we entered a narrow passageway, at the end of which was a small yard. A shrewish-looking woman, who was sitting in a dark corner, called out to us:

"Who do you want?"

"Monsieur Saint-Germain."

"He ain't in; he went away this morning, and won't be back to-day."

"Monsieur Bouqueton must be here, then, and what we have to say to his friend Saint-Germain, we can say to him just as well."

The woman looked at us distrustfully, then said:

"Yes, Monsieur Bouqueton's here—since this morning. Wait, while I go and call him. Go into that room; I'll tell him some friends of Monsieur Saint-Germain want to see him."

We entered a room on the ground floor, taking care not to go near the window, so that we might not be seen from outside.

After a few minutes, we heard heavy steps coming downstairs; they stopped at the door of the room in which we were, and Monsieur Dauberny appeared.

He gazed at us for several seconds in amazement; but, on scrutinizing me more closely, he seemed disturbed. However, he tried to recover himself, and said:

"What can I do for you, messieurs?"

"We have come in search of Mignonne Landernoy, a young woman whom you caused to be kidnapped yesterday morning as she was coming away from Père-Lachaise."

Dauberny could not control a sudden start; but he affected an air of tranquillity, and replied:

"I haven't the faintest idea what you mean, monsieur. I suppose that you mistake me for somebody else."

"No, I know you quite well. Search your memory. You saw me once at your house in Paris; you are Monsieur Dauberny; Bouqueton is the name you assume in your love intrigues! I know you perfectly, monsieur, as you see!"

Frédérique's husband looked at me for some instants, then assumed a mocking expression, and rejoined:

"And you are my wife's lover—the man who lives with her at Fontenay-sous-Bois. You see that I know you too."

"If your wife has a liaison in which her heart is engaged, monsieur, your abominable conduct makes her only too excusable."

"Monsieur!"

"Let us have done with this! Where is Mignonne? Give that young woman up to us; we will not leave this house without her."

"I don't know what you mean, and I order you to leave the house."

Instead of complying, Balloquet and I walked up to Monsieur Dauberny, and I held before his eyes the hand in which was Annette's ring.

"What about this—do you know what this means?" I said.

At sight of the ring, Dauberny turned a greenish white and fell into a chair. Balloquet seized his arm.

"It was I," he said, "who attended the unhappy Annette, the woman you murdered! She is dead; but I received her full confidence, and we are familiar with your crime to its smallest details."

Dauberny could not speak. Great drops of sweat rolled down his forehead; he took a key from his bosom and held it out to us with a trembling hand, stammering almost inaudibly:

"On the second floor. Mignonne is on the second floor."

I motioned to Balloquet to stay with Dauberny, while I flew upstairs to the second floor. I found two doors; the one at the rear was locked. I opened it and found Mignonne on her knees, praying, in a corner of the room. When she heard the door open, she gave a shriek and ran toward the window; but I called her by name; she recognized my voice, and fell unconscious to the floor. Poor girl! joy sometimes kills. I took her in my arms and carried her downstairs. The air revived her; when we reached the yard, she opened her eyes and smiled at me.

"You have saved me again!" she cried.

Balloquet heard our voices and joined us. I told him to take Mignonne to the cab; then I returned to Dauberny,

who was still in the lower room, pale and trembling, like a criminal awaiting his doom.

"Monsieur," said I, "we will hold our peace concerning your crime; but you must go away, leave France, and never let your wife see you again."

He motioned that he would obey me, and I made haste to join my friends.

Ballangier was like one mad with joy; he seized Mignonne's hands and kissed them, and I made haste to tell the young woman that but for Ballangier we should have known absolutely nothing of her abduction, and that he was her savior.

Thereupon she gave Ballangier her hand.

"Poor boy!" she said.

She told us that the night before, in a narrow, lonely street, two men, who doubtless were watching for her, had suddenly seized her and taken her to a cab which was waiting a few yards away. To prevent her crying out, one of them held a handkerchief over her mouth; but that precaution was unnecessary in the carriage, as terror had deprived her of the use of her senses.

On recovering consciousness, she found herself in the little house at Montmartre. A man, whom from her description I identified as Faisandé, was with her, and tried to allay her fears.

"You will see my friend Bouqueton to-night," he said. "You will come to an understanding with him, for he's a good fellow; he seems to be in love with you."

Mignonne threw herself at his feet, imploring him to set her free. He contented himself with locking her in a room, where the shockingly ugly old hag brought her food. The evening passed, and no one came. Mignonne did not close her eyes during the night. At last, about eight in the morning, another man, whom she recognized as the one who had insulted her on the street, appeared before her and informed her that she must be his mistress. Mignonne repulsed him with horror, and he left her, saying:

"Weep, shriek—it will do no good; you will be much wiser to make the best of it; we will dine together this evening, and I will pass the night with you."

Mignonne, alone once more, had determined to die rather than yield to that man; having no weapon, she had resolved to jump out of the window when he returned to her room. Then she prayed—and it was at that moment that I arrived. It was time.

At last we were at my rooms once more. Frédérique was awaiting us; she embraced Mignonne, then insisted that I should tell her all. I had not the strength to speak. The intensely exciting scenes that I had passed through had inflamed my wound; I was in terrible pain, and I swooned.

L

A PRESENTATION

It seems that I was ill a week; my wound threw me into a fever; then, I was delirious, and a scratch that should have amounted to nothing became a serious matter as a result of the events following my duel.

But I became convalescent at last, I was restored to health and happiness; for Frédérique was there, beside my bed, watching for my first glance. Tears fell from her eyes when I held out my hand to her.

"Saved!" she cried; "saved! Ah! Balloquet was right when he said that you were cured; but I dared not believe him!"

I saw two other persons stealing softly toward the bed; they were Mignonne and Ballangier. I shook their hands; I tried to thank them; but Frédérique begged me not to speak yet. I could smile at them, and that was something.

Madame Dauberny had learned from Balloquet how we had succeeded in rescuing Mignonne. He had not concealed from her that Monsieur Bouqueton was poor Annette's murderer. Frédérique had taken an oath never again to live under the same roof with that man. For my part, I did not believe that he would ever venture to reappear in society.

Health returns quickly when the heart is at peace. A few days later, I was walking on the boulevards, leaning on Frédérique's arm.

"My dear," she said, "Balloquet insists that the country air will complete your cure. To-morrow, if you feel strong enough to endure the journey, we will go to Fontenay and pass the rest of the season there."

"To Fontenay?" I said, looking her in the face. "Why, aren't you afraid of meeting people there whose presence annoys you?"

"Oh, no, no!" she said, fixing her lovely eyes on mine; "I am not afraid of anything now, for I am sure of your love."

The next day, we went to Fontenay, and Frédérique absolutely insisted upon taking Mignonne with us; she had become very fond of her; to be sure, Mignonne was much more amiable to Ballangier.

Mignonne lived in the pavilion which I had previously occupied, and I was under the same roof with Frédérique; a convalescent requires so much attention!

Armantine came to see us soon after our arrival. Frédérique received her with vastly more cordiality than before, notwithstanding which, Madame Sordeville came much less frequently; women have a tact which enables them to divine instantly when they have lost the game beyond recall.

I went to Paris and made inquiries about Ballangier; all that I learned was in his favor. I went to see him at his employer's, and invited him to dine at Fontenay on the next day but one. At first he declined what he called an honor; but I did not leave him until I had made him promise to come. The poor fellow asked nothing better, for I told him that he would see Mignonne.

I invited Balloquet to come into the country on the same day. On my return to Fontenay, I told Frédérique of the

invitations I had ventured to extend without asking her permission; she closed my mouth by informing me that I need not ask her permission for anything. Then, after a moment's reflection, she said:

"I too propose to invite some people for that day. Will it annoy you if I have other company?"

"On the contrary, on that day it will give me great pleasure."

The next day, I went to Paris again; I had various purchases to make of gifts which I had in mind. As I passed through Rue du Petit-Carreau, I noticed a sponge shop. I thought of Rosette and stopped. Someone called me; it was my pretty brunette, enthroned at the desk.

"Are you afraid to come into my shop, monsieur?" asked Rosette, who was as lively and alluring as ever. "You were going by without deigning to say good-day to an old acquaintance."

And she began to sing:

"Eh quoi! vous ne dites rien!
Mon ami, ce n'est pas bien!
Jadis c'était différent,
Souvenez-vous-en!"^[B]

"Still as merry as ever, Rosette?"

"Faith, yes! sponges ain't such a dismal trade as I thought; and then, my husband's such a good fellow! He's like putty in my hands!"

"You are happy, are you?"

"Yes, monsieur, very happy. Are you sorry for that?"

"On the contrary, I am very glad."

"And your lovely friend—does she still pretend to be nothing but a friend?"

"Faith, no! we are on better terms than that now; we were both mistaken in thinking that our feeling for each other was only friendship."

"Bah! I saw what was coming a long way off! It was a long time coming, that love!"

"Adieu, Rosette!"

"You will give me your custom, I hope? Send me your doctor *à la rose* too, with or without his gloves."

"I will send all my acquaintances to you."

"Oh! I haven't told you—on Sundays, I have my seven aunts in the shop, and people come in just from curiosity; we make a lot of money that day."

I left Rosette and returned to Fontenay. I showed Frédérique all that I had bought for Mignonne; I proposed that the young woman should wear a costume which would enhance the charms of her person, and I suggested that Frédérique should superintend her toilet. She approved all that I had done; I fancy that she also divined a great part of what I intended to do.

The reception day came in due time. The Ramonet brothers and several other neighbors arrived before dinner. Armantine was among those invited. I was very glad of it; I should have regretted her not being there on that day. Balloquet soon appeared, and then our old friend the Baron von Brunzbrack, who wrung my hand with great force, saying:

"I would like to pe your frent no more, but I vas, all te same."

"Why should you not be my friend, monsieur le baron?"

"Because, ven she haf sent me a letter of invitation, Montame Dauberny, she haf told me dat she loafe you, but dat she offer to me her frentship."

"Well, baron, isn't it something to be her friend?"

"Ja, ja; but I vas right, ven I haf susbect dat you pe in loafe mit her."

"You had second-sight, baron."

Mignonne appeared at last, in a lovely costume, which became her to admiration, and which she seemed ashamed to wear. It was Frédérique herself who led her into the salon; she blushed when she came in, although Frédérique whispered to her:

"Don't be afraid, Mignonne; the men admire you and the women envy you; that is the most delightful part that one can play in society."

Madame Sordeville bit her lips when she saw Mignonne; that was a tacit homage to her charms.

Everybody had arrived, except Ballangier. He came at last, dressed without pretension, but very suitably for the occasion.

The whole company was assembled in the salon on the ground floor. I took Ballangier's hand and led him to Madame Dauberny, saying:

"Pray permit me, madame, to present my brother."

Everybody loudly expressed surprise, except Frédérique, who whispered to me:

"I knew it."

But the one upon whom my words produced the greatest effect was Ballangier himself. He stood as if rooted to the floor, trembling like a leaf; tears gathered in his eyes, and he said under his breath:

"O Charles! why tell it? there was no need."

"No need to acknowledge you as my brother?" I said, raising my voice. "Oh! be sure that this is a very happy moment to me! If I did for a long time conceal the ties that united us, do you suppose that it was because our positions were different, because you were only a workman, while I, more favored by fortune, chose to be an artist, a poet, a financier? No, my dear fellow; I forbade you to call me your brother, when, led astray by vicious men, you lived a life of idleness, drunkenness, and debauchery. Yes, I blushed to be the brother of a lazy vagabond! But now that you have reformed, now that you possess the esteem of your fellow workmen and your employers, I am proud to call you my brother; for one should always be proud to be related to an honest man, whatever rank he may hold in

society."

Balloquet shook hands with me, saying:

"What you said was very fine, Rochebrune!"

The baron complimented me too, but I fancy that he did not understand.

I continued, addressing Frédérique:

"Yes, madame, Ballangier is my brother; not on the father's side—our names are not the same—but on the mother's side. My mother was a widow with one son when she married Monsieur Rochebrune, my father.—And now," I added, turning to Mignonne, "allow me to solicit your hand for my brother, who loves you sincerely and who will devote his life to making you happy."

Mignonne timidly gave her hand to Ballangier, saying to me with her customary gentleness:

"I shall be very happy to be your sister."

While all this was taking place, Armantine cut a peculiar figure. She left us early in the evening. The next day, she left Fontenay.

"How did you know that Ballangier was my brother?" I asked Frédérique, when we were alone.

"My dear, have you forgotten that day on the Champs-Élysées? The poor fellow was tipsy, and, while I was trying to quiet him, he involuntarily told me the secret, although I asked him no questions."

A few days after that festivity, Frédérique received a letter, which she read with evident emotion. Then she handed it to me, murmuring:

"See, my dear! you began the work, and Providence has done the rest."

The letter was from Zurich, Switzerland, and contained these words:

"MADAME:

"Monsieur François Dauberny, travelling for pleasure, met his death three days ago on one of our glaciers. The sad event occurred, it is said, while he was pursuing a young Swiss girl, who had refused to listen to him. The papers found upon him give the information that he was your husband."

"Well!" said I, taking Frédérique's hand; "nothing can part us henceforth!"

THE GIRL WITH THREE PETTICOATS

I

THE DANGER OF SLEEPING TOO MUCH

At first glance, you will think that this is a paradox, you have so often heard it said that: "There is nothing so good as sleep"; or: "Sleep is so beneficial"; or: "Sleep is the greatest of restorers"; or: "He who sleeps, dines."—I ask your pardon for this last quotation. I am persuaded that you have never experienced its truth.

To all this I might reply that the best things have their bad side, and that we must never abuse them. But I will content myself with simply giving you some figures; you are aware that there is nothing so convincing as figures.

I take people who go to bed at midnight; many, it is true, go to bed much later; but as there are vast numbers who go to bed earlier, the balance is preserved. You retire at midnight, then, and you get up at eight in the morning; you have slept eight hours, or one-third of your day. Consequently, if you live sixty years, you will have devoted twenty years to sleep. Frankly, doesn't that seem to you too much? Ah! but I can hear you retort:

"But, monsieur, one doesn't sleep all night without waking; I never have eight hours' sleep!"

Very good; I agree. Instead of twenty years, then, I will charge you with only fifteen; is not even that a good deal of time wasted?

"Sleep," says Montaigne, "stifles and suppresses the faculties of our mind."

You will say: "Rest is indispensable to mankind"—and to womankind, too, the ladies are so charming when they are asleep!—That is true; but habit is everything in a man's life; with four hours' sleep a day, or a night, you might be in as robust health as Æsculapius. I love to believe that the god of medicine was in robust health; however, I will not take my oath to it. But, to reach that result, you must get into the habit of not sacrificing more than four hours to oblivion of your surroundings. Now, as you adopt a contrary course, the result is that the more you sleep, the more you feel the need of sleep, which, by deadening your faculties, thickens your blood, deprives you of a part of your normal activity, and sometimes makes your mind indolent—that is to say, if you have one; but I am sure that you have.

Sleep has another great disadvantage; it tends to produce obesity; and you will agree that you do not wish to be obese. That is a burden with no corresponding benefit. In general, nothing ages a man so quickly as a big paunch. Find me a man who desires one; I am inclined to think that you would search in vain. On the other hand, you will find men by the hundred who do their utmost to compress and abolish what stomach they have; to that end, they often employ means which impede their respiration; they wear corsets, like women; there are some who even go so far as to refrain from satisfying their appetites, who do not eat as their stomach demands, always in the fear that that

organ will protrude unduly.

Alexander the Great, or the great Alexander—no, I think it better to say Alexander the Great, because he stands by himself, and great Alexanders are very numerous—Alexander the Great often desired, even when he was in bed, to resist the attacks of sleep, for fear that it would make him forget the plans and projects that he had in mind. Perhaps you will ask me why he went to bed, that being the case. He went to bed to rest, but not to sleep. To that end, he caused a large copper basin to be placed on the floor beside his bed; he kept his arm extended over the basin, and held in his hand a big copper ball. If sleep overcame him, his fingers would relax, and naturally the ball would drop and make such a splash when it struck the water that it woke him instantly.

You have the right to do as Alexander the Great did, when you wish to avoid going to sleep; but perhaps you will find it rather tiresome to hold your arm over a basin, with a heavy copper ball in your hand. I admit that one must needs be Alexander the Great, or Alexander Dumas, to do such things.

There are other ways of keeping awake: sleep rarely assails you when you are enjoying yourself; therefore, you need only enjoy yourself, but that is not always so easy as one might think.

A gentleman, whom I will call Dupont, with your permission, and who lived in the pretty little town of Brives-la-Gaillarde, had the unfortunate habit of sleeping too much. He was married, but it seems that that fact did not amuse him enough; there are some men who are capable of hinting that it was more likely to increase his infirmity.

This much is certain: that Madame Dupont herself often said to her husband:

"You sleep a great deal too much, monsieur; it's perfectly ridiculous! You're only forty years old; what in heaven's name will you do when you're fifty? You fall asleep as soon as your head touches the pillow, and don't wake up during the night; in the morning, I can hardly make you open your eyes. You're not a man any longer, you're a marmot. Let me tell you that when I married you I didn't think I was marrying a marmot! But never mind about me; this sleeping all the time will be the death of you; you're getting to be terribly fat, and you'll soon have a stomach like Punchinello."

Monsieur Dupont was impressed by his wife's harangue; perhaps he would not have cared so much about the resemblance to a marmot, but he was not anxious to have a stomach like Punchinello.

He did not hesitate, but went at once to his physician and said to him:

"Doctor, I sleep a great deal too much; my wife complains about it, and I feel myself that it's making me lazy. What must I do to sleep less?"

The doctor, who was very fond of smoking, shook his head and rolled a cigarette, as he asked:

"Do you smoke?"

"Yes, doctor, I smoke all the time; but I fall asleep even when I'm smoking."

"That's a pity! because I was going to advise you to smoke."

"Advise something else."

"Do you take snuff?"

"Yes, doctor; I have a collection of snuffboxes; but I don't take much pleasure in it."

"That's too bad! for I would have advised you to take snuff."

"Try something else."

"Do you play cards?"

"I know all the games, but I don't care for any of them; cards put me to sleep at once."

"So much the worse! I would have advised you to play cards. For, after all, to avoid going to sleep, you must amuse yourself. Have you ever been to Paris?"

"Yes, doctor, twice; but it was a long while ago, when I was in business. It was before my marriage. I have an idea that I rather enjoyed myself in Paris."

"Well, then, go there again; spend a few weeks in Paris; that will wake you up, invigorate you, and amuse you. But be sure to go alone; don't take your wife."

Dupont heartily approved this last injunction; he hastily made the necessary preparations, told his wife of the doctor's prescription, and started; nor did madame seem greatly distressed by his departure. But one does not care much for the society of a marmot, unless one is a marmot also.

II

HOW DUPONT AMUSED HIMSELF AT THE BALL

It was the year 1860, and it was the carnival season, which unluckily was very brief that year. We say unluckily, for we admit that we do not agree with the people who say:

"Masks have gone out of fashion; it isn't the thing to disguise yourself now to drive or walk on the boulevards. No, no! That's all gone by, forgotten, bad form! Before long, there won't be any carnival."

In the first place, we do not understand why such people frown upon something that tends to amuse and rejoice the common people. It may not make you laugh, monsieur, who seem always to be in a bad humor, and whose nerves are unstrung when you see other people enjoying themselves. I am very sorry for you! But I assure you that, in the old days, when, during the pre-Lenten season, a triple row of carriages filled with masks formed an immense Longchamp in the centre of Paris, the promenaders and idlers did not complain because they were furnished with that spectacle gratis.

Everybody could not afford to go to the Opéra ball, or even to the Salle Barthélemy; and the modest annuitant, as he strolled about the streets with his wife during the carnival days, returned home in high glee when he had rubbed elbows with Harlequins or Punchinellos; and if a Bear said to his wife: "I know you!" the delighted couple could not contain themselves; and madame would say proudly to her concierge: "A Bear said to me: 'I know you!'"

You must see, you pessimists, who want to abolish the carnival, that by abolishing it you would grieve a great many people. I know that that is a matter of indifference to you; but, despite your efforts, so long as the world exists, there will be masks. Some people would tell you that there are masks all the year round; that you need not wait for carnival time to see them. But, as you hear that very often, I will not say it.

The carnival is the season of intrigues and of mad pranks. Again, we might say that there are intrigues all the year round; but that has been said before, and we will not repeat it. We will take the liberty, in passing, of calling your attention to the fact that we say only novel things; that is very considerate on our part, and we are persuaded that we shall receive due credit therefor.

Monsieur Dupont was, as we have said, a man of forty years; that is the age of passions, when one is destined to have any; but thus far the gentleman in question had not manifested the slightest symptom of anything of the sort. He smoked, took snuff, gambled, and drank, but without enthusiasm, and, we might say, without enjoyment. As for the women, you have seen that he slept most of the time beside his wife. Nevertheless, Monsieur Dupont was not insensible to the charms of beauty; what attracted him more than anything else in a woman was figure, shape, carriage; in short, he preferred a well-proportioned body to a pretty face; and unluckily for Madame Dupont, she was rather pretty than well made. Perhaps that was what had made her husband such a heavy sleeper.

As for Dupont himself, he was neither handsome nor ugly, neither short nor tall, neither clever nor stupid; he was one of those men of whom nothing is said. He had rather a good figure, however, with a shapely foot and a small white hand. He was very proud of these advantages, considered himself a little Apollo, and was absolutely determined not to take on flesh; the fear of that catastrophe was mainly responsible for his decision to go to Paris; and since the doctor had recommended that he should go without his wife, it was evident that he wished him to lead the life of a bachelor there. Now, what is the life of a bachelor, if not to be constantly on the look-out for intrigues, amourettes, *bonnes fortunes*; in a word, to pass one's time running after women—society women when opportunity offers, and grisettes when one can do no better?

Speaking of grisettes, there are some writers who try to make us believe that there are none now; that they have gone out of fashion, like pug dogs; that the mould is broken. With due deference to those gentlemen, we maintain that the grisette still exists and always will exist in Paris. For, if you please, what are all the flowermakers, seamstresses, burnishers, illuminators, laundresses, waistcoatmakers, shirtmakers, trousermakers, etc., etc.?—They are neither coquettes, nor those exceedingly free and easy beauties who are always in evidence in the proscenium boxes of the smaller theatres, and are called, I do not just know why, lorettes; nor are they kept women, for it very often happens that their lovers can give them nothing but love; lastly, they are not virtuous bourgeois women, who never go out except on the arm of a father or brother. They are grisettes, genuine grisettes! Pray let us not demonetize them, they are such pretty coins! Why insist that they shall cease to be current?

I wish that you gentlemen, who will have it that there are none left in Paris, would go now and then, during the summer, to the Closerie des Lilas, the favorite ball of the students who love dancing and love; you will see there grisettes of all categories, you will see them laughing, capering, fooling, dancing a cancan as graceful and much less indecent than the Spanish dances which are allowed at the theatres; you will hear them talk, making fun of one another, envying this one her lover, ridiculing that one's lover; and amid the brief sentences and bursts of laughter that fill the air on all sides, you will catch some piquant, clever remarks, original expressions, which you hear nowhere else, and which make it impossible for you to keep a serious face—unless, that is to say, you belong to that school which insists that no one shall laugh, and which dares to say that "laughter is a grimace"! What a pitiful school, good Lord! Take my advice and never send your children to it! You must surely see that the results are not desirable.

Dupont, arriving in Paris during the carnival, began his bachelor life by betaking himself to the Opéra ball.

"The doctor ordered me to enjoy myself, and I can't fail of it in the midst of that crowd, largely composed of pretty women who are not absolute Lucretias, who ask nothing better than to make acquaintances, who, in fact, go to the ball for that sole purpose. I will take my choice, I will try to find a woman shaped like a Venus—yes, a Bacchante even, for all the Bacchantes I ever saw in pictures were of perfect shape; I will play the agreeable, the gallant; I have wit enough when I am started; to be sure, I have some difficulty in getting started, but with perseverance and punch I shall succeed; and I won't go to bed at ten o'clock, for I won't go to the ball till midnight."

Dupont carried his plan into execution; he had some trouble to avoid falling asleep in his chair when the clock struck ten. Several times he was on the point of getting into bed instead of putting on his dress coat; but, luckily, just as he was about to yield to his old habit, he glanced at his stomach and remembered that he could no longer button the last button of his waistcoat; whereupon he sprang to his feet and dressed in haste, muttering:

"You poor devil, do you want to turn into a Punchinello? I shan't have a hump behind, to be sure, but one in front is just as laughable and much more inconvenient. I'll go to the ball, cut capers, and have a jolly time! Sapristi! this isn't a joking matter, it's a matter of remaining young!"

Behold, therefore, our friend at the ball, gliding amid the throng that walked back and forth around the dancing enclosure, because from there one can look at the women at close quarters; one can even speak to them, joke with them, and offer them an arm when they are without an escort; all that is permissible at a masquerade ball. Indeed, what is not permissible there?—Dupont saw divers pretty creatures dressed as boatmen, sailors, jockeys, and postilions. As a general rule, ladies who dress in masculine costume wear no masks and are very glad to show their faces. They also disclose their shoulders and breasts; sometimes, indeed, there is too much abandon in their attire; they do not understand that the eye likes to have something to divine, and that a man is especially enamored of what he does not see.

Dupont selected a very attractive little blonde dressed as a Columbine. To become better acquainted, he invited her to polka; but our worthy friend from Brives-la-Gaillarde did not know what a risk he was taking; he fancied that the polka was danced at the Opéra ball as it was danced in his province; above all, he was unaware that it always ended in a galop—and such a galop! it must be seen to be appreciated. It is a whirlwind; it is as if a sort of insane frenzy had taken possession of all the dancers, under the inspiration of the lively, rapid, deafening music that electrifies you and takes you off your feet; you no longer galop, you fly, you whirl madly about, you push and jostle everyone you meet! Be fearless and do not lose your head, or you will infallibly be thrown down.

That is what happened to Dupont; he was not agile enough to hold his own in that bacchanalian dance; he fell and dragged his partner to the floor with him; she sprang quickly to her feet, and said in an angry tone:

"When you don't know how to galop, my boy, you shouldn't ask a lady to dance."

And the Columbine seized the arm of a Harlequin, and began to dance with him; while poor Dupont, who had not risen quickly enough, was struck by the feet of several dancers, and finally got up covered with bruises.

As he was very lame in the knees, shoulders, and back, he left the ball and went home to bed, saying:

"That's enough amusement for to-night!"

But Dupont would not admit that he was beaten, although he really had been. A few days later, he tried his luck again at a ball; but this time he went to the Casino, which he had been told was the rendezvous of the women most in vogue. In truth, our provincial was agreeably impressed by the fine costumes and by the elegance of those ladies, most of whom were in party dresses instead of masks.

"It is impossible," he said to himself, "that they dance such a dangerous galop here as they do at the Opéra. However, I will be prudent and not galop; I will confine myself to taking a partner for a contra-dance; that's the wiser way, because the figures are always the same; I know them all, and it isn't possible that I can be thrown down doing the English chain or the *pastourelle*."

And Dupont, after walking about the hall for some time in search of a particularly shapely partner, invited at last a rather attractive person whose languorous eyes gazed into his with infinite good humor.

They stood up to dance; but Dupont had for vis-à-vis a *gaillarde* who had been a pupil of the famous Rigolboche, and whose bold and eccentric dancing was so renowned that people fought for places to watch her.

When Dupont executed his *avant-deux* before that lady, he suddenly received a superb kick full in the face, amid the applause and roars of laughter of the spectators.

Dupont alone did not laugh; his nose was crushed, and he attempted to complain; but the tall *gaillarde* said to him:

"It's your own fault! You're a donkey, my dear friend; you ought to have known that that was the time when I lift my leg! If you don't know my steps, you shouldn't dance opposite me! Bribri would never have let my foot hit him!"

As Dupont's nose was bleeding and pained him severely, he left the ball and went home to bed, saying to himself:

"I've amused myself enough for to-day."

Several days passed, and, Dupont's nose having healed, he said to himself:

"I'll go to the ball again; I'll stick to it; but this time I won't dance."

Attracted by the length of a poster which almost covered a whole pillar on the boulevards, he went to the ball in the Salle Barthélemy. There the crowd was almost as great as at the Opéra, but the company was infinitely less refined, and the tobacco smoke and the dust raised by the dancing, blended with the odor of the refreshments which were being served, gave to that ball a distinction peculiarly its own.

Dupont discovered a pretty little brunette, whose dress resembled that of a grisette. She was alone; he offered his arm and a glass of punch. The girl hesitated, then replied:

"You are very kind! I am very fond of punch, and I'd like to take a glass; but I'm afraid of Ronfland."

"Who's Ronfland?"

"He's—he's my friend, a cabinetmaker, a good fellow—but he gets drunk too often. I came to the ball with him, and he was to dance with me; but he didn't, and he left me here. That ain't a nice way to treat me!"

"As Monsieur Ronfland left you, it seems to me that you're at liberty to do what you choose, and to accept my arm and a glass of punch; you can't stay alone in this crowd, you need an escort."

"It ain't very good fun to be alone, that's true. I don't understand Ronfland; he left me near the orchestra, and he says: 'Stay here, and I'll come right back.'—That was more than an hour ago, and he hasn't come back."

"He's forgotten you."

"Oh! I'm sure he's gone to get a drink."

"Without you? That isn't polite. Of course, you have the right to do the same."

"Faith! yes, so I have. So much the worse for Ronfland! After all, it's his own fault!"

Dupont put the little brunette's arm through his and took her to the café; he ordered punch and filled a glass for his new acquaintance, who drank it readily, but kept repeating:

"After this you'll dance with me, won't you, monsieur? For one don't come to a ball to go without dancing."

And Dupont, who was not at all anxious to dance, continued to pour out the punch, as he replied:

"Yes, by and by; we have time enough. There are too many people here now; we should be too warm; it's better to drink punch."

But suddenly a young man, with a cap cocked over one ear, rushed up like a bomb, brought his fist down on the table, upset the punch bowl and glasses, and boxed the little brunette's ears, crying:

"Ah! that's how you behave, Joséphine! I've caught you at it! I bring you to the ball, and you play tricks on me with other men! I'll bring you to the right-about, you vile street walker!"

Mademoiselle Joséphine began to weep.

"You're still drunk, Ronfland," she cried. "I don't play tricks on you; you ought not to leave me; you're a drunkard; I don't love you any more!"

But Dupont was not of a temper to allow a woman who was in his company to be maltreated; he rose, picked up the empty bowl, which was rolling about the table, and with it struck Ronfland on the nose.

"Parbleu!" he said; "my nose was smashed the other day, and I'm not sorry to have my revenge."

But the young man in the cap, infuriated by the blow, leaped upon Dupont, who lost his balance, and they rolled together on the floor, still striking each other.

The police appeared and separated them. Ronfland and his companion were turned out of doors, and Dupont was obliged to pay for what was broken. As he had cut himself severely in the face while rolling about on the broken glass, he lost no time in taking a cab and returning to his hotel.

"I've got what I deserve!" he said to himself; "I have gone about it the wrong way. I certainly shall not go to any more balls in search of amusement!"

MADEMOISELLE GEORGETTE

Dupont was obliged to keep his room a week. He had taken rooms in an unpretentious hotel on Rue de Seine. To pass the time, which seemed very long, our provincial spent most of the day at his window. As his rooms were on the third floor, and as the opposite house was not high, Dupont was able to look into the chamber of a neighbor who lived opposite, under the eaves.

"I haven't had any luck in Paris yet," thought Dupont, as he paced the floor slowly, with his head swathed in bandages. "I have done what I could to amuse myself, but I have had poor success; however, I must admit that I sleep less—especially since I received this wound in the face. I won't go to balls any more in search of *bonnes fortunes*. But sometimes one goes far afield in search of what one has close at hand. In one of those attic chambers opposite, I have noticed a young woman—very pretty she is, on my word! and, above all, well built. I am the better able to judge, because I see her in *négligé* costume—a morning jacket, and a short fustian skirt, as well as I can see from here. But how alluring that simple *négligé* is! It enables one to admire a shapely, flexible figure, and hips! oh! such well-rounded hips! She has a fine shape! It is impossible not to fall in love with such a shape!"

And Dupont, opening his window, although it was quite cold, leaned bravely out, and fastened his eyes on his neighbor's window. It was closed, but the curtains were not drawn, and he could easily see the young woman who lived there, and who was at that moment engaged in arranging her hair before a mirror fastened to the window shutter.

"Her face is captivating," said Dupont to himself; "wide-awake brown eyes, a turned-up nose—à *la* Roxelane, as they say—and a mouth—hum! the mouth isn't small, but it's well furnished; and then, she has a very pleasant smile. But, on the whole, there's nothing extraordinary about the face, and I prefer the figure. Ah! good! now she's walking about the room—still in that charming costume, tight-fitting white jacket, and the little striped skirt that hangs so well over her rounded hips. I can't see her foot or leg, but they must be beautiful; a tall, graceful figure almost always means a good leg. I certainly am dead in love with that figure; I must make that girl's acquaintance. She must have noticed my assiduity in watching her. It doesn't seem to displease her; there's nothing savage in her manner; on the contrary, there's a merry, aye, a mischievous look about her face, which seems to be intended to encourage one to make her acquaintance. She is probably a seamstress. As soon as I can go out, I'll ask the concierge opposite; I know how to make those fellows talk."

Meanwhile, being engrossed by his neighbor, Dupont slept much less, and sometimes even passed the night without sleep. That was good progress, and he said to himself:

"What a change my wife will see in me when I go back to Brives-la-Gaillarde! All I'm afraid of is that there the desire to sleep will return."

His wound being healed, Dupont was able to get rid of all the bandages in which his head was swathed. He made haste to leave the house, crossed the street to the house in which the girl with the striped skirt lived, and entered the concierge's lodge. In Paris, the porters have all become concierges; just as the shops have become *magasins*; the wine shops, *maisons de commerce*; the hair dressers' establishments, salons where one is rejuvenated; the groceries, *dépôts* for colonial produce; the bakers, pastry cooks; the *marchands de confection*, tailors; the book shops, *cabinets de lecture*; the *cafés*, restaurants; soup houses, *traiteurs*; indeed, even those gentry who haul refuse at night have assumed the title of *employés à la poudrette*.

Dupont accosted the concierge most affably, and slipped his irresistible argument into the hand of that functionary, who, happening to be a woman, asked nothing better than to talk, and instantly laid aside her one-sou illustrated paper, and answered without stopping for breath:

"The girl who lives on the third, second door at the left, is named Georgette; she embroiders for a living, and she has lots of talent; she embroiders like a fairy, so they say! She's twenty years old, I believe, and she hasn't been in Paris long. She's a Lorrainer, and she's full of fun, always ready to talk; and yet I think she's straight. Still, I wouldn't put my hand in the fire to prove it! it's never safe to put your hand in the fire about such things; you'd get burned too often! But I don't see any men go up to Mademoiselle Georgette's. Does she meet any of 'em outside? That's something I can't tell you. You see, when that girl goes out, I don't follow her. But she leads a regular life all the same, and never goes to balls, although I don't think it's the wish to go that's lacking, for I've heard her say more'n once: 'How lucky people are who can afford to enjoy themselves! When shall I have twenty thousand francs a year?'—But, although she hasn't got it, that don't seem to make her sad; for she sings all the time. That's all I can tell you about her, seeing that it's all I know."

"Twenty thousand francs a year!" muttered Dupont, scratching his head. "The devil! it's not I who'll give it to her!—So she embroiders, you say?" he continued.

"Yes, monsieur."

"What?"

"What do you mean by *what*?"

"I mean, what does she embroider?"

"Oh! collars, handkerchiefs, caps, whatever anyone wants her to embroider."

"Then I might ask her to do something for me?"

"That's your right."

"Very good. I'll go up to Mademoiselle Georgette's."

"Third floor, monsieur."

"Oh! I know."

"Yes, but there's two or three doors; it's the one where you see a toothbrush instead of a tassel on the bell cord."

"I'll remember."

As he mounted the stairs, Dupont said to himself:

"What in the devil can I have her embroider? Ah! a cravat! I believe they're not in fashion, men don't wear

embroidered cravats now; but, no matter, I'll tell her it's the fashion at Brives-la-Gaillarde; and, after all, what does she care, so long as I give her work?"

He reached the third landing, where there were several doors; but he discovered the little toothbrush hanging at the end of a bell cord, and he boldly pulled it.

The door was opened by Mademoiselle Georgette herself, who smiled mischievously when she saw who her visitor was. She was still dressed in the white jacket and short fustian skirt; that costume was very becoming to her, it showed off all her good points. If we dared, we would say that that costume is becoming to all women—but we should add: provided they are well built.

"Mademoiselle Georgette—embroiderer?" inquired Dupont, assuming rather a patronizing air.

"Yes, monsieur."

"Mademoiselle, I came—I should like—I was told——"

"Pray come in, monsieur; I don't receive my visitors on the landing."

Dupont asked nothing better than to accept the invitation. He entered a room of which he had only caught a glimpse from his window. It was simply furnished, but extremely neat and clean; the floor was scrubbed and waxed; there was not a speck of dust on the furniture; the bed was very white and smooth; all of which spoke loudly in favor of the occupant. Demosthenes, being asked what constituted an orator, replied: "Elocution, elocution, elocution!" A philosophical king, being asked what occasioned the fall of the ramparts of a city, replied: "Money, money, money!" And Ninon, being asked what was the most beautiful ornament of womankind, replied: "Cleanliness, cleanliness, cleanliness!"

The girl offered Dupont a chair; she did the honors of her domicile with infinite ease, and seemed in no wise intimidated by her visitor. He, on the other hand, while he tried to assume an imposing manner, became exceedingly awkward, and had much difficulty in finding words, especially as Mademoiselle Georgette waited for him to speak, with an expression which seemed to indicate a powerful desire to laugh.

"I came, mademoiselle, for——"

"For something, I presume, monsieur."

"Yes, mademoiselle; I have been told—that you embroider."

"You were told the truth. Have you something you wish to have embroidered?"

"Yes—that is to say—I don't know whether embroidered cravats are worn in Paris?"

"No, monsieur; they are not in style now."

"Indeed! and cuffs?"

"Nor cuffs either."

"And—handkerchiefs?"

"For ladies; oh! yes, monsieur, some beautiful embroidery is done on handkerchiefs."

"Ah! very good! You do embroider handkerchiefs!"

While they conversed, Dupont cast frequent glances at the young woman's feet, which were small and well arched; the lower part of the leg was very shapely; so that his thoughts were diverted, and he murmured again and again:

"Ah! you embroider handkerchiefs!"

In a moment Mademoiselle Georgette laughed heartily, and thereby completely disconcerted her visitor, who gazed at her in amazement, saying:

"You are very merry, I see, mademoiselle."

"It is true, monsieur, that I do not engender melancholy."

"And might I ask what has aroused your merriment at this moment?"

"Why, you, monsieur!"

"I! Ah! it is I who make you laugh! Do you find me so very amusing, pray, mademoiselle?"

"Amusing is not the word, monsieur; but, to speak frankly, you are far from clever in inventing a pretext."

"A pretext! What do you mean? I don't understand."

"Still, it's easy enough to understand. You wanted to have an excuse, a reason, for coming to my room—for you have nothing to be embroidered."

"What makes you think that, mademoiselle?"

"Do you suppose that I do not recognize you, monsieur?"

"Ah! you recognize me, do you?"

"To be sure; you live at the small hotel opposite, where you pass your time staring at me, making eyes at me——"

"Ah! you have noticed that?"

And Dupont puffed himself out like a turkey-cock; he was gratified to have been observed, and drew a favorable augury from that fact.

"Yes, monsieur, I have noticed that," the young embroiderer continued. "How could I have helped seeing it, unless I was blind? Why, the other day, when you came to the window, it was horribly cold, and your nose was all blue! I was strongly tempted to make faces at you."

At this point, Dupont bit his lips and did not puff himself out.

"I didn't do it, because I presumed, seeing your head all bandaged, that you were either sick or hurt; and one should always take pity on those who suffer; but you are cured now, it seems."

"Yes, mademoiselle; I fought a duel, and was wounded in the head."

"Ah! you fought a duel, did you, monsieur? May a body, without being too inquisitive, ask what was the cause of your duel?"

"It was a lady, of great distinction, with whom I happened to be, and at whom an insolent knave presumed to look too closely."

"You fought for a lady! That was very well done, and leads me to forget your glances at me; but tell me, monsieur,

why you have come here to-day?"

"Since you are so good at divination, mademoiselle, you ought to have no difficulty in guessing. I saw you from my window, I found you charming, and I desired to make your acquaintance."

"Good! that is plain speaking! And with what purpose do you wish to make my acquaintance? Perhaps you hope to make me your mistress?"

"I do not say that, mademoiselle."

"No, but you think it! As if that wasn't always what men aim at, when they fall in with a poor girl who is weak and foolish enough to believe them! But I am generous enough to warn you that you will waste your time with me."

"In any case, mademoiselle, it would be difficult to waste it more agreeably than in your company."

"That is very prettily said. But, monsieur, I will confess that I have a fancy for knowing the people whom I receive. Now, I don't know you."

"That is true, mademoiselle, that is very true; one must know with whom one is dealing."

And Dupont, who had prepared his little story in advance, straightened himself up in his chair and continued:

"I am an—an American; I was in business, but I have retired; I have money enough to be happy; I am a widower, without children, and therefore at liberty to do exactly as I please."

"Very good, monsieur. And your name?"

"My name is—Dupont."

"Dupont—that is quite a French name; I thought Americans had names more like the English."

"That depends on their origin; my family was French. Now that you know who I am, mademoiselle, will you allow me to pay court to you?"

"I see no objection—provided that you haven't lied to me; for, I give you fair warning, I hate liars!"

Dupont bowed, scratched his head, and rejoined:

"You wished to know who I was, mademoiselle, and I have gratified your wish. In my turn, may I be permitted——"

"To know who I am! Oh! that is soon told: you already know that my name is Georgette, and that I am an embroiderer. I was born at Toul, a pretty village in Lorraine, near Nancy. My parents are not rich, and I have two sisters, both older than I. My two sisters came to Paris in the hope of being better off here and of being able to help our parents, but they didn't succeed. Poor sisters! Then they came back again to us."

"And you have come to Paris in your turn. I am surprised that your parents consented to let you leave them. They might well have been afraid that you would be no more fortunate than your sisters."

"Oh! but I was determined to come to Paris; I had made up my mind to do it; and when I make up my mind to do a thing, it's got to be done."

"That indicates a strong will."

"Yes, monsieur; I have a very strong one."

"And since you have been in Paris, have you found it pleasant?"

"So-so; not too pleasant! Certainly there are plenty of means of enjoyment in Paris, one has such a choice of pleasures! Plays, balls, promenades, concerts—all of them are delightful to those who can afford such diversions. But when you stay in your chamber all day long, and pass your evening working or reading, you hardly enjoy life in Paris."

"That is very true. But what prevents you from enjoying all these amusements that tempt you?"

"Can a woman who is all alone go about to plays and promenades?"

"No, certainly not; but you can have had no lack of cavaliers ready to offer you their arms."

"True; but I don't go with everybody, monsieur; I don't accept the arm of the first comer! Certainly, if I had chosen to listen to all the young men who have followed at my heels and overwhelmed me with their silly declarations of love,—love that seized them all of a sudden when they saw me walk along the street,—I should have had plenty of opportunities! But that isn't what I want!"

Dupont caressed his chin, saying to himself:

"She is exacting; she doesn't choose to go about with every *gamin*! She wants to make the acquaintance of a *comme il faut* man. All the chances are in my favor."

Mademoiselle Georgette had resumed her embroidery, looking out of the corner of her eye to see how her visitor bore himself. He looked at her work and exclaimed:

"Mademoiselle, you embroider superbly."

"Do you think so, monsieur? Are you a connoisseur?"

"Yes, my wi—my sister used to embroider."

"Is she in America?"

"Yes, she remained there."

"It's not surprising, monsieur, that I know how to embroider well, for I come from a province renowned for its embroideries. The very best of that sort of work is done at Nancy."

"And you are from Nancy?"

"No; but Toul is quite near. Well! do you really want some handkerchiefs embroidered?"

Dupont began to laugh, and replied:

"Faith! no; and since you have so shrewdly guessed that I came here solely in the hope of making your acquaintance, shall I be so fortunate, mademoiselle, as to have your permission to cultivate it—to come again to see you—and perhaps to offer you my arm sometimes and take you to the play or to walk?"

Mademoiselle Georgette reflected a few moments, gazed earnestly at Dupont, and said at last:

"You have not lied to me in what you have told me about yourself? You are really a widower and free?"

"No, mademoiselle, I have not lied to you," Dupont replied unhesitatingly.

"In that case, monsieur, come to see me; I am willing."

"Ah! mademoiselle, you make me the happiest of men!"

"But you must not make your visits too long; that might compromise me."

Dupont rose, bowed to the young woman, and took his leave, saying to himself:

"She is mine! It may perhaps take longer than I should have liked, but it's only a question of time now. She is mine! and I haven't the slightest desire to sleep."

IV

YOUNG COLINET

A fortnight had passed. Dupont called very frequently on his neighbor, of whom he was more enamored than ever; for to the charms of her person Mademoiselle Georgette added wit, high spirits, and entertaining conversation. Less than these were enough to turn the head of our provincial, who lost his appetite, and slept no more than two hours in succession during the night, because his love was in no degree satisfied, and his desires augmented with the presence of her who gave birth to them. But he was no further advanced in that direction than on the first day. If he took the girl's hand, she laughingly withdrew it; if he tried to kiss her, she pushed him away without ceremony; if he ventured to place his hand on her knee, or tried to put his arm about her waist, she assumed a severe expression and said to him in a very decided tone:

"If you don't stop that, I'll turn you out and never admit you again!"

Thereupon Dupont was fain to cease his audacious experiments, and said to himself again as he went away:

"It will take a long time! it will take much longer than I thought! However, I shall certainly gain my end; for if the girl hadn't found me to her liking, she wouldn't have consented to receive my visits, she wouldn't go out with me and accept presents from me. She plays the cruel, to give greater value to her conquest. That is coquetry, yes, immodesty—but it can't last forever."

Mademoiselle Georgette did, in fact, accept Dupont's escort readily enough to the play, to concerts, and to go out to walk. As for balls, Dupont did not offer to take her to any, nor did she seem to desire it. One thing she had always refused: that was, to dine in a private dining-room at a restaurant.

"I am willing to dine with you at a restaurant," she said; "but we will dine in the main dining-room, with other people."

In vain did Dupont say:

"The service isn't so good in the main dining-room; and then, too, it's bad form—ladies who dine at restaurants never go to the public room."

Georgette was inflexible; she would not give way. As a general rule, she seemed to go with Dupont, not for the pleasure of being with him, but to see the people and to be seen herself.

She dressed very modestly. Dupont had said to himself: "The way to capture a woman is by giving her things to wear, by encouraging her coquetry;" and he had sent the young embroiderer a pretty shawl, a silk dress, and a stylish bonnet. She had accepted his gifts without argument, and had arrayed herself in them that same day to go to the Opéra-Comique with him. But when, after escorting her home at the close of the performance, he had asked permission to go up to her room for a moment, she had shut the door in his face, saying:

"I should think not! it's quite enough to receive you in the daytime."

Mademoiselle Georgette made frequent conquests when she was on Dupont's arm; then our provincial became jealous, for it seemed to him that his companion was distraught at times, and that she paid too much attention to the men who ogled her, and not enough to him.

Then, too, the young woman was very curious; at the play, she would call his attention to a stylishly dressed young dandy and say:

"Do you know the gentleman in that box, just opposite us, with an opera glass in his hand?"

"No; I haven't an idea who he is," Dupont would reply sourly; "I don't know anyone in Paris."

"Ah! to be sure; I forgot that you had just come from America. It's a pity!"

"Why is it a pity?"

"Because you don't know anyone in Paris."

"And even if I did know the young man you refer to, how would that help you?"

"Oh! not at all. I simply wanted to know."

Another time, it was a middle-aged man, but dressed in the height of fashion, and mimicking all the manners of a young dandy, whom Mademoiselle Georgette noticed on one of the public promenades and pointed out to her faithful attendant.

"Do you know who that man is?"

"How in the devil do you suppose that I know who he is?"

"Ah! to be sure! you are just from America—I forgot that."

On returning to his room, Dupont would say to himself:

"Why does she question me about the men we meet walking, or at the theatre? That doesn't amuse me at all! She is a great flirt, is that girl; she doesn't lower her eyes when a man looks at her; she acts as if she was delighted to make conquests. And yet she's virtuous, perfectly virtuous! I know that better than anybody; but all she wants is to go out, to show herself. Ah! she has such a fine figure! When she's on my arm, everybody admires her carriage, her figure above all! and her foot, and her leg! How can a man help falling in love with all that? I can't eat or drink on account of it; and I lost the power to sleep long ago; I'm growing thin; to be sure, I'm not sorry for that, but I'm growing perceptibly thinner. If this goes on, I shall look like a Pierrot instead of a PUNCHINELLO."

One day, Dupont had been in his pretty neighbor's room for several minutes; he was watching her work, and was doing his utmost to persuade her that he adored her, while the girl listened with manifest indifference, like one who was thinking of something other than what was being said to her, when there came two light taps at her door.

"Someone is knocking," said Dupont, with an air of surprise.

"Yes, I thought that I heard a knock."

"Are you expecting company?"

"No; but why shouldn't people come to see me? You came, whom I certainly did not expect."

"Listen—they're knocking again. It is certainly at your door."

"Come in!" cried Georgette; "the door isn't locked."

In fact, the young woman was always careful to leave the key in the lock outside when Dupont was with her, in order to give less occasion for gossip.

The door opened and a young man appeared and stopped on the threshold. He may have been about twenty years old, although he looked younger. His fresh, ingenuous face was exceedingly youthful; his great blue eyes, gentle and tender, had almost the charm of a woman's eyes; his chin was covered with an almost imperceptible down; his forehead was without a wrinkle, and his light chestnut hair grew naturally and at will, having never known the hand of a hairdresser. Take him for all in all, he was a very pretty fellow; of medium height, but slender and graceful.

His dress was neither that of a peasant nor that of a Parisian youth. He wore broadcloth trousers, almost skin-tight, with long leather gaiters reaching to the knee, a velvet waistcoat with metal buttons, and a rough, long-haired hunting jacket. Lastly, he held in his hand a felt hat, with a round crown and broad brim, and a stout knotted stick.

"Mamzelle Georgette, if you please?" said the young man, still standing in the doorway.

At the sound of that voice, the young woman sprang to her feet, crying:

"Colinet! it's Colinet!"

And she ran to the new-comer, seized his hands, then his face, and kissed him again and again, with every indication of the keenest delight.

"Dear Colinet!" she said. "Oh! how glad I am to see you!"

"And I am very glad to see you, Mamzelle Georgette!" the young man replied. "For they told me Paris was so big, I was afraid I wouldn't find you!"

Dupont meanwhile looked on with a strange expression on his face, saying to himself:

"It seems that she lets some people kiss her! More than that, she kissed him first! The devil! the devil! I wonder if I'm nothing better than an old fool! That would be humiliating!"

Georgette took the young man's hand, and leading him into the room presented him to Monsieur Dupont, saying:

"This is a friend of my childhood. We used to play together when we were children—didn't we, Colinet?"

"Yes, Mamzelle Georgette."

"Let us pray that they won't continue to play together, now they're grown up!" thought Dupont, who was forced to admit that the young man was very comely.—"Is monsieur from your province?" he asked.

"Yes, to be sure, and he's just come from there.—Isn't that so, Colinet?"

"Yes, mamzelle; I arrived last night at the Plat d'Étain, where I'm staying, on Carré Saint-Martin."

"And my mother and father and sisters—do tell me about them."

"They are all well, thank heaven! and they all told me to be sure and kiss you for them."

"Well! kiss me for each of them."

Young Colinet lost no time in kissing Georgette again; while Dupont's face became a yard long, and he said to himself:

"Are they going to pass all their time kissing? That fellow has obtained more in two minutes than I have in a month. I simply must change my batteries."

When young Colinet had delivered all his kisses, Georgette bade him sit down and said:

"Didn't my sisters give you anything for me?"

"Oh! yes, excuse me; Mamzelle Aimée, the oldest one, gave me a letter, which I've got here in my pocket."

"Oh! give it to me, quick!"

Monsieur Colinet handed a letter to Georgette, who eagerly seized it, broke the seal, and walked to the window to read it, regardless of her visitors. Thereupon Dupont turned to the new-comer and asked:

"Have you been in Paris before?"

"No, monsieur; this is the first time."

"Do you mean to settle here?"

"Oh! no, monsieur. In fact, I promised mother not to stay more than four days. I'm going home Saturday."

This reply caused Dupont most intense satisfaction, for he had begun to fear that he should find the young man at his compatriot's every day. He continued, with a more amiable air:

"Are you in business?"

"I raise sheep, and my father calves."

"That's a very fine trade! Our first parents raised cattle, more or less; we content ourselves nowadays with eating them, and that is all the more reprehensible because it's not the way to multiply the races."

Mademoiselle Georgette finished reading her letter, which seemed to have interested her deeply; as she folded it, she uttered an "at last!" which seemed to say many things.

Dupont, content to know that young Colinet was to remain only a short time in Paris, took his hat and said to his neighbor:

"I leave you with your old friend. You must have many things to say to each other."

"I will not keep you," Georgette replied, with a smile.

"She won't keep me! parbleu! I can see that for myself!" said Dupont, as he took his leave. "She never does keep

me! Oh! this is too long a job! I am drying up! That young Colinet kissed her more than ten times! It's high time that my turn should come!"

V

AN INGENUOUS YOUTH

The next afternoon, when Dupont called upon his neighbor, he found Colinet there, apparently no less shy and embarrassed than before, sitting in front of Georgette and watching her work, without a word; but with the air of being perfectly happy simply to look at her.

"Well, Monsieur Colinet," said Dupont, "have you been enjoying yourself? have you got a little acquainted with Paris?"

"I've been to see the animals in the Jardin des Plantes, monsieur; but I like my sheep better than the lions and tigers. I wonder why they give them such fine cages, when my sheep often don't have any house even."

"Tigers are kept in cages, Monsieur Colinet, because they are vicious and people are afraid of 'em. As for your sheep, as they never injure anybody, nobody worries about them, and they're allowed to feed where they will. That's worth something in itself."

"My sheep don't always find enough to eat in the fields; but I saw them give great big chunks of meat to your ugly tigers."

"For the very same reason! They're afraid of 'em, so they must keep 'em well fed."

"You must go to the play while you're in Paris, Colinet."

"With you, Mamzelle Georgette?"

"Yes. Monsieur Dupont here will take us both."

"The devil! it seems that I must amuse Monsieur Colinet too," thought Dupont. "But, after all, I prefer that to having her go alone with him."

"Will you take us to the theatre to-night?" Georgette asked Dupont.

"Why, certainly, mademoiselle, with the greatest pleasure! Am I not always at your service, and too happy if I can do anything to please you?"

"Yes, monsieur; I know that you are extremely obliging; but I should dislike to abuse your good nature."

"You cannot put it to the test too often. You know my sentiments for you, for I make no mystery of them; I am your loyal knight!"

Young Colinet stared first at Dupont, then at Georgette, as if he were trying to fathom their meaning. The pretty embroiderer laughed heartily, as she said:

"Then we'll go to the Cirque-National. They give fairy plays there, with transformation scenes;—you'll like that, Colinet."

"I'll go wherever you say, Mamzelle Georgette."

"It's strange," thought Dupont, "that she addresses this young man *thou*, while he uses *you*. After all, that's better than if it was the other way."

That evening, he escorted Mademoiselle Georgette and young Colinet to the theatre of the Circus on Boulevard du Temple. I do not need to tell you that the numerous theatres that imparted so much animation to that boulevard were not then demolished. The play was a fairy extravaganza, a mixture of dancing and marvellous exploits, with frequent changes of scenery. The rather scant costumes of the female dancers made Colinet lower his eyes; sometimes he even turned his head away just when most of the spectators had their opera glasses fastened on the forms of those ladies.

"Well, well! what are you thinking about?" Dupont would exclaim, nudging the young man; "you look away at the most delicious moment!"

"I'm afraid of offending those ladies, if I look at them when they lift their legs in our direction," Colinet would reply, with a blush.

"Poor fellow! he certainly isn't dangerous!" was Dupont's conclusion. "Still, my pretty embroiderer pays no attention to anyone else. When I speak to her, she hardly answers me, she doesn't seem to listen. I long for the time when her childhood's friend will return to his sheep."

Dupont's wishes were soon gratified. On the Saturday Colinet said farewell to Georgette, who gave him two letters for her sisters and kisses for her parents. The young man took charge of them all, and went away sadly enough.

"Why don't you come back with me?" he asked Georgette. "I should be so happy to take you back to the province! Do you enjoy yourself so very much in Paris, mamzelle?"

"It isn't that I enjoy myself so much, Colinet; but I must stay here—I must!"

"And will you have to stay long?"

"I don't know; we will hope not. But I promise you, Colinet, that the day that takes me back to my parents will be the happiest day in my life."

"And in mine too, mamzelle."

"Really, Colinet? then you have much—friendship for me?"

"I don't know what I have; but I would like never to leave you again."

"We shall meet again, Colinet; don't forget me. I promise not to forget you."

"Ah! Mamzelle Georgette, that promise makes me very happy!"

And to prove his joy the poor boy burst into tears; then he kissed Georgette and ran away as fast as his legs would carry him, because he felt that if he delayed any longer he would not have the courage to go at all.

Dupont called on his neighbor in the afternoon; he found her sad and thoughtful.

"I opine that the young shepherd has gone," he said.

"Yes, monsieur. He is very lucky: he is going to see my father and mother!"

"No doubt. But it must be very monotonous to look at sheep all the time. You see, charming Georgette, there's nothing like Paris! It is the home of all pleasures; it is the place to which all the great talents, all the people of renown, come to be applauded! In a word, one really lives in Paris; elsewhere, one only vegetates!"

"If that were true, monsieur, it would be most unfortunate for a great many people, for Paris isn't big enough to hold the whole world. But I think myself that one can be very happy elsewhere, when one is with those whom one loves and is able to confine one's desires within reasonable limits."

"That is true, charming Georgette; you talk like Virgil, or Delille. It was the latter, I believe, who said:

"Les vrais plaisirs aux champs ont fixé leur séjour;

On y craint plus les dieux, on y fait mieux l'amour!"^[C]

But as for making love, with all deference to Delille, that can be done very well in Paris; indeed, the art is carried to perfection here; and if you would only be less cruel to me— But you are distraught! You don't seem to be listening!"

"What did you say, monsieur?"

"There! I was sure of it; you weren't listening to me! But I forgive you; the departure of your childhood's friend has saddened you. Come, you absolutely must have some diversion! To-morrow will be Sunday, and we must enjoy the day. Will you dine with me?"

"With pleasure."

"I will call for you at five o'clock; be ready then. We will dine at Bonvalet's, on the boulevard."

"Wherever you choose; it's all the same to me."

"Well, then, at Bonvalet's; they treat one very well there. Then we will go to one of the theatres opposite. It's all settled; and until then I leave you with your memories. Au revoir, dear neighbor, until to-morrow!"

Dupont took his leave, rubbing his hands and saying to himself:

"To-morrow will see my triumph! Between now and then, I will go to Bonvalet's, I will speak to one of the waiters, I will suborn him in my interest, and I will engage a private dining-room in advance, even though I have to pay its weight in gold!"

VI

A PRIVATE DINING-ROOM

The next day, punctually at five o'clock, Dupont appeared. He found Georgette dressed in her best clothes, but still pensive and careworn.

"Decidedly, you regret your childhood's friend too much," said Dupont, with a smile. "You were always so light-hearted, singing all the time—I should hardly recognize you now!"

"It isn't Colinet's going away that makes me thoughtful."

"Oho! it isn't that? Then there's something else, is there?"

"Perhaps so."

"Something which you will confide to me?"

"I think not."

"In that case, let us go to dinner."

They went to the restaurant on Boulevard du Temple. As they were about to ascend the flight of stairs leading to the first floor, three gentlemen who seemed to have dined very well came down. One of them, finding himself face to face with Dupont, uttered an exclamation of surprise as he looked at him, and slapped him on the back.

"Well, upon my word!" he cried; "this is an unexpected meeting! It's Dupont, dear old Dupont! What does this mean? You are in Paris, and haven't been to see me?"

Dupont turned scarlet, he hung his head, and stammered:

"Ah! is it you, Jolibois? Bonjour! How are you? Adieu!"

And he tried to pass with Georgette, who had his arm.

But Monsieur Jolibois caught him by the sleeve, and continued:

"Well! do you hurry away like this when you meet a friend? When did you leave Brives-la-Gaillarde? Is your wife with you? Don't run away, I say; I'm very glad to see you. Poor Dupont! Do you still sleep like a marmot? For that's all you did when I was at Brives-la-Gaillarde, and your wife complained of it. Ha! ha! she complained bitterly, did your dear spouse!"

Dupont was on the rack; if he had dared, he would have struck his friend Jolibois, to make him relax his hold, at the risk of knocking him downstairs. He tried to release his arm, muttering:

"You have been dining, Jolibois, and dining very well, I should judge. But madame and I have not dined, and we would like to join our friends, who are waiting for us upstairs. I'll call on you; but let me go now, Jolibois; I promise you that I'll call to see you.—Come, my dear madame, they are waiting for us."

With another jerk, Dupont succeeded in shaking off his persecutor. He hurried Georgette upstairs, leaving his friend Jolibois, who looked after them, crying:

"Ah! you rascal! you think you can fool me! But I can guess—I see what's up! You're a rascal, Dupont! But don't be

afraid: I won't tell your wife."

Georgette did not say a word; she took pity on her escort's pitiable state. They reached the landing on the first floor. Dupont recognized his waiter and said to him:

"Waiter, we would like a table in one of the public rooms."

"There isn't one, monsieur; they're all taken. It's very hard to get one on Sunday, unless you come much earlier than this. But I happen to have a private room, just vacated; I will give you that."

Dupont glanced at Georgette, who replied:

"We wish to dine in a public room. Let us take a turn on the boulevard; we will come back in a little while, and probably we shall find a table then."

"As you please, my dear friend," replied Dupont, who dared not insist, because the meeting with his friend Jolibois had made him very sheepish; but as they went away he made a sign to the waiter.

They returned to the boulevard; it was a dull, damp day, and there was some mud on the pavement; but, as it was a Sunday, there was a great throng on the boulevards, for there are multitudes of people in Paris who are determined to walk out on Sunday, whatever the weather, and who, when the rain begins to fall in torrents, vanish only to reappear a moment later, armed with umbrellas, and stroll along, looking in the shop windows, as if the sun were shining.

Dupont offered Georgette his arm; he did not know how to begin the conversation, being sadly embarrassed. The girl enjoyed his confusion for some minutes, then began:

"Well, Monsieur l'Américain from Brives-la-Gaillarde, has your meeting with your friend Jolibois made you dumb? Really, that would be a pity, you say such pretty things sometimes!"

Dupont tried to recover his self-possession, and replied:

"My charming neighbor, I confess that that meeting was not very agreeable to me!"

"Oh! I believe you there!"

"In the first place, Jolibois was drunk; it was easy enough to see that he'd been drinking too much, for he didn't know what he was saying. He recognized me—and then he took me for somebody else."

Georgette stopped, looked her escort squarely in the face, and said in a very sharp tone:

"Monsieur Dupont, do you take me for a fool?"

"I, mademoiselle? God forbid! On the contrary, I have every reason to know that you have a very keen intellect, that you reason perfectly, and that you are also exceedingly shrewd and satirical."

"In that case, monsieur, don't try to go on with the lies you have told me, in which, by the way, I never placed much faith: for you are much more like a Limousin than an American. You were never an American. You came to Paris from Brives-la-Gaillarde, as your friend Jolibois has just told you. But what I am least able to forgive is your passing yourself off as a widower while your wife is still living! Fie, monsieur! to deny your wife is a shameful thing!"

Dupont saw that he must abandon falsehood.

"Mademoiselle," he faltered. "Well, yes—it is true—I admit it. But I was so anxious to make your acquaintance! And if I had told you I was married, you wouldn't have consented to receive me."

"Why not? On the contrary, it would have given me more confidence in you. I would have said: 'Here's a man who doesn't try to deceive me.'—But to pretend to be a widower—to attempt to play the bachelor here, while your poor wife is lamenting your absence, no doubt!"

"Oh, no! you may be quite easy in your mind as to that! My wife doesn't lament my absence in the least. She was one of the first to urge me to come to Paris, and to come without her."

"And to pretend to be a bachelor?"

"I don't say that she went so far as that; but when a woman allows her husband to travel without her, that means that she is willing he should play the bachelor; for, after all, my dear little neighbor, men aren't nuns, and you understand——"

"Enough, monsieur, enough! not another word on that subject!"

"Very good; I ask nothing better.—But I think I felt a drop of rain."

"Yes, it's raining. Let's go back to the restaurant; there will probably be room now."

They returned to Bonvalet's, where the waiter made the same reply:

"Everything's taken in the public room; but I happen to have a private room; I advise you to take it quick, or somebody else will get possession."

Dupont looked at Georgette, who replied:

"All right! let's take the private room, as we can't do anything else."

Our gallant was overjoyed. The waiter escorted them into a warm, comfortable, well-closed room, where a table was already laid for two.

"Really, one would think that they expected us!" said Georgette, removing her bonnet and shawl.

"Guests are always expected at a restaurant."

"Of course; but these two covers all laid!"

"It is probably a room in which they never put more than two."

"No matter. Give your order quickly, monsieur, for I am awfully hungry."

"I would like to know what you prefer."

"Oh! I like everything."

"And there is nothing that I don't like; so the matter can be easily arranged."

Dupont ordered a choice, toothsome dinner, with a great variety of wines. He attempted to sit on a sofa beside Georgette; but she compelled him to sit opposite her, on the other side of the table.

"You would be in my way at dinner," she said; "and I don't like to be hampered when I am eating."

"I must not annoy her," said Dupont to himself. "I must go softly, for I have much to be forgiven for. Let's wait till the generous wines arrive."

Georgette did honor to the dinner; but she drank very little, although her companion did his utmost to induce her to, crying, as he filled her glass with *beaune première*:

"Above all things, don't put water in this wine; it would be downright murder! It's the most delicious *beaune* there is."

"That makes absolutely no difference to me," replied the girl. "I never drink pure wine. I prefer it with water."

"That's all right with common wines. But this, which costs four francs a bottle—it's sacrilege to put water in it!"

"In that case, my dear Monsieur Dupont, you shouldn't have ordered anything but common wines; then you wouldn't have exposed me to the risk of committing crimes."

Dupont was vexed; but, to compensate himself for his disappointment, he was very careful to drink his own *beaune pure*, and he resorted to it frequently, to keep up his courage and his *gayety*. He was beginning to risk an affectionate word or two, when Georgette abruptly interposed, saying:

"Is madame your wife pretty?"

Dupont frowned, as he replied:

"Quite—but not so well built as you—far from it! Ah! if she had your enchanting figure!"

"Are her eyes black or blue?"

"They are—they are green, like a cat's."

"Oh! what a misfortune! You say that your wife has eyes like a cat's?"

"What do I care?—And your mouth is so lovely! Your smile charms me beyond words!"

"And her teeth—are they fine?"

"Whose teeth?"

"Your wife's."

"*Mon Dieu!* mademoiselle, don't you propose to talk about anything but my wife? I will confess that I didn't ask you to dine with me in order to hear you talk about her."

"That may be; but the subject is very interesting to me."

"Must I tell you again, my lovely Georgette, that in Paris I have no wife, that I am a bachelor again?"

"True; I know perfectly well that you would like to make people think so. But, after all, my dear Monsieur Dupont, you may be quite sure of one thing, and that is that it's a matter of indifference to me whether you are married or single."

Dupont wondered how he ought to take that. He concluded to look upon it as an omen favorable to his love, and filled his neighbor's glass with *grenache*, saying:

"This is a lady's wine, very sweet, which won't stand water. Taste it, I beg you."

Georgette took one swallow of *grenache*, then put her glass on the table.

"I don't like sweetened wines," she said.

"*Sapristi!* what in heaven's name does she like?" thought Dupont; and to console himself, he emptied his own glass at a draught.

But by dint of trying to maintain his *aplomb*, he became as red as his friend *Jolibois*; and when the champagne was brought, he left his chair and proposed to Georgette to dance the polka with him. She laughed in his face and sent him back to his seat. He filled a glass with champagne and offered it to the girl.

"Don't you like champagne either?" he asked.

"Oh, no! it has an effervescence, a sparkle, that arouses— Does your wife like it?"

Dupont brought his fist down on the table, drank a glass of champagne, and cried:

"Upon my word, you're laughing at me! But you shall pay me for it! That calls for revenge, and I propose to avenge myself by kissing you."

As he spoke, he rose and rushed toward Georgette, and tried to put his arms about her. But she checked him with a firm hand.

"None of this nonsense, Monsieur Dupont," she said, "or I shall be seriously angry."

"What, dear angel! do you really mean to refuse me this?"

"I shall refuse you everything; you may be sure of that."

"Oho! why, then you have been laughing at me, making a fool of me!"

"In what way have I made a fool of you, monsieur?"

"In what way? Why, in every way! When a woman accepts a man's attentions, when she consents to receive presents from him,—a shawl, a bonnet, and heaven knows what!—she doesn't send him about his business afterward, do you understand, mademoiselle?"

"I understand, monsieur, that you are as foolish as you are impertinent. Did I ever give you the slightest hope that I would be your mistress? You taunt me for accepting a few paltry presents. I have made you some much more valuable ones, by consenting to receive your visits, to go to walk and to the theatre with you, to put my arm in yours. Do you count all that as nothing, monsieur?"

"I don't say that. But you consented to dine with me in a private room; and when a woman goes to a private dining-room with a gentleman—it isn't for the purpose of being cruel. Everybody knows that."

"Oh! I could well afford to dine *tête-à-tête* with you, monsieur, for you have never been at all dangerous to me."

"Then why have you always refused until to-day?"

"Because I didn't choose to give you hopes that could not be realized."

"And why did you accept to-day?"

"Because it bored me to walk about in the rain with you. But, never fear, monsieur, I shall not be caught again."

Dupont was terribly put out; but self-esteem, the wine he had drunk, and the mocking glances of the girl, who seemed to defy him—all these excited him beyond measure, and he determined to face even Mademoiselle Georgette's wrath. He said to himself that he was nothing but a simpleton, that the girl was laughing at him, that he

would never have so favorable an opportunity again, and that he would be a fool not to take advantage of it. All these reflections passed through his mind like a flash of lightning; having failed in his attempt to kiss his intended victim, he ventured to attack her in a different fashion. Instantly he received a smart blow as the reward of his audacity.

"Leave me, monsieur," said Georgette, rising from her seat; "you are an insolent fellow, and I will not remain with you another minute."

"Oh! I am very sorry, my lovely neighbor, but I will not leave you," replied Dupont, who had lost his head completely; and he succeeded in seizing the short striped petticoat that Georgette had on. "No, no; I have got hold of that charming little skirt which is so becoming to you, and which I have gazed at and admired so often! I've got it, and I won't let it go."

"All right! then keep it, monsieur, for it's all you will ever have of mine!"

As she spoke, Georgette found a way to let the skirt fall at her feet. She jumped over it, ran to where her shawl and bonnet were hanging, and left the room before Dupont, who still held the striped skirt in his hand, had recovered from his astonishment.

VII

THE SECOND PETTICOAT

On the day following that dinner, Mademoiselle Georgette left her modest little chamber on Rue de Seine very early in the morning; for she had taken care to give notice in the middle of the quarter.

This time she hired lodgings in the Marais, on Boulevard Beaumarchais, where rows of handsome houses, solidly constructed, now replace the paths, shaded by secular trees, which used often to serve as places of assignation for lovelorn couples.

The young embroiderer exchanged her attic room for a small apartment, still very modest, but indicating a less precarious financial condition. The furniture, too, was more pretentious; it was not that of a *petite-maitresse*, but it was no longer that of a *grisette*.

Mademoiselle Georgette changed her business also; she abandoned embroidery to become a shirtmaker; and as she sewed as well as she embroidered, she did not lack work.

Lastly, the short fustian skirt gave place to a petticoat of black silk, which fell gracefully over her alluring figure and reached only halfway to her ankle, so that it disclosed the lower part of a very shapely leg and the beginning of a plump calf.

In her own room, the pretty shirtmaker affected the costume that she wore in the attic on Rue de Seine, a tight-fitting white jacket, and the short skirt that was so becoming to her. Add to these, spotlessly clean white stockings, and a tiny foot neatly shod, and she was quite certain to turn the heads of all who saw her in that charming *négligé*.

Georgette lived now at the rear of a courtyard; but that courtyard was spacious, airy, and well kept; it was square in shape, and the tenants of the building in front looked on the boulevard and on the courtyard, while those in the building at the rear had the latter view only; and when they sat at their windows, they could see nothing but one another.

Georgette occupied two small rooms on the entresol. But above her was an elderly female annuitant, with her servant; their combined ages exceeded a century. On the next floor above, a family of honest bourgeois, who were always in bed at half-past ten. On the upper floor, a lady who gave lessons on the piano. In the building at her right lived an unmarried government clerk, who had a maid of all work. Above him, a lady of uncertain age, who had once been very pretty, and was still a great coquette; who covered her face with rice powder, cold cream, and red, blue, and black paint; who regretted the *mouches* with which ladies used to spot their faces, but who had made, with the aid of a red-hot pin, two beauty spots—one on the left cheek, the other on a spot which is not seen. But, you will say, if it is not seen, why make the beauty spot there? Ah! you are too inquisitive! Pray, do not those persons who are gifted with second-sight see everything, even the most carefully hidden things? The second beauty spot was for them; magnetism is an invaluable science.

Above this lady, whose name was Madame Picotée, were two young men who devoted themselves to literature, which did not prevent them from ogling their neighbors, when they were attractive.

In the building at the left, on the first floor, was a dressmaker's establishment; on the second, a painter of miniatures; on the third, a photographer. In all the buildings, the rooms under the eaves were reserved for servants.

The building that looked on the boulevard contained the handsomest apartments, and, consequently, the most important tenants of the house.

On the first floor was a very rich gentleman with two servants: a maid and a valet. On the second, a young couple; the husband was engaged in business, the wife in coquetry; she was pretty and a flirt, he was ugly and a rake; they had a soubrette with a very wide-awake air, and a cook who drank too much.

On the third floor was a young man who had just received his degree as a physician and who lacked nothing but patients; he looked for them and solicited them everywhere; he would have made some, if it had been possible, but only for the pleasure of taking care of them and the glory of curing them.

After Mademoiselle Georgette took up her abode in the entresol at the rear of the courtyard, all eyes were fastened upon her, and the feminine glances were foremost in seeking to scrutinize and pass judgment on the new-comer; for women are more curious than men—that is a recognized fact.

It was easy to obtain a sight of the latest arrival; it was April; the weather was very fine, the sun deigned to show his face frequently; and Mademoiselle Georgette, who was very glad to admit him to her little entresol, left her windows open almost all day, and, as her custom was, sat at her window working. You know what her costume was: the white jacket fitting close to her figure, and the skirt clinging about her hips.

So that they could look at her and examine her at their ease; and as she was very attractive, very alluring in her

simple costume, the women did not fail to discover that it was very unseemly, and that it was most unbecoming to her. They decided that the little shirtmaker did not know how to dress, and that she had no other beauty than her youth.

The lady who painted her cheeks even went so far as to say that the girl's skirt was indecent, because it outlined her figure too plainly. To be sure, the lady in question no longer had any figure that could possibly be outlined by her garments; but, on the other hand, she was very fond of going to the Circus, where men perform daring feats on horseback, and she had never found any fault with the exceedingly tight nether garments worn by most of the riders.

The men who lived in the house disagreed entirely with the opinion of the ladies. To a man, they voted the girl most attractive and exceedingly well built; and they rivalled one another in passing encomiums upon the grace with which she wore her modest costume. The short black petticoat was declared to be enchanting; and from the first to the topmost floor, the male tenants said to one another:

"Have you seen the girl on the entresol, with her little short skirt?"

"Yes, she's very piquant, is that young woman; she has such a well-set-up figure, and such well-rounded hips! She reminds me of the famous Spanish dancer, Camera Petra."

"Yes, yes, there's a resemblance in her skirt. I saw her in the yard, drawing water at the pump."

"Still in her simple *négligé*?"

"Yes. Ah! messieurs, if you could have seen her pump! She was so graceful, and her skirt followed her motions so perfectly! It was enough to drive a man mad!"

"She has a very pretty leg too, and a tiny foot."

"She's a mighty pretty girl! I must try to make a conquest of her."

"And I."

"And I."

"And I," said the photographer to himself; "I'll do it quicker than any of 'em, as I'll go to her and suggest taking her picture on a card; for all these young girls are delighted to have their picture."

VIII

A GENTLEMAN WHO DID NOT RUIN HIMSELF FOR WOMEN

There was one man in the house who said nothing; to be sure, he was too lofty a personage to gossip with his neighbors! It was the man who occupied the first-floor suite in the building on the boulevard. His name was Monsieur de Mardeille; was he of noble birth, or was he not? that is of little consequence to us; but this much is certain: he had about twenty-five thousand francs a year and he never spent the whole of his income.

Monsieur de Mardeille was at this time about fifty years of age, but he looked hardly forty-four. He had been a very comely person, and was still far from ill-looking. He was of commanding stature, well built, and had had the good fortune not to grow stout as he grew older; thus he was still capable of making conquests, his physical advantages being reinforced by those due to the possession of wealth. Always dressed in the height of fashion, but wise enough to avoid those extreme styles which, while they are endurable in a young man, are ridiculous in middle age, Monsieur de Mardeille had a distinguished bearing and the manners of the best society; and lastly, while he was no eagle, he had that social cleverness which often consists only in a good memory, and is infinitely more common than natural cleverness. With all the rest, he was exceedingly presumptuous, and believed himself to be very shrewd.

It is almost superfluous to say that Monsieur de Mardeille took the greatest care of his health, for he was most solicitous to retain his good looks, and, consequently, his youth; which last is a decidedly difficult thing to do, as we grow older every day. But still, so long as a man has a youthful look he tries to persuade himself that he is really young; to be sure, there is always something in our inmost being that reminds us how old we are; but so long as that something does not let itself be seen, we are entitled to forget it.

Monsieur de Mardeille, then, took the greatest care of his person; he took medicinal baths twice a week; he took all the laxatives that keep the complexion fresh; he indulged in no excess, either at the table or in love. In fact, as he was a man who thought of nothing but himself, he had never allowed himself to undergo the slightest annoyance because of a woman, for egotists never love. Moreover, this gentleman prided himself upon never having spent money on a mistress. We do not call it spending money when we take a lady to dine at a restaurant, or to the play, or to the Bois in a calèche; for, in such cases, as we have our share of the pleasure, and as we gratify our vanity by parading our conquest, the money is spent for our own behoof. So that Monsieur de Mardeille, having thus far succeeded in having *bonnes fortunes* that cost him nothing, laughed at his friends, most of whom ruined themselves, or at least ran into debt, to satisfy the whims of the fair ones for whom they sighed.

"What the devil!" he would say, looking at himself in a mirror; "do as I do, messieurs! No woman ever resisted me, and yet I never gave them diamonds or cashmere shawls—still less, money, egad! And I have always taken good care not to pay their milliner's bills; whenever it has happened that a lady who had been kind to me has taken it into her head to send one of her purveyors to me with a little note begging me to help her out of a scrape by paying his bill, I have always begun by turning the man out of doors; and then I have ceased visiting my fair one, to whom I have written: 'I found it impossible to accommodate you, and I dare not see you again.'—Then my mistress was certain to come running after me, overwhelming me with tokens of affection, and crying: 'Can it be that you thought that I loved you from selfish motives? Why, it is you, you alone, whom I love! Oh! come back, come back!'—I have generally let them pull my ear for a while, and then gone back, amid transports of love on their part. For you may be perfectly sure, messieurs, that a woman will never love a man more because he is very gallant and very generous with her. She will take more pains about deceiving him, that's all; for she will hate to lose his gifts and his bounty; but what pleasure is there in possessing a woman who clings to you only from motives of self-interest?"

"But," some of his friends would reply, "have you never felt the pleasure of giving? Are you insensible to the

delight one feels in gratifying a woman's desires, in humoring her fancies, her caprices, and in the sweet smile with which she thanks you when you take her a present, whether it be some pretty trifle, or a magnificent jewel?"

"Pardieu! I can readily believe that she smiles at you then; you wouldn't have her make a face at you, would you? But that gracious smile, which transports and intoxicates you, is not bestowed on you, but on the jewel or the shawl that you bring her. And perhaps you think that she loves you the more for it? Why, not at all; she will deceive you the next minute, making fun of you with the friend of her heart, to whom she will laughingly show the present you have just given her. No, messieurs, I do not know, nor have I any desire to know, what you choose to call the pleasure of giving. For that pleasure would deprive me of all confidence in my mistress; and if I am deceived, I can, at all events, say that it has cost me nothing.—And then," De Mardeille would add, "I must say that I have always chosen my conquests in good society, and that, consequently, my mistresses did not need to have me treat them generously."

"That proves nothing. Whatever a woman's rank, she is always flattered to receive a handsome present."

"Perhaps so; but, on the other hand, I am much more flattered when she loves me without any presents."

Now you know the gentleman who lived directly opposite Georgette, and whose windows, being on the first floor, enabled him to look directly into the apartments in the entresol opposite; which entresol was occupied by the pretty shirtmaker, who, as we have already had the privilege of informing you, often left her windows open to enjoy the balmy spring air, and perhaps also to allow her neighbors to see her. When a woman is pretty, she does not hide herself, unless she is under the sway of a jealous tyrant. And even then she finds a way to let some portion of her person be seen, which may kindle a desire to see the rest.

Monsieur de Mardeille condescended occasionally to sit at a window in his dining-room, which looked on the courtyard; and there, in a stylish *négligé*, enveloped in a handsome dressing-gown, of velvet or dimity according to the season, his head covered with a dainty cap, the tassel of which fell gracefully over his right ear, and from beneath which escaped some stray brown locks, which were sternly forbidden to turn gray, my gentleman would bestow a glance or two on those of his neighbors who were worth the trouble of looking at. But thus far he had discovered nobody in the house who deserved to be scrutinized for more than an instant.

When Georgette moved in, Monsieur de Mardeille's valet lost no time in informing his master that he had a new neighbor opposite, and added:

"I thought she seemed to be very good-looking."

"Ah! she seemed to you to be good-looking?" replied the old dandy, with a smile. "What sort of woman is this new tenant?"

"She's an unmarried woman, so it seems, monsieur, and she makes men's shirts."

"A shirtmaker! What! do you presume to praise a shirtmaker to me, Frontin?"

Monsieur de Mardeille had insisted that his valet should consent to be called Frontin, although his real name was Eustache; for the name Frontin, which used to be employed in all comic operas, reminded our elegant seducer of a multitude of interesting and diverting love intrigues, wherein Frontin's master was always triumphant; and it was probably with a view to reproducing in actual life those scenes of the stage that Monsieur de Mardeille had dubbed his servant Frontin. If he had dared, he would have called him Figaro; but he himself was beginning to be a little mature to play *Almaviva*.

Frontin, a great clown who deemed himself very shrewd, smiled as he answered:

"Faith! monsieur, I thought that a pretty girl was a pretty girl, even if she was a shirtmaker!"

"There may be some little truth in what you say, Frontin; but so far as I am concerned, you must understand that I look at women with other eyes than yours; that is to say, to appear pretty to me, a young woman, even a *grisette*,—for I do not absolutely debar *grisettes*,—must have something more than the commonplace beauties which charm you other men on the instant. She must have a—I don't know what—a certain peculiar fascination which we connoisseurs readily recognize, and to which the common herd of martyrs pay no heed. Tell me, Frontin, what you noticed especially alluring in this girl? I shall see at once whether you're an expert."

"What I noticed, monsieur?"

"Yes. And, first of all, where did you see her?"

"I saw her pass this morning, monsieur, crossing the courtyard; I was in the concierge's lodge, and he said to me: 'See, there's the new tenant of the little entresol! That's Mamzelle Georgette; she's a shirtmaker, and she sews like a fairy, so they say.'—Naturally, I looked at her. I should say that she's about twenty, very well built, with very pleasant, attractive eyes; eyes of the sort that—that—"

"Enough, Frontin, I understand. What else?"

"*Dame!* monsieur, her nose is a little turned up, and she has a very large mouth; I saw her teeth when she spoke to the concierge; there isn't one missing, monsieur."

"Pardieu! if her teeth were decaying at twenty, that would be unfortunate!"

"But I mean that her teeth are very white and even; and her cheeks are rosy and fresh."

"I see! a simple, country beauty! she's probably just from the country."

"Oh, no! she doesn't look in the least like a peasant; she carries herself too easily for that."

"Well, I will see, I will examine her, I will run my eye over her. But I will wager—a toothpick—that your pretty neighbor is a mere ordinary beauty. Does she ever sit at her window?"

"Oh! better than that, monsieur: she leaves all her windows wide open, and from ours we can look right into her room; we can even see her little bed in the rear!"

"Ah! we can even see her bed? And she leaves her windows open?"

"I presume that she shuts them when she goes to bed. And she has curtains."

"Ah! Frontin, you knave, you have noticed all that! she has curtains! Parbleu! it would be a pretty state of things if she hadn't! Morals, Frontin, morals! However, I will take a look at this young woman whom you think pretty, and tell you if you know what you're talking about."

"Oh! I am sure that monsieur will agree with me."

A few moments later, Frontin ran to his master and said:

"Monsieur, our young neighbor's windows opposite are wide open, and she's sewing at one of them; you can see her at your ease."

Monsieur de Mardeille arose, saying:

"This devil of a Frontin! he insists that I must see his little shirtmaker. But beware! if you have disturbed me just to show me some commonplace face, I shall withdraw my confidence in your taste."

Although he pretended that he went to look at his new neighbor solely to oblige his servant, he was not at all sorry to assure himself whether she was in fact as attractive as Frontin said; for Monsieur de Mardeille had always been very fond of the fair sex; to seek to attract women had been almost the sole occupation of his life; and for the last few years that occupation had been much more laborious, and had demanded much more time and trouble. It is useless to appear only forty-four years old when one is fifty; there are women who think forty-four too old—usually those who are about that age themselves. A middle-aged man finds it easier to make the conquest of a mere girl than of a woman who has known life. Why is it? Probably because the former lacks the experience of the other.

Monsieur de Mardeille took up his position at one of his dining-room windows; he assumed a graceful attitude, leaning on the window sill; he pushed his cap a little farther over his right ear, then turned his eyes to this side and that, not choosing to let anyone suppose that he had come there to look at the new tenant of the entresol.

Soon, however, he carelessly cast a glance in that direction. Georgette was sitting at the window, sewing, and from time to time she too glanced into the courtyard; there is no law against a young woman's desiring to become acquainted with the faces of her neighbors.

Monsieur de Mardeille therefore was able to scrutinize the young shirtmaker's features at his leisure. She, when she raised her eyes from her work, saw plainly enough that her opposite neighbor was examining her; but that fact seemed not to embarrass her in the least, for she raised her head as often as before to look out of her window.

"Not bad! not bad!" muttered Monsieur de Mardeille; "a little nose *à la* Roxelane, fresh cheeks, eyes that look bright enough and saucy enough! But nothing extraordinary; I have seen all that a hundred times. She's rather a pretty girl, but nothing more. She doesn't deserve all your high-flown praise, my poor Frontin."

But thus far he had only seen Georgette seated, so that he had no opportunity to admire the shapeliness of her figure or the grace of her carriage. Luckily, chance willed— But was it really chance? We will not take our oath to it; women are so quick at divining what is calculated to seduce us! But, no matter! let us charge it to the account of chance that it occurred to the girl to leave her seat to water a small pot of violets that stood on the other window sill.

Thereupon her opposite neighbor had an opportunity to watch her walk about her room; for one does not find on the instant all that one requires to water flowers, especially when one has no watering pot. So he saw Mademoiselle Georgette in her jacket and short petticoat; he could even see her foot and the lower part of her leg; for the girl—still by chance—went several times to the rear of the room, walking back and forth, after she had watered her flowers; and Monsieur de Mardeille, who was about to turn away from the window, remained there, and did not stir.

"Ah! the devil!" he was muttering now; "ah! that's very pretty, that is! *Fichtre!* what a figure! what hips! what a foot! what a leg! This is infinitely superior to all the rest. What a brisk walk! She reminds me of Béranger's ballad."

And he began to hum:

"Ma Frétilton! ma Frétilton!
Cette fille
Qui frétille,
N'a pourtant qu'un cotillon!"

Amazed to hear his master sing, Frontin said, with a downcast expression:

"So, monsieur doesn't think that the little one opposite deserves all I said in her praise?"

"Hush! hush! hold your tongue, Frontin!" replied Monsieur de Mardeille, without leaving the window or taking his eyes off his neighbor; "I said that, but I hadn't then seen her graceful, willowy form, or the little black skirt that outlines her voluptuous hips so perfectly. It is adorable! Indeed, it is well deserving of one's attention! And her foot! she has a charming foot! and the leg promises——"

"Ah! I am very glad that monsieur sees that I was right, and——"

"Hush, Frontin, hush! She's looking in this direction."

Georgette had, in fact, raised her head at that moment, and her eyes had met her neighbor's of the first floor. Monsieur de Mardeille eagerly seized the opportunity to bestow a gracious salutation upon the new tenant, who replied with a courtesy and a very amiable smile.

Thereupon Monsieur de Mardeille left his window, saying:

"We must not be too lavish of our attentions at once! But from the way the little one smiled at me, I see that this conquest will not cost me much trouble."

IX

THE LITTLE BLACK SKIRT DOES ITS WORK

While Monsieur de Mardeille deemed himself certain of triumphing over the young shirtmaker, almost all the other tenants of the house were trying to make a favorable impression on her. Georgette's little skirt had turned all their heads. The young men of letters were pleased to write verses in her honor, to commemorate her seductive figure in a ballad; they proposed to immortalize Georgette as Béranger immortalized Lisette, as all lovelorn poets have tried to immortalize their mistresses and their love affairs. Each of them believed himself to be a Virgil, a Catullus, a Tibullus, a Petrarch. There is no harm in that: we ought always to believe ourselves to be something; it affords one so much pleasure and costs so little!

The miniature painter determined to propose to paint the girl's portrait. The photographer hoped that she would allow him to photograph her in all sizes and in different attitudes.

The young doctor was bent upon attending her, and prayed heaven to inflict some trifling indisposition upon his pretty neighbor which would compel her to have recourse to his skill. The married man, who was very ugly and had a pretty wife, naturally considered the shirtmaker much better-looking than his wife. As he lived above Monsieur de Mardeille, he too had an excellent view of Georgette's apartment. So he frequently stationed himself at one of the windows in his dining-room; and from thence, not content with staring at his neighbor, he had no scruple about making signs and throwing kisses to her—in a word, indulging in a pantomime most discreditable to a married man. The truth was that he knew that his wife was not jealous, and that she paid little heed to his acts and gestures.

In fact, even the old bachelor, who had a maid of all work, ventured to make eyes at the pretty shirtmaker, despite his fifty-five years; and as his windows were not opposite hers, in order to see her he was obliged to lean very far out of his window.

Thereupon the maid of all work never failed to cry out:

"Mon Dieu! monsieur, it's perfectly ridiculous to lean out like that! What is it you're trying to see, anyway? Is monsieur trying to throw himself out of the window on account of the little shirtmaker on the entresol? On my word, she isn't worth the trouble! She's no great wonder; and then, monsieur won't have anything to show for the crick in his neck, for the girl never looks in this direction."

And the bachelor, irritated, but desirous none the less to deal gently with his maid, would reply:

"You don't know what you are talking about, Arthémise! I don't look in one direction more than another. I stand at the window because it does me good to breathe the fresh air. I don't pay any attention to my neighbors; I didn't even know that there was a shirtmaker on the entresol."

"Oh, yes! tell that to the marines! you can't fool me! Why, all the men in the house are getting cracked over that girl! It's easy enough to see that, for they pass about all their time at their windows, now."

In truth, as soon as Georgette's window was open and she sat down by it to work, you would see a head appear on the fourth floor, then another on the second; and sometimes they all appeared at the same moment. It seemed to amuse Georgette, who would respond affably with a little nod to the salutations addressed to her from every floor.

The female contingent was horrified by the conduct of the gentlemen; for no one of them had ever shown the slightest desire to gaze at one of the beauties of the establishment; to be sure, there were none, save the ugly man's wife, and she never appeared at any of the windows looking on the courtyard. Her bedroom faced the boulevard, and she would have considered that she compromised her reputation by showing herself at one of the rear windows.

By way of compensation, her husband was one of the most enterprising, one of those who tried most frequently to see Georgette, and who indulged in telegraphic signals to which the young shirtmaker paid no attention whatever. But that did not discourage Monsieur Bistelle,—that was the gentleman's name,—who continued to throw kisses to the girl, which she pretended not to see; it scandalized all the neighbors, however.

The young dressmakers amused themselves at Monsieur Bistelle's expense, and pointed him out to one another as soon as he appeared at his window. The lady of the beauty spot, Madame Picotée, always stationed herself at her window as soon as her neighbor came to his, and burst into roars of laughter, a little forced. At every kiss that Monsieur Bistelle threw to Georgette, she cried:

"Oh! mon Dieu! what fools some men are! but I never saw one quite so bad as this fellow! And a married man, too! why, it's shocking! The Bastille ought to be rebuilt on purpose for such people."

Monsieur Bistelle heard it all; but it made no impression on him, and he often said to himself, in an undertone:

"Bah! if I had chosen to send her a kiss, she wouldn't have thought it so shocking!"

Monsieur de Mardeille was very careful not to act so foolishly as his neighbor on the second floor. He also stood at his window to look at Georgette; but, far from making signs and throwing kisses to her, he contented himself with a low bow, to which the girl never failed to respond with a pleasant smile. But as Bistelle was often looking out just as Georgette nodded and smiled, he took for himself the salutation addressed to the floor below; so that his hopes gained strength; he was enchanted; he would rub his hands in glee and sometimes go down to walk in the courtyard, where he would stop under the shirtmaker's windows, humming:

""Tis here that Rose doth dwell!""

or:

""When one knows how to love and please,
What other blessing doth he lack?""

And the young dressmakers never failed to clap their hands and demand an encore. One day, Madame Picotée had the bright idea of tossing him two sous, which he laughingly picked up and put in his pocket, saying: "This will buy me some rouge and rice powder."—Which remark maddened the lady of the beauty spot, who ran for her slop jar and would have emptied it on her neighbor, but for the presence of the concierge, who was sweeping the courtyard.

Meanwhile Frontin, who soon discovered that his master was enamored of the damsel of the entresol, told him all that happened in the house, and all the foolish freaks to which Monsieur Bistelle resorted in his endeavors to commend himself to Mademoiselle Georgette.

"What do you say? that ugly creature hopes to make a conquest of that pretty grisette?" cried Monsieur de Mardeille; "didn't he ever look at himself in the glass?"

"I don't know whether he knows how ugly he is," replied Frontin; "but I assure you, monsieur, that he flatters himself that he has made an impression on Mademoiselle Georgette; he declares that she smiles sweetly at him when he's at his window."

"Smiles! Why, it's at me that the girl smiles, not at him! It's impossible that it should be at him! The conceited ass! the monkey! for the fellow looks very much like a monkey, doesn't he, Frontin?"

"Yes, monsieur; and he makes gestures like one, too."

"What! do you mean to say that he presumes to do what monkeys do?"

"Faith! monsieur, he goes through some very curious performances; they're very much like it! But that isn't all."

"What else is there, Frontin?"

"I know that Monsieur Bistelle sent a very fine bouquet to Mademoiselle Georgette this morning."

"A bouquet! The popinjay! He had the assurance! And did the little one accept his bouquet?"

"Yes, monsieur; indeed, it's on her window sill now."

"Can it be possible? I must look."

Monsieur de Mardeille lost no time in going where he could see the shirtmaker's window; he not only saw a huge bouquet on the sill, but he saw Monsieur Bistelle walking in the courtyard and humming:

"And if I am not there,
At least my flowers will be."

"Well, well! I must act, that is plain!" said the elderly dandy to himself; "I must declare myself in some other way than by standing at the window. Still, I can't make a straight dash for that grisette's rooms; that might compromise me. Ah! I have an idea! It's as simple as can be. She makes shirts. There's a pretext right at my hand.—Look you, Frontin."

"Here I am, monsieur."

"I want you to go to Mademoiselle Georgette's."

"The pretty neighbor's?"

"Yes; you will present yourself in my name, and most politely. You will say to her that, as I have heard that she is a shirtmaker and as I have some very fine shirts to be made up—— That isn't true; I don't need any, but they are always useful and I can safely order a dozen.—You will say to her then, that, as I have some work for her, I shall be much obliged if she will take the trouble to come to my rooms. You understand: in this way, I don't compromise myself, and I shall be able to talk to her much more freely than in her apartment."

"Yes, monsieur, yes; I will go and do your errand."

"Be perfectly courteous and respectful; that flatters these little girls."

"Yes, monsieur; and you don't want me to take her a bouquet too?"

"Nonsense! what good do bouquets do? There's nothing so commonplace! Do you suppose that I intend to copy Monsieur Bistelle? No, no, never a bouquet; I don't need that sort of thing to succeed. Go, Frontin; if the young shirtmaker asks you at what time I can receive her, say that she is entirely at liberty to choose the hour that is most convenient to her, and that she will always be welcome. I think that's rather pretty, eh? That's worth more than a bouquet."

Frontin departed, to perform the mission with which his master had intrusted him. But the bouquet sent to Georgette by Bistelle had been seen by the whole house. Instantly, as if he had lighted a train of powder, all the aspirants to the girl's favor had determined that they must not lag behind, and that the moment had come to try to make her acquaintance.

The young literary man who dabbled in poetry purchased a small bunch of violets for two sous—we are all gallant according to our means;—but he wrapped it in a sheet of note paper, whereon he had written this quatrain:

"Je vous ai vue, agissant à la pompe;
En vous tout est charmant, tout est vrai, rien ne trompe;
Vous déployez alors des mouvements si doux,
Que l'on se damnerait pour pomper avec vous!"^[D]

The young poet gave his bouquet and his verses to the concierge, to be delivered, instructing him to say to the girl that she must read what was written on the paper. A little later, the poet's confrère also appeared with a modest bouquet; but his forte was vaudevilles rather than poetry, so that the offering which accompanied his flowers was a ballad, and he laid the same injunction on the concierge.

Next came the photographer, who sent a package of photographs of the most popular actors. It is well known that young working girls, as a general rule, have a pronounced penchant for actors. Our photographer had no doubt that his gift would be most acceptable, and he told the concierge to say to Mademoiselle Georgette that he would be highly flattered if he might be permitted to photograph her.

Next came the miniature painter, who sent a dainty pasteboard box on which he had painted a swarm of little cupids in exceedingly graceful attitudes. As he handed his box to the concierge, he said:

"You will not fail to assure Mademoiselle Georgette that the artist who executed all these cupids would esteem himself very fortunate if he might paint his neighbor's portrait free of charge, and in whatever costume may be most agreeable to her."

A few moments after the miniature painter, the young doctor appeared and handed the concierge a package, saying:

"Be kind enough to hand this to Mademoiselle Georgette, with my compliments; it contains mauve, linden leaves, and poppy seeds; they are all excellent to take when one has a cold, and it rarely happens that a person goes a whole year without a cold. You will say to the young lady that I solicit her permission to attend her."

Lastly, the old bachelor himself had purchased a box of candied fruit, without his maid-servant's knowledge. But he took care not to intrust his gift to the concierge, for if he did he knew that his servant would certainly be told of it. So he went out on the boulevard and found a little bootblack, to whom he handed his box and gave instructions where to deliver it; and as he did not choose to remain incognito, lest his pretty neighbor should attribute his gift to somebody else, he instructed his messenger to say to her:

"Your neighbor, Monsieur Renardin, sends you this box, with his compliments.—Above all things," he added, "don't stop at the concierge's lodge, and don't speak to him; go straight to Mademoiselle Georgette's room on the entresol."

You are paid, so take nothing from her."

Affairs were in this condition when Monsieur de Mardeille sent his valet Frontin to Georgette's room. From early morning, the concierge, having received the presents one after another, had passed all his time going back and forth from his lodge to the entresol, where the young shirtmaker accepted without hesitation everything that was sent to her, simply saying to the concierge:

"Say to monsieur that I thank him."

"Don't forget to read the verses, mademoiselle; there's verses written on the paper," said the concierge, when he delivered the bunches of violets.

"All right; I'll read everything, but I shall not answer anything."

Georgette had read the quatrain, and was humming the vaudevillist's ballad, which was written to the tune of *La Boulangère*, laughing heartily at the words:

"Vous avez un minois fripon,
Une taille tres-fine;
L'œil assassin, le pied mignon,
La tournure mutine;
J'admire enfin votre jupon
Et tout ce qu'on devine
De rond,
Et tout ce qu'on devine!"^[E]

when the concierge appeared once more, with the package of photographs of actors; and a few moments later with the box adorned with cupids.

"What! more?" said Georgette. "Why, these gentlemen seem to have passed the word around to-day to pay compliments to me!"

"Faith! yes, mademoiselle, they're standing in line at my door. But I don't complain; to tell you the truth, all these young men are well intentioned; all they want is to pay their respects to you; that's what they told me to tell you."

"I accept the little gifts, monsieur; they serve to keep up—pleasant relations; but be good enough to say to these gentlemen that I do not want their respects, and beg them not to take the trouble of coming to offer them to me."

"The devil!" muttered the concierge, as he went away; "the young shirtmaker is one of the virtuous kind, it seems; and these gentlemen won't have anything to show for their presents! But in spite of that, she accepts everything that comes!"

Georgette had just received the package of simples presented by the young doctor and had repeated her previous reply to the concierge, when Monsieur de Mardeille's valet presented himself at her door.

He saluted her with the unceremonious air commonly assumed by servants who think that their appearance is most welcome; and when Georgette asked him what he wanted, he replied in an almost patronizing tone:

"I come, mademoiselle, from my master, Monsieur de Mardeille—the gentleman who lives opposite, on the first floor—an apartment that rents for three thousand francs. My master is very rich; he has more than twenty-five thousand francs a year; he might have a carriage if he chose; he has money enough. The only reason that he hasn't one is that he doesn't want it."

Georgette laughed in the servant's face.

"Well! what of it?" she retorted. "What do you suppose I care whether your master has a carriage or not, or how much he pays for his apartment? Did he send you here to tell me that? Oh! that would be too stupid!"

Monsieur Frontin was a little disconcerted to find that he had not produced more effect. He continued, in a less lofty tone:

"No, mademoiselle, no; my master didn't send me here to tell you that. But I thought—I supposed you would be glad to be informed. One likes to know with whom one is dealing."

"Do your errand; that will be better than your long speeches."

This time Frontin was altogether disconcerted; he expected to find a young seamstress only too delighted to receive a message from his master, and he found that he had to do with a young woman who seemed strongly inclined to laugh at him. So he decided to be very polite, and said in a respectful tone:

"My master, mademoiselle, having occasion to have some shirts made, and knowing that you work in that line, requests you to be kind enough to call at his apartment, so that he may give you his order and be measured."

"Monsieur," replied Georgette, in a very decided tone, "you will say to your master that I am not in the habit of calling upon unmarried men. If he were married, if his wife were with him, why, I would gladly comply with his request, there would be no difficulty about it; but as he is alone——"

"He has a maid, mademoiselle, and myself."

"Servants don't count, monsieur. I shall not go to your master's apartment; if he has an order to give me, he can take the trouble to come here; I will receive him and his twenty-five thousand francs a year, with or without a carriage!"

Frontin was piqued; in the first place, because the young woman had said that servants did not count; and secondly, because she seemed to make very little account of his master's exalted position. He replied, with evident irritation:

"Why, where would be the harm, mademoiselle? Suppose you should come to Monsieur de Mardeille's rooms; you wouldn't be the first one to do it! He receives ladies—a great many ladies! And they *are* ladies, too, who don't work for everybody."

"Monsieur le valet de chambre, you are a donkey! You talk nothing but nonsense!"

"What's that? I am a donkey! Allow me——"

"I don't doubt that your master receives many ladies, and for that very reason I don't propose to add to the number."

"But——"

"Enough of this! You have my answer; go and repeat it to Monsieur de Mardeille."

Frontin was on the point of making some retort, when a great uproar in the courtyard attracted the attention of all the tenants of the house.

X

A BOX OF CANDIED FRUIT

The reader will remember that Monsieur Renardin, one of Georgette's neighbors, who had a maid of all work, had purchased a box of candied fruit and had employed a little bootblack to deliver it to Georgette, and had told him that she lived on the entresol at the rear of the courtyard.

But the young fellow, who was a messenger as well as a bootblack, was a child of Auvergne, and had just as much intelligence as he required to black boots or to carry a pail of water; almost all water carriers are Auvergnats. He put the box of candied fruit under his arm; it was carefully wrapped in white paper and tied with pink ribbon. He entered the designated house, and, passing the concierge's door with his head in the air, started across the courtyard; but the concierge, who had seen him pass, ran out of his lodge and stopped him, saying:

"Where in the devil are you going, you young scamp? What do you mean by marching by my door without a word? That's no way to go into a house, do you hear, Savoyard?"

"I ain't no Savoyard, I'm an Auvergnat."

"Savoyard or Auvergnat! I don't care which, they're the same thing! Where are you going, I say?"

"I'm not speaking to you! I'm going straight ahead."

"I see that you don't speak to me; but I speak to you; I'm the concierge, and I have a right to question you, and you must answer."

"I'm not to speak to the concierge, that's my orders. I'm going straight ahead."

"What an obstinate little beggar! I tell you, you shan't pass till I know where you're going!"

"But I tell you I'm going straight ahead to take this box."

"Where?"

"I won't tell you."

"I'll make you tell me! What's in the box? explosive stuff, perhaps? If you won't answer, I'll take you and your box before the magistrate."

The concierge seized the boy's arm; he struggled and wept, and shouted at the top of his lungs:

"Let me be—you big thief! Monsieur Renardin, your neighbor, sent me here, and I'll tell him that you wouldn't let me do my errand!"

Mademoiselle Arthémise, the old bachelor's servant, crossed the courtyard at that moment. Hearing her master's name, she stopped short, then ran to the messenger.

"Monsieur Renardin!" she cried; "who wants Monsieur Renardin? This little fellow?—What do you want of him?"

"Why, no, he doesn't want him; he says that he comes here from him," said the concierge; "if the little donkey had only said that at first, I'd have let him pass."

"From him—he comes from him? Then it's me he wants. Monsieur Renardin must have sent him to me. What do you want of me, my boy?"

The little Auvergnat looked at Mademoiselle Arthémise, who was a strapping, red-faced wench of about thirty, with stray hairs on her chin and upper lip that made her look like a man disguised as a woman.

"Be you Mademoiselle Georgette?" he asked.

"Mademoiselle Georgette!" replied the stout servant, with a savage glare. "Yes, yes, that's me."

"And you live in the entresol yonder?"

"Yes, yes, it's me, I tell you! Did Monsieur Renardin send you to bring that box to Mademoiselle Georgette, on the entresol?"

"Yes; it's from your neighbor, with all his compliments, mademoiselle."

"Ah! we'll just look and see what he sends to that hussy!"

And Mademoiselle Arthémise seized the box and was beginning to tear off the wrapper, when the concierge called to her:

"I beg your pardon, mademoiselle; you take that box when you know perfectly well it isn't for you."

"What business is it of yours? What do you want to meddle in it for, you low-lived porter? Does the shirtmaker pay you to look after her lovers' presents?"

"No, mademoiselle, the shirtmaker doesn't pay me, but I'm bound to do my duty; if that Auvergnat Savoyard had said what he wanted, I'd have let him pass and carry to Mademoiselle Georgette what he had for her."

"Oh, yes! everybody knows that you look after the lovers; that's your business, you know."

"My business is to see that the tenants get what's addressed to them. Give me that box, which isn't for you."

"Not if I know it! Candied fruits! apricots! Look at this, will you! He gives candied fruits to that slut, and he says there's no need of my putting mushrooms in the chicken fricassee! that I spend too much money! that I ain't economical! Just wait! just wait! I'll give you candied prunes and cherries packed in straw!"

"But I tell you again to give me that box, Mademoiselle Arthémise; you are not Mademoiselle Georgette!"

The little Auvergnat, who was just beginning to understand that he had made a botch of his errand, interposed at that point.

"What! ain't you the lady on the entresol?" he asked.

"Bah! hold your tongue, you brat, it's none of your business! Here, here's an orange; put that down and show me your heels!"

And Mademoiselle Arthémise stuffed a piece of candied orange into the bootblack's mouth. He accepted and ate it; but he was none the less determined to recover the box. He tried to take it away from Monsieur Renardin's maid, and the concierge seconded his efforts. But the stout Arthémise was a muscular wench, able to contend with more formidable antagonists. She began by throwing a slice of quince in the boy's face; then she planted a candied apricot on the concierge's left eye, whereat he cried out like an ass whose eye has been put out; then she dealt blows indiscriminately to right and left.

It was the outcries of the concierge and the little Auvergnat, blended with roars of laughter from Mademoiselle Arthémise, that had brought all the tenants to their windows. To add to the uproar, Monsieur Renardin appeared at that moment, uneasy because his messenger had not returned, and curious to know how the pretty shirtmaker had received his gift.

The bachelor was horrified when he saw the little Auvergnat on all fours, looking for the piece of quince, which had fallen to the ground; the concierge yelling and cursing as he removed the apricot from his eye, piece by piece; and lastly, the maid of all work, stuffing herself with candied fruit and saying:

"It's mighty good, all the same! I never tasted it before, but I'll make him give me some now."

"What does this mean, Arthémise? What are you doing here in the courtyard, instead of attending to your dinner?" inquired Monsieur Renardin, with a frown.

"My dinner! Deuce take the dinner! it can take care of itself. I'm having a treat, I am! I'm eating candied cherries and pears! I say, monsieur, when you go about it, you send nice presents to young ladies! But you'd better choose a page who ain't quite so stupid as this one; he took me for the hussy of the entresol. Oh, my! I didn't say anything; I just took the box."

"What's that? you little rascal! is this the way you do errands?"

"No, monsieur; it wasn't my fault. Why wouldn't the concierge let me in?"

"I did my duty; this Savoyard's a fool, and I was just going to send him to the entresol when Mademoiselle Arthémise told him she was Mademoiselle Georgette, and that the box was for her."

"What, Arthémise! you dared——"

"Hoity-toity! why should I have hesitated? This little brat brings a box from you—of course, I thought it was for me. As if I could suppose that a man of your age would pay court to young girls! that he'd lay out money for the first pert-faced minx that perches in the house! that he'd send boxes of candied fruit to a new-comer, a shirtmaker, when he growls every day because, as he says, I put too much butter in a sauce that——"

"Enough, mademoiselle! that will do; come with me, and we will have an explanation upstairs. I don't choose to have the whole house know what goes on in my establishment."

And Monsieur Renardin walked hastily toward the stairs, not daring to look at the windows of the entresol. Mademoiselle Arthémise followed her master, making faces behind his back; she still had the box of candied fruit in her hand, and she called out to the concierge, laughing in his face:

"I don't care a snap of my finger! I always get the good things. As for monsieur, as he don't like bread soup, he can make up his mind to eat nothing else for a week!"

"If my eye is injured, mademoiselle," said the concierge, "you'll have to pay the doctor!"

"Count on it, my dear man; apply to Monsieur Renardin; he's the cause of it all! He's an old rake, and nothing else!"

Georgette had overheard all this from her room, and it had amused her immensely. Monsieur Frontin, who was on the landing, had stopped there, in order not to lose a word of the altercation and to be able to report it faithfully to his master. When there was no one left in the courtyard, the little Auvergnat having decamped after picking up the piece of quince, the valet returned to the front building and to his master's apartment. He began by attempting to tell him what had just taken place in the courtyard; but Monsieur de Mardeille interrupted him:

"I know all about that; I was at my window. I know that Monsieur Renardin sent a box of candied fruit to the little shirtmaker, and that Arthémise, his maid, got possession of the box and ate what was in it. That Arthémise is a bad one, and her master ought to discharge her at once. But when a man submits to be domineered over by his servant, he deserves to have her make a fool of him. However, that doesn't interest me much; this Monsieur Renardin is not a rival to worry about. You have been to see the little one? Well! She was flattered, enchanted by my proposition, of course? When is she coming?"

Frontin drew himself up, assumed a solemn expression, and replied:

"Mademoiselle Georgette did not seem at all flattered by monsieur's proposition; on the contrary, she put on an air—well, an air as if she was a great swell!"

"Cut it short, Frontin!"

"Well, monsieur, this shirtmaker doesn't choose to measure you for shirts; do you understand that?"

"I understand that you're an idiot, if that's the way you did my errand! I never said a word to you about taking my measure!"

"But I supposed that was necessary, monsieur. When a tailor makes you a coat, he takes your measure first."

"Enough! What did the girl say? She didn't refuse without giving any reasons, did she?"

"She thought it was strange, monsieur, that you are not married. She said: 'Oh! if your master was married, if he had a wife, that would make a difference; I'd go and measure him right away; but I don't go to see bachelors. If he chooses to come to my rooms, I will receive him.'"

"Aha! she wants me to go to her! You ought to have begun by telling me that, you clown! I understand—that flatters my young lady's vanity! These girls have so much self-esteem! She wants the whole house to know that Monsieur de Mardeille is paying court to her! Well, I don't care, after all; I will go; but I will go in the evening, because the neighbors aren't at their windows after dark."

DECLARATION AND OBSTINACY

That same evening, Monsieur de Mardeille left his apartment about eight o'clock. It was quite dark, everything was quiet in the house, and he stole noiselessly downstairs and passed the concierge's lodge on tiptoe, unnoticed. Then he walked rapidly across the courtyard and went up to the entresol, where he could see a light.

"No one will see me go to the little shirtmaker's," he said to himself, "and perhaps she will be quite as well pleased to receive me after dark. That saves appearances."

He stopped at Georgette's door and knocked softly. In a moment, a sweet voice said:

"Who is there?"

"Open, if you please, Mademoiselle Georgette; it is someone who wishes to speak to you."

"I don't receive visits at night. Come back to-morrow morning."

"I am your opposite neighbor, mademoiselle—Monsieur de Mardeille; I sent my servant to you this morning. You know what it is that brings me; so be kind enough to open the door, I beg."

"I am very sorry, monsieur; but I never let anybody in at night. Come back to-morrow. It will be light then."

"What, mademoiselle! you leave me outside your door—me, Monsieur de Mardeille! You are quite certain, I presume, that I am not a robber?"

"Perhaps you might be a more dangerous character! Good-night, monsieur! Until to-morrow, by daylight!"

"It's because she considers me too dangerous that she won't let me in now!" said Monsieur de Mardeille to himself, as he returned to his own lodgings.

That idea, by flattering his self-esteem, consoled him a little for having put himself out to no purpose.

"It's plain," he thought, "that she wants the whole house to know that I am paying court to her.—Well! since it must be, mademoiselle, you shall receive a visit from me at midday."

And the next day, after passing more than an hour at his toilet, because he was determined to be irresistible, Monsieur de Mardeille decided to defy the prying glances of the neighbors. He went downstairs as if he were going out; but as he passed the concierge, who was standing at his door, he said:

"By the way, that girl who lives on the entresol makes shirts, doesn't she?"

"Yes, monsieur; she works for a linen draper; her sewing is perfect, so they say."

"In that case, I am inclined to order some shirts of her. One ought always to employ one's neighbors, as far as possible."

And our dandified friend turned on his heel, crossed the courtyard, and in an instant stood before Georgette's door, which was always unlocked during the day.

Monsieur de Mardeille tapped softly twice.

"Come in, the door is unlocked," replied the same voice that he had heard the night before.

Monsieur de Mardeille entered with the ease of manner born of familiarity with society, and the nonchalance which a rich man always affects when he calls upon poor people—unless, that is to say, he is possessed of intelligence or tact; in which case, far from seeking to make his superiority felt, his endeavor will rather be to keep it out of sight. But men of tact and intelligence are rare, and Georgette's caller was deficient in both those qualities.

However, he abated something of his lordly manner when he saw how unconcernedly the young woman received him. She seemed in no wise perturbed by his visit, but gracefully motioned him to a chair and coolly resumed her own, which was near the window, saying:

"May I know, monsieur, to what I am indebted for the honor of your visit?"

Monsieur de Mardeille settled himself comfortably in his chair, and replied:

"Mademoiselle, I sent my valet to you yesterday; I ventured to request you to come to my apartment; it is not very far; I live just opposite."

"Oh! I know it, monsieur; I recognize you perfectly. But your servant must have told you——"

"That you would not call upon unmarried men—yes, he told me that. But, bless my soul! why do bachelors cause you such alarm? Have you had much reason to complain of them? Ha! ha! ha! Do you know that that might give rise to many conjectures?"

And he laughed again, because he had fine teeth which he was very glad to exhibit, and because, moreover, he thought it quite clever to laugh like that. But Georgette remained unmoved, and replied:

"I don't know what conjectures one might form, monsieur; but I act thus because it suits me, and I worry very little about what people may think."

Monsieur de Mardeille, surprised at the girl's serious tone, smiled rather sheepishly and decided not to laugh any more. He moved uneasily in his chair as he rejoined:

"I had no intention to offend you. The deuce! mademoiselle, it seems that one cannot safely jest with you."

"I beg your pardon, monsieur; I am very ready to jest, when I know my man."

"Ah! to be sure, and you know me only by sight as yet. I consider myself fortunate, mademoiselle, to have so charming a person as you are for my opposite neighbor; and it made me anxious at once to—to—to become better acquainted with you."

"I thank you, monsieur; but there is too great a difference of rank between us."

"Differences may be lessened; in fact, they very soon disappear between a lovely woman and a man who is fascinated by her charms."

Georgette smiled and murmured:

"Was it to tell me that that you came here, monsieur?"

"Faith, yes! Look you! I won't beat about the bush; I prefer to go straight to the point. Indeed, why should I conceal the impression that your charms, your beauty, have made on my heart? Is it a crime to love you? especially

as I am a bachelor, which certainly is no reason for spurning my homage. Yes, my lovely neighbor, you turned my head the very first time I saw you—in this charming *négligé* which is so becoming to you! I have not had a moment's repose since, I think of nothing but you! I used the pretext of wanting shirts made to try to lure you to my apartment; but what I wanted, what I want now, before everything, is to tell you that I adore you, and to beg you not to be insensible to my love!"

It was Georgette's turn to laugh; and she did it so frankly, so unreservedly, that the old beau, who had leaned over toward her, straightened himself up and seemed completely taken back. As the pretty shirtmaker continued to laugh, he decided to say:

"Mon Dieu! mademoiselle, I am delighted to have afforded you so much amusement; but may I not know what it is that makes you laugh so heartily? It cannot be my avowal of my sentiments? You must be accustomed to receive such declarations, are you not? So far as I have been able to see, almost all the men in the house have told you or would like to tell you the same thing."

"Ah! you know that, do you, monsieur?"

"Did I not see the concierge pass the whole of yesterday bringing you bouquets, photographs, and heaven knows what? I even heard something of a box of candied fruit.—Ha! ha! ha! that was too absurd!"

"It is quite true that all the gentlemen in the house have been most polite to me."

"Faith! mademoiselle, I don't send bouquets myself; I consider it so commonplace, so vulgar, that I am not tempted to imitate these gentry. I speak out, I say frankly what I feel. Don't you consider that the better way?"

"Why, it seems to me that it is very pleasant to receive bouquets and other presents."

Monsieur de Mardeille bit his lips and said to himself:

"She likes her little presents; she's selfish; that's a pity!"

But that did not prevent him from moving his chair nearer to Georgette's, and trying to assume a very affectionate, touching tone, as he murmured:

"You have made no reply to my declaration, charming girl."

"I beg your pardon; didn't you hear me laugh?"

"What! is that the way you reply? What am I to conclude from that?"

"That I took your declaration of love for what it was worth—that is to say, for a joke."

"A joke! Oh! don't think it! I spoke most seriously. I love you! I adore you!"

"On the instant, just from seeing me at my window?"

"Does it take weeks or months to fall in love? We see a woman; she attracts us, fascinates us at once, or never. Love—what is it but electricity?"

"Oh! I didn't know!"

"Why, it is nothing else; a pretty woman's eyes contain the fluid that electrifies us. The moment that we feel the shock, it's all up with us; we are electrified."

"Really! and the women, what electrifies them?"

"Why, that is done by the same process; our glances do the business!"

As he spoke, he tried to electrify the girl by fixing his eyes upon her, full of fire, and attempted to move his chair still nearer. But Georgette moved hers away, saying in a very sharp tone:

"Don't sit so near me, monsieur, I beg you! it makes it hard for me to work, and, besides, it isn't proper."

The old beau was speechless with surprise; he concluded that his eyes had not emitted enough of the magnetic fluid, and tried to make them still more inflammable as he exclaimed:

"May not one venture to approach you, pray, in order to admire that divine figure at closer quarters?"

"No, monsieur, one may not. What would the neighbors think if they should see you sitting so near me?"

"The neighbors! the neighbors! Why do you leave your window wide open? It makes it very inconvenient to talk with you. I will close it, with your permission."

"No, monsieur, no; I wish it to remain open; it does not interfere at all with my talking; and if the neighbors know that you are calling on me,—which they probably do, for everything that goes on in this house is seen,—why, they will see that nothing has happened that I need to conceal."

Monsieur de Mardeille frowned slightly; he shifted about in his chair, and said, after a brief pause:

"What a strange idea it is, to subject yourself like this to the inspection of other people, to whose opinion you ought to be indifferent, in any event!"

"Ah! so you think that one can afford to be indifferent to other people's opinion?"

"I think—I think that you treat me very cruelly!"

"And I, monsieur, think that I have conferred a great favor on you by consenting to receive you in my room—where I never receive any man. It seems that you are not at all grateful."

"Oh! pardon me, my lovely neighbor; certainly I am very grateful; but I thought—I hoped— By the way, you have not told me yet whether my sentiments are offensive to you?"

"Why, monsieur, I hardly know you! And I don't allow myself to be electrified as easily as you do, I presume."

"Cruel girl! you make sport of my torments."

"You say that you love me, do you, monsieur? But why should I believe in your love? What proofs of it have you given me?"

"What proofs? Do you mean to say, mademoiselle, that you must have proofs before you believe in it?"

"Most certainly! Oh! I am very incredulous, monsieur, and I don't believe in anything until I have had proofs of it."

"But it seems to me, mademoiselle, that the step I am taking at this moment ought to satisfy you that I am telling you the truth. When a man of my rank, a man accustomed to frequent only the best society, pays a visit to a—a simple working girl, he must be impelled thereto by a very powerful sentiment!"

"That is to say, monsieur, that you think you do me great honor by calling on me?"

"Why, no, I don't say that! You are cruel, and no mistake! you put a bad construction on everything I say!"

Georgette made no reply, but continued to sew. Monsieur de Mardeille, sorely annoyed because he had failed to make such rapid progress as he hoped, said to himself:

"Let us try changing the subject. The little one must like pleasure. All women want to be amused. Let us see if we can't dazzle her."

After a moment, he added, aloud:

"Have you been working long at this trade—for a linen draper?"

"No, monsieur. Indeed, I have not been long in Paris."

"Ah! then you are not a Parisienne? You surprise me! You have all the grace of one. May I, without being impertinent, ask you from what province you come?"

Georgette hesitated a moment before she replied:

"I come from a small village near Rouen."

"Ah! you are a Norman! That is strange, for you haven't the Norman accent. How long have you been in Paris?"

"Nearly five months."

"Did you come alone?"

"Yes, all alone. I said to my parents: 'I want to go to Paris; I will work hard there, and perhaps I may make my fortune—who knows?'"

Monsieur de Mardeille scratched his head as he repeated:

"Fortune! hum! that's not so easy. Women don't often make their fortunes in Paris, when they have no other means of earning money than their needle. But, when you came to Paris, you probably knew that you would find a friend here, a wealthy protector, who could start you at once on the road to the fortune to which you aspire?"

"No, monsieur," Georgette replied coldly; "I did not come to Paris to meet anyone, and I shall find a way myself to reach the end I have in view."

Once more the old beau bit his lips and glanced about the room.

"It's impossible to tell how to take the girl; she's always on her guard!" he said to himself. "I shall not succeed with her so quickly as I thought. But, it doesn't make much difference, I have plenty of time. I must find her sensitive spot.—Are you fond of the play, mademoiselle?" he asked.

"Oh! yes, monsieur, very!"

"Do you go often?"

"Most rarely, monsieur. In the first place, I have no acquaintances in Paris; and for a young girl to go to the theatre alone is hardly proper."

"I have found the weak point in the shield," thought Mardeille; and he rejoined:

"Well, my charming neighbor, I will escort you to the theatre, with your permission. We will have a little screened box; it will be very comfortable, like being at home."

"I don't know what your little screened boxes are, monsieur; but when I go to the play, I don't go to hide myself; I want to see and be seen."

"Ah! you want to be seen! What a coquette!"

"It is not from coquetry. But, monsieur, you cannot think that I would go to the play with such an elegant person as you, in the modest costume that I wear."

"I presume that you would not go in this jacket and this short skirt, although the costume is divinely becoming to you! On my word, you are bewitching so!"

"No, of course, I would not go out in a jacket; but my best costume is very modest: a cotton gown, a little cap, a knitted fichu—that's my attire!"

"What! haven't you a bonnet—a tiny bonnet?"

"No, monsieur, I haven't."

The elderly dandy moved about in his chair, seemed to reflect, and said, at last:

"After all, you must be fascinating in a cap. Besides, we can take a cab. Is it settled? I will take you to-night, if you agree."

"What, monsieur! do you mean to say that you would take to the theatre a woman in a cotton dress, cap, and a fichu instead of a shawl?"

"I do; I am entirely free from prejudices. I would like to take you in the costume you have on, if it were possible."

"Well, upon my word! I wouldn't have believed that!"

"That proves how dearly I love you, I hope."

Georgette shook her head as she replied:

"Why, no, it doesn't prove it at all. However, monsieur, I have more self-esteem than you. I have enough respect for your exalted rank to avoid compromising it. Fie, monsieur! what would people think of you if they saw you with a woman in a cap on your arm?"

"But we shall take a cab."

"We shall not go into the theatre in a cab! Ha! ha! And as I don't propose to hide myself in a screened box, when I am once in the theatre everyone will have plenty of time to admire my costume."

Monsieur de Mardeille rose and paced the floor, and for some time he did not speak; at last he said:

"What do you need to go to the theatre with me, my lovely child?"

"Why, almost everything: a silk dress; they have such nice things ready-made now, that it will be easy enough to find one that will fit me. And a pretty bonnet, and a fine shawl—cashmere, or something like it,—and gloves—nice kid gloves."

Monsieur de Mardeille began to pace the floor again, dissembling with difficulty the grimace that had replaced his amiable air. Suddenly he looked into the courtyard and exclaimed:

"Ah! I believe I have visitors! Yes, they have come to see me. Au revoir, my charming neighbor; a thousand

pardons for leaving you so abruptly!"

"Oh! pray don't mind me, monsieur!"

Our dandy was already at the door; he returned hurriedly to his own apartment, with an exceedingly ill-humored expression; and when Frontin inquired:

"Did the shirtmaker take monsieur's measure?" he angrily replied:

"Hold your tongue, you imbecile! I forbid you ever to mention that grisette to me."

XII

LOVE! LOVE! WHEN THOU HAST TAKEN US CAPTIVE!

A week passed. Monsieur de Mardeille had not called again upon Georgette; he had not stationed himself at his rear windows; but he had stolen many a glance through the glass, by raising a corner of the curtain. He had seen his young neighbor, as alert and alluring and graceful as ever, going to and fro in her modest apartment; then sitting down to work at her window; then rising and sitting down again; and every movement of the pretty shirtmaker made his heart beat fast. He had given Frontin a kick in the hind quarters, when that worthy ventured to laugh inanely because his master raised the curtain.

He was somewhat flattered by the fact that, although Georgette responded affably enough to the salutations of her other neighbors, he had never seen one of them in her room; so that she had really done him a favor by consenting to receive him.

At the end of a week, he said to himself:

"After all, it was on my account, it was in my interest, to avoid compromising me, that the girl insisted upon being well dressed before she would go out on my arm. I can't be angry with her for that: it was a very excusable motive. But then I must send her all that she lacks. Pardieu! I am well able to do it! That is not the question—no—but it isn't my custom; I have never spent money on women. I know that once doesn't make a custom; but, for all that, I don't like it. But that girl is obstinate and strong-willed; if I don't send her what she wants, I shall have to abandon the pursuit. And I don't want to abandon it! I dream of her every night. I see her slender figure, her rounded hips, which her little black skirt hugs so closely. Well! I must buy her this finery. I won't go so far as the cashmere—no, indeed, I'm not such a fool! But when a man goes so far as to play the gallant, he must do things properly. At my age, it's very unpleasant to change one's habits. Why in the devil did that provoking grisette take up her abode in my house? right opposite me? under my nose? It's a fatality!"

Love, and self-esteem, which is quite as strong as its brother, carried the day at last. One morning Georgette received the shawl, the bonnet, the dress, and even the kid gloves, with this brief note written by her stylish neighbor:

"Now will you go to the theatre with me to-night?"

And Georgette replied, to the messenger:

"Yes, I will go."

For Monsieur de Mardeille, who did not wish that anyone should know that he was spending money to gratify the shirtmaker, had not sent his gifts by Frontin.

That evening, about seven o'clock, the dandy presented himself at Georgette's door. She was all dressed and ready, and probably less seductive in that guise than in her jacket and short skirt; but she was still very comely, because a young and pretty woman never becomes ugly in a stylish bonnet. Indeed, Monsieur de Mardeille was surprised at the ease with which his little neighbor wore her new costume.

"On my honor!" he cried; "you are charming thus! You wear these clothes with such grace!"

"Does that surprise you, monsieur?"

"Nothing surprises me in you; I believe you to be adapted for any station."

"I am ready; let us go."

"Oh! we have plenty of time. Pray let me admire you a moment."

"You may admire me all you please at the theatre; but as I don't often go, I want to see everything. Let us be off!"

Georgette was already on the landing. Monsieur de Mardeille followed her, saying to himself:

"She has a little will of her own that can't be resisted! But to-night, when we return from the theatre, I flatter myself that she won't dismiss me so quickly."

It was still broad daylight when Georgette left her room, handsomely dressed and on Monsieur de Mardeille's arm. All the neighbors were at their windows; it is unnecessary to say that their tongues were in motion.

"The ex-beau carries the day!" said the photographer; "he is rich and fashionable, and such advantages seduce these little girls, who are immensely flattered by hanging on a dandy's arm."

"And then, he's very good-looking still," said the miniature painter. "I can understand that he may have taken the little one's fancy. These girls have a surprising taste for mature men."

"The Lovelace of the first floor must have put out some money," said the two men of letters; "he's dressed the little neighbor from top to toe. Women can always be caught by flattering their coquetry."

"And we couldn't offer her all that!"

"It's very strange! this Mardeille has the reputation of being a stingy curmudgeon with women."

"That's a report that he spreads himself, so as to get all the more credit."

The young doctor said nothing; he simply sighed, as he thought:

"She hasn't even had a cold!"

Monsieur Bistelle was furious, for she had received his bouquets and had not received him, and had met all his propositions with a refusal, although they were most alluring. And so, when he saw Georgette pass in her new attire, he cried:

"Bah! cheap stuff! Why, that shawl isn't a cashmere, nor even a Lyon; that dress isn't silk; that bonnet didn't come from one of our leading milliners! It's all trumpery; anyone can see that at a glance. I'd have dressed the girl a hundred times better; she's a fool to prefer that Mardeille, who never knew what it was to be generous to a woman!"

This gentleman did not reflect that he himself was very ugly, whereas his rival was still very comely; but that is one of the things that one never considers. Moreover, we are so accustomed to our own faces that we never deem ourselves unattractive.

Even Monsieur Renardin, the old bachelor, made a very pronounced grimace when he saw Georgette pass; especially as Mademoiselle Arthémise, his maid-servant, did not fail to say, with a sneer:

"See, there goes your flame on the arm of the Joconde of the first floor! I advise you to send boxes of candied fruits to such hussies! The shirtmaker snaps her fingers at you."

"In the first place, Arthémise, you're talking nonsense; that young woman didn't receive any candied fruit from me, as you ate it all."

"Thank God! I was on hand to stop it as it passed—or else she would have got it. It's very lucky that I ate it, you see. I suppose you think that mincing thing would have put the box on her head to go out with you, don't you? Oh! she's a sly one! She's bleeding the ex-young man of the first floor; she's quite right, for he's a skinflint with women, they say; he's getting what he deserves."

Monsieur de Mardeille escorted Georgette to the Ambigu-Comique. He tried to take her to a small, dark box, but she refused to enter it, and he was obliged to take a seat in the balcony with her. There it was impossible to take the slightest liberty! As some consolation, our gallant kept trying to whisper words of love in the girl's ear, but she soon said to him impatiently:

"Please be kind enough not to keep talking to me! You prevent me from hearing the play, and I suppose that is what people go to the theatre for."

Monsieur de Mardeille bit his lip and said to himself:

"There's nothing so idiotic as these girls who have never been to the theatre! I won't bring you very often, I can tell you!"

The play amused Georgette immensely, but was exceedingly tedious to her escort, who was overjoyed when it came to an end. He suggested returning home in a cab; but the girl refused, she was absolutely determined to go on foot.

"But it's beginning to rain!" said Monsieur de Mardeille.

"Well, it will cool us off!"

"But your new bonnet—won't the rain fade it and ruin it?"

"What a terrible misfortune, if it is spoiled! There are other bonnets in the milliners' shops!"

"I wonder if she thinks I am going to buy her one every day!" thought her companion, with difficulty restraining an outburst of temper; for he was obliged to return on foot, while Georgette, leaning on his arm, talked of nothing but the play and the actors she had seen.

They reached home at last. Monsieur de Mardeille had impatiently awaited that moment. He flattered himself that it would mark his final triumph. They entered the house in which they both lived. In front of the concierge's lodge, which was at the foot of Monsieur de Mardeille's staircase, Georgette stopped and said, with a graceful courtesy:

"Bonsoir, monsieur! a thousand thanks for the pleasure you have given me by taking me to the play."

"What's that? Bonsoir?" cried Mardeille, with a smile. "But I am not going to bed yet; and you will allow me to come up and chat a moment with you, will you not?"

"Oh! no, monsieur! for I am going to bed, and this is no time for conversation."

"Going to bed? What difference does that make? I won't prevent you; indeed, I shall be too happy to assist you in making your *toilette de nuit*."

"I don't need anyone to assist me. If I did, I wouldn't resort to a man for that purpose. Bonsoir, monsieur!"

"Oh! I say—this is a jest! Surely, my charming neighbor, you don't mean that you won't receive me in your room a moment?"

"To-morrow, monsieur, to-morrow during the day, I shall be greatly flattered to receive a call from you, if you choose to come; but at this time of night it would be very improper."

With that, Georgette nodded and ran across the courtyard to her own staircase, leaving Monsieur de Mardeille, utterly taken aback, in front of the concierge's door. He was nonplussed by the girl's conduct.

"This is too much!" he said to himself; "she accepts my presents—a whole toilette, which cost me a pretty penny—and she's just as cruel as she was before! So the young lady is making sport of me, is she?"

But suddenly, the courtyard and staircase being still lighted, he saw the concierge in his lodge watching what was going on; whereupon our dandy struck his forehead, saying to himself:

"What an idiot I am not to understand! That child has a hundred times more tact than I have! She doesn't want the concierge to see me go up to her room at midnight; for that would inevitably spread a report through the whole house that I had passed the night there! Yes, of course that's it; she's quite right; she has pointed out to me clearly enough what I have to do: go up to my room and pretend to go to bed; then, when everybody's asleep, and the gas is all out, go downstairs and steal up to her room, where I'll wager that I shall find the door unlocked as usual. There is my path all marked out for me: now I must follow it."

Monsieur de Mardeille went upstairs, purposely making a great noise. He entered his room, slammed the door, ordered Frontin to undress him, and then dismissed him with strict injunctions to go to bed at once. Half an hour passed, the gas was extinguished, there was no light to be seen in any of the neighbors' rooms, not even Georgette's.

"That girl thinks of everything!" thought Monsieur de Mardeille. "She is prudence personified: she has put out her

light. Very good! Darkness makes one more daring. I must make haste; the propitious moment is here!"

And the gentleman stole from his room on tiptoe, enveloped in an ample robe de chambre, and with his jaunty cap on his head. He went downstairs, taking every precaution not to make any noise; he passed the concierge's lodge, where there was no light; darkness reigned on all sides, and as our seducer was feeling his way across the courtyard he ran against the pump; but that told him where he was; the door leading to the narrow stairway was close at hand; he found it and went upstairs, muttering:

"Here I am, at last!"

He soon stood in front of Georgette's door. He felt about on all sides; the key was not in the lock, and the door was securely fastened.

"She didn't think of leaving the key outside!" thought Monsieur de Mardeille; "that was an oversight. Perhaps it was from modesty, so that she might not seem to be expecting me. However, I must let her know that I am here. I'll knock softly; she can't be asleep."

And he gave two very soft taps, then a louder one, muttering:

"She doesn't hear! Can she have gone to sleep already? It's very strange; there's not a sound anywhere in the house, and she ought to hear! Damn the odds! I must wake her up! If other people hear, it will be her own fault."

And he knocked louder, then louder still, and shouted through the keyhole:

"Little neighbor! it's I! open the door a minute; I left something in your room. Come, charming Georgette, you've teased me enough; you must let me in; I have some very interesting things to tell you. For heaven's sake! just long enough to say two words to you, and then I'll leave you."

His trouble and entreaties were wasted; she made no reply, and the door did not open. After spending nearly three-quarters of an hour on Georgette's landing, the discomfited gallant angrily pulled his cap over his eyes and left the entresol, bumping against the walls.

To augment his rage, when he was in the courtyard he heard roars of laughter from several windows; and he recognized Mademoiselle Arthémise's voice, saying in a very loud tone:

"Ah! that's well done! The scented dandy's sold again! The little one makes fools of her lovers; that reconciles me to her! Ha! ha! now's the time to sing:

"Ma chandelle est morte,
Je n'ai plus de feu;
Ouvre-moi ta porte,
Pour l'amour de Dieu!"^[F]

XIII

A BROOCH

Monsieur de Mardeille did not close his eyes that night. He was terribly vexed, and he awaited the morrow with extreme impatience, in order to have an explanation with the little shirtmaker, whom he proposed to reproach in no measured terms. He firmly believed himself to be in the right, because he maintained that in love one gives nothing without some equivalent.

At last the morning came; people began to stir in the house. Our dandy rose and looked at himself in the mirror. He found that he was horribly pale, that his eyes were red, and that he had a worn, jaded look. As he desired, before all else, to be handsome and fascinating, he passed more than an hour at his toilet, changing his cravat and waistcoat again and again; but he did not succeed in restoring his usual freshness of aspect. At last, weary of the struggle, he said to himself:

"A little pallor makes one more interesting; women like a melancholy air. That cruel girl will be touched by my evident suffering. Decidedly, it is much better for me to be pale; it gives me the advantage at the outset."

He betook himself to his little neighbor's apartment, crossing the courtyard as rapidly as possible to avoid the glances of the other tenants. This time the door was unlocked. Monsieur de Mardeille unceremoniously entered Georgette's room and found her already at work. She looked up at him with a sly smile, and said:

"Good-morning, monsieur! it's very good of you to come to see me. Pray sit down, and we will talk about the play."

But Monsieur de Mardeille did not sit down; he paced the floor excitedly, and rejoined in an angry tone:

"I didn't come here to talk about the play, mademoiselle!"

"Indeed? Very well, then we'll talk about something else."

"Mademoiselle—you sleep very soundly!"

"I? Oh! you are mistaken, monsieur; on the contrary, my sleep is very light; the slightest noise wakes me."

"The slightest noise? How did it happen, then, that you didn't hear the noise I made last night, when I knocked on your door for half an hour, and you did not deign to reply?"

"Last night? Why, I heard you distinctly, monsieur; much too distinctly, in fact!"

"Then, mademoiselle, why didn't you let me in?"

"Why? Because I didn't choose to; because I don't receive visits at midnight; because I considered the uproar you made at my door most unseemly!"

"Uproar? But if you had opened your door at once, I wouldn't have made any uproar!"

"True; but as I didn't choose to open it, you shouldn't have kept on knocking."

"Why, mademoiselle, it seems to me that I had the right to come to your room, that I might fairly expect to be admitted! When a woman accepts gifts from a man, it means that she consents—at all events, she shouldn't leave

him at the door when he comes to see her."

"The right! the right!" cried Georgette, rising, and casting such an angry glance at Monsieur de Mardeille that he was thoroughly abashed. "Let me tell you, monsieur, that you are most impertinent, and that I ought to turn you out of my room at once and forbid you ever to put your foot inside my door again. The right! What do you mean, monsieur? Is it because you have sent me a few paltry rags that you presume to speak to me in this tone? Understand, monsieur, that I did you much honor by receiving your superb gifts! If you had not wanted to go out with me, you wouldn't have given them to me, I presume. So that you did it much more to gratify your own vanity than to please me. And monsieur imagines that, because of those gifts, I will open my door to him at midnight! and perhaps give myself to him and esteem myself too happy to be his mistress!—Why, you are mad, monsieur! Here are your presents. I don't want them; you may take them back! Look, this will show you how much I care for them!"

As she spoke, Georgette ran to her closet, took down the gown, shawl, and bonnet, threw them on the floor, and kicked them toward Monsieur de Mardeille, who was horrified and dared not move.

Having done this, the girl returned to her chair by the window, which was open as usual, and resumed her work, paying no further heed to her neighbor, who stood in the same spot as motionless as a statue.

Several minutes passed thus. The ex-beau had had time to reflect. He began by picking up the gown, the shawl, and the bonnet, and laid them all carefully on a table; then he went to Georgette and stammered confusedly:

"Mademoiselle—I was wrong—I was very wrong—I admit it!"

"It's very fortunate that you realize it, monsieur!"

"I should not have believed—or rather, I should not have hoped— Certainly I do not attach any value to these gewgaws that I sent you; it wasn't on account of them that I knocked at your door last night; but I thought that you were touched by my passion for you, that you no longer doubted it—that was what led me to come here and knock last night, after the theatre. Forgive me, I beseech you, my dear neighbor; don't be angry with me; it would make me too unhappy."

"As you admit your wrongdoing," Georgette answered, with a smile, "I forgive you. Oh! I am not one who bears malice! I say at once what I have on my heart; then it's all over and I think no more about it."

The old beau took the girl's hand and respectfully put it to his lips. She withdrew it and pointed to a chair, saying:

"Now sit down, and let us talk about something else."

"Something else!" murmured Monsieur de Mardeille as he sat down. "When I am with you, it is hard for me to refrain from telling you of my love. Does it make you angry?"

"No; but have you forgotten what I said to you?"

"Faith! it's quite possible, my dear neighbor; what did you say to me on that subject?"

"I told you that I did not believe in any man's love until he had given me proofs of it."

Her neighbor frowned, and faltered:

"Ah! yes—to be sure—I remember now—proofs. But I don't feel quite sure what you mean by that."

"Oh! monsieur, I should consider that I insulted you if I explained my meaning any further!" retorted Georgette, satirically. "If you don't understand me, so much the worse for you!"

"Did you enjoy the play last night?" hastily inquired Monsieur de Mardeille, anxious to change the subject.

"Yes, monsieur, very much. I would go very often, if I had the means."

"But if someone takes you, it's the same thing, isn't it?"

"No, monsieur; it isn't the same thing to be able to give one's self pleasure when one chooses, as to take it only when it pleases others to offer it."

"At all events, my pretty neighbor, when it is your pleasure to go again, I shall be at your service and delighted to escort you."

"You are too kind, monsieur.—Did you notice that lady in pink who was in a box on the stage last night?"

"In a proscenium box, do you mean?"

"I don't know whether you call it a proscenium box, but the lady I mean had a sort of crown of flowers on her head—and she was very pretty, too."

"Oh! yes, I remember—a lovely blonde. That was Irma, one of the women most in vogue at this moment."

"Do you know her?"

"Oh! as one knows a great many of the women one meets at all the balls at the Casino, at all the first performances—in short, at all the functions to which one can gain admission by paying for it."

"Is she married?"

"Married? the deuce! never!—As if those creatures ever married! She's a kept woman, that's the whole story."

"Ah! she's a kept woman. At all events, she is kept handsomely. She had a magnificent diamond necklace and brooch. For they were diamonds, weren't they, monsieur?"

"They were—or, at all events, they looked like it; but they may have been false. Nowadays, they make false gems that resemble real ones so closely that it's very hard to distinguish them. They're quite as handsome; indeed, they are often more effective, on account of the way they're mounted."

"False diamonds! how horrible! I should never be willing to wear anything false, myself!"

Monsieur de Mardeille looked at his watch, then rose, and said:

"How the time flies with you, charming Georgette! But I have some business at my broker's, and I have only just time to go there. So, au revoir, my lovely neighbor! You are not angry any longer, are you?"

"No, monsieur, no; I have entirely forgotten the past."

The ex-beau bowed and left her, saying to himself:

"She has forgotten the past! Therefore she has entirely forgotten that I gave her a complete toilette. She looks upon that as such a trifling matter! And now she's beginning to talk about diamonds! Oh! that is going too far! The little one has extravagant ideas! I wonder if she would like me to keep her like Irma? It's incredible! a shirtmaker wanting diamonds! The deuce! I didn't expect to encounter so many obstacles with a grisette; it never happened to

me before! She talked with self-assurance! She's no fool, that's clear! And the worst of it is that, when she gets excited, her eyes have such fire and expression! She is enchanting! She's a little demon! But give her diamonds! never! never! I'd rather eat them!"

Several weeks passed. Monsieur de Mardeille continued his visits in the daytime to Georgette, who always had her windows open, whatever the weather. But he did not make the slightest progress in his love affair. When he tried to move nearer to the girl, she compelled him to remove his chair; if he tried to take her hand, she withdrew it; if he tried to place his hand on the little skirt, at which he gazed with covetous eyes, she pushed him away roughly, and exclaimed in her sternest tone:

"I won't have you touch my skirt; that is forbidden!"

Thereupon our gallant heaved profound sighs, to which she replied by laughing heartily, and by mischievous glances which made her prettier than ever; for, while confining her neighbor strictly within the limits of respect, Mademoiselle Georgette did not hesitate to employ all the little coquettish arts that make a man more enamored than ever and put the finishing touch to his distraction.

The result was that one day, on leaving Georgette, who had done nothing but walk about the room in her simple morning costume, Monsieur de Mardeille exclaimed:

"Well! I can't do anything else! I'll send her a little brooch—in diamonds—rose ones—something not too expensive; and yet it must be pretty; for if it isn't, I know her well enough to know that she is quite capable of making a fool of me again. Oh! these women! to think that I never spent a sou on them! And this little hussy has made me depart from my custom, and now I'm as big a fool as other men."

The next day, when he presented himself at his neighbor's door, Monsieur de Mardeille was amiable and lively and in high spirits; one would have taken him for a boy of twenty. Having taken a seat beside Georgette, he took a little pasteboard box from his pocket and handed it to her, saying:

"Allow me, my charming friend, to offer you this token, this proof, of my affection; and be assured that in offering it to you I do not consider that it gives me the slightest claim to your love; I desire to owe that to your heart alone."

"Good! that is very well said," replied Georgette, hastily opening the box, in which she found a little brooch, worth eight or nine hundred francs, and very effective.

"Oh! this is most gallant of you!" she cried. "Really, monsieur, you are coming on!"

"What's that? I am coming on?" thought Mardeille; "what does she mean by that? No matter! I won't ask any questions. This will touch her, and I am sure that to-morrow she will be the one to say: 'I expect you to-night.'"

"This is a lovely brooch," said Georgette.

"And you will deign to accept it?"

"Will I accept it? Most assuredly, monsieur, and I am very grateful to you."

"She is grateful for it; that's good!" said our seducer to himself; "the rest will go of itself. I won't commit the blunder of seeking payment now for my present; I'll go away, that will be more adroit.—I am obliged to leave you, my dear neighbor," he said, rising.

"Already, monsieur?"

"That word is very pleasant in your mouth!—Yes—I have some urgent business to attend to. I leave you so soon with the greatest regret, but to-morrow, I hope, I shall be more fortunate."

"I hope so, too, monsieur."

Mardeille bowed most respectfully to the young woman; without even taking her hand. He took his leave, enchanted with what he had done.

"I have taken the right way," he thought. "Women are stubborn, as a general rule; to refrain from asking them for anything is enough to induce them to grant you everything. The little one is mine now!"

XIV

COLINET'S SECOND VISIT

On the day following the gift of the brooch, Monsieur de Mardeille, buoyed up by the sweetest hopes, left his couch with this thought in his mind:

"I will make a careful toilet, but I won't go to see my young friend too early; I must let her wish for my coming. After breakfast I will go to my window, and I am sure that Georgette will beckon me to come to her. Yes, that is the more adroit way."

Monsieur de Mardeille breakfasted slowly; he enjoyed his coffee as, in anticipation, he enjoyed his coming triumph; at last, after glancing over several newspapers, he went to one of the windows looking on the courtyard, thinking that he had given her time enough to wish for his coming and that he would do well to show himself.

On opening his window he looked at once toward his little neighbor's, and saw a young man seated beside Georgette, holding both her hands and gazing at her most affectionately. Thereupon our gallant frowned, compressed his lips, and stared in dismay.

"Sapristi!" he exclaimed; "with a young man! She's with a young man, and she pretends to receive visits from no man but me! And this is her gratitude for my brooch! Ah! we'll see about this! I won't allow myself to be fooled in this way! I must find out who this young man is who holds both her hands, when I can hardly induce her to let me hold one."

The man whom he had discovered in his neighbor's apartment was young Colinet, whom we already know. His dress was almost exactly the same as he had worn on the occasion of his first visit to Georgette, except that his broadcloth trousers were replaced by linen ones, and that he carried a light switch instead of his stout stick. A much greater change had taken place on his face, however; in the intervening three months, his innocent, shy air had

given place to one more sedate and thoughtful; it was still frank and open, but the artless expression had disappeared.

"Oh! how glad I am to see you, Mamzelle Georgette!" said Colinet, taking the girl's hands.

"And I to see you, Colinet! It makes me very happy, I can tell you! And you say that everybody at home is well—my father and mother and sisters?"

"Yes, mamzelle, I left them all in good health; and here's a letter that Mamzelle Suzanne, your second sister, gave me for you."

"Oh! give it to me, give it to me quick, Colinet!"

Georgette eagerly seized the letter that the young man had brought her; she broke the seal and read it to herself inaudibly; the expression of her face betrayed her deep interest in its contents. While Georgette was reading, Colinet looked about, apparently making an inspection of the room.

"It's very nice here," he muttered; "much finer than it was in the other place."

Having finished reading the letter, Georgette put it in her bosom, then smiled anew at Colinet, who said:

"Will that letter bring you back to the province?"

"Not yet, Colinet."

"Do you still enjoy yourself more in Paris?"

"It is not that, my friend; but I came here for a certain purpose; and I shall not leave Paris until I have finished what I have begun."

"Ah! you're doing some work here, are you?"

"Yes, my friend."

"And you won't tell me what it is? Perhaps I could help you."

"No, you couldn't help me; and it's better that I shouldn't tell you now what I am trying to do; but you shall know some day; yes, I promise you that some day you shall know everything; and you won't blame me, Colinet; on the contrary, I am sure that you will approve of what I have done."

"Oh! Mamzelle Georgette, I shan't blame you; for I know you, I do, and I know that you ain't capable of doing anything wrong. But, dear me! your head's a little—what do they call it down home?—a little solid; and when you've made up your mind to do something, why, you've got to do it."

"Mayn't one have a strong will, as long as it doesn't lead one to do wrong?"

"Yes, yes! Oh! you can have anything; but you used to *thou* me, and now I'm sorry to find that you've stopped doing it."

Georgette blushed as she replied:

"That is true, Colinet; but it ought not to hurt your feelings—far from it—for I don't like you any the less on that account. But it seems to me that I ought not to speak to you so familiarly as I used to when we were children."

"If you like me just as much, I ought not to complain; but I love you more and more every day, Georgette."

"Oh! so much the better! that's just what I want! Above all things, don't you ever change; for I count on your love, Colinet!"

"Oh! Mamzelle Georgette, can a man ever change when he loves you?"

"Kiss me, Colinet."

"With all my heart!"

The opposite neighbor did not see the kiss, because all this had taken place before he went to the window.

"What about that Monsieur Dupont I saw in your room so often when I was here before?" queried Colinet; "do you still see him?"

"No, Colinet, I don't see Monsieur Dupont any more."

The young man smiled. He seemed delighted to hear that; but his brow grew dark when Georgette added:

"No, I never see him now, but I do see another man."

"Ah! you have made the acquaintance of another man?"

"Yes, a very stylish gentleman who lives in this house; he comes to see me very often."

"Very often?"

"You'll probably see him very soon. Then, as I shall tell him, which is perfectly true, that you are an old playfellow of mine, don't forget that I am supposed to be a Norman."

"A Norman! But that isn't true; you are from Toul, in Lorraine."

"I know that very well, Colinet; but that is just what this gentleman mustn't find out; and, above all things, don't mention my parents' name before him—remember that."

"Why on earth do you make all this mystery with this man? You haven't ever done anything wrong, I know; so why do you conceal your family name, mamzelle?"

"You told me that you had confidence in me, Colinet."

"To be sure—I have it still."

"In that case, my friend, don't ask me questions that I can't answer now. I have told you that it will all be explained some day, and that ought to be enough for you."

"That's true, mamzelle; I was wrong to ask you questions; I won't say any more about it.—So you're a Norman, are you?"

"Yes; from a little village near Rouen."

"What's the name of the village?"

"The name? I haven't an idea; what difference does it make? any name will do. That man doesn't know all the suburbs of Rouen. Call it Belair—there are Belairs in every province."

"All right; and I'm a Norman, too, I suppose?"

"Of course."

"And may I still raise calves?"

"Why not? cattle are raised everywhere. Hush! I hear my neighbor coming upstairs."

Monsieur de Mardeille had crossed the courtyard like a rocket; he ran up the stairs without stopping for breath, entered Georgette's room like a shot out of a catapult, and, without even acknowledging the salutation of Colinet, who rose as he entered, he took his stand in front of the young woman and exclaimed in a hoarse voice:

"It is I, mademoiselle!"

"So I see, monsieur," replied Georgette, with a smile.

"You didn't expect me—that is to say, not at this moment, I fancy."

"Why not, pray, monsieur? I never expect you. You come when you please; neighbors don't stand on ceremony."

"Yes—but I thought—I didn't expect to find you with company, as you said you never received anybody but me."

The girl's face became grave and stern; she looked at Monsieur de Mardeille with a wrathful expression, exclaiming:

"Let me tell you, monsieur, that I consider that what you have just said is in the worst possible taste. If, up to the present time, it has suited me to receive no other visits than yours, you may be perfectly sure that it hasn't been from any desire to be agreeable to you."

"Mademoiselle, I——"

"Upon my word, to hear you, anyone would think that I am dependent on you, that you have some claim over me! You make me blush for you, monsieur!"

The ex-beau turned as red as a gobbler; he shuffled his feet about and tore his gloves, but did not know what to reply.

"To-day," continued Georgette, "my old playfellow, the friend of my childhood, who has just come from our province to bring me news of my relatives, has called on me. He will always be welcome in my home. I was about to introduce him to you, monsieur, when you began to say such nonsensical things! You were not polite enough to acknowledge the bow my friend Colinet gave you when you came in. You know so well what is customary and proper, monsieur, that you will allow me to believe that you are not in your ordinary frame of mind this morning, and that something has happened to upset you.—Sit down again, Colinet, my friend."

Monsieur de Mardeille did not know where he was; Georgette's haughty glance had rooted him to the floor. At last, he turned to Colinet and made him a low bow; then he concluded to take a chair, muttering, as he did so:

"Yes, it is true, I have a sick headache this morning, a very bad one; it makes me feel wretched."

"All right! tell us that, and we will excuse you for being in an ill humor.—Colinet, my friend, are you in Paris for long?"

"Oh! no, Mamzelle Georgette; I can only stay one day; I must go back to-morrow afternoon."

The neighbor's face became amiable once more; he straightened himself up in his chair.

"What makes you in such a hurry, Colinet?"

"I have several places to stop at on my way back—to collect the price of cattle we've sold."

"Monsieur is a cattle raiser?" Mardeille inquired.

"Yes, monsieur; I deal in horned cattle mostly, because there's always a market for them."

"Yes, yes, it's an excellent business," said Monsieur de Mardeille.—Then he leaned toward Georgette and said to her, almost timidly:

"You're not wearing your brooch?"

"Well, I should think not—with my jacket!" laughed Georgette. "Is it customary to put on a brooch so early in the morning?"

"Have you got a chicken to roast?"^[G] queried Colinet. "I'll help you, if you want; I know all about chickens."

Georgette laughed aloud, and Monsieur de Mardeille tried to do the same; but his laughter was not sincere.

"We're not talking about chickens, my dear Colinet, nor of the kind of *broche* you have in mind," said the young shirtmaker, when her merriment had somewhat abated. "Oh! I don't live so magnificently as that; my repasts are more modest. Still, my friend, if you will breakfast with me to-morrow, before you go away, I will have a sausage and a meat pie; with those and a good appetite, one can breakfast perfectly— isn't that so?"

"To be sure, mamzelle; I won't fail to be here."

"If Monsieur de Mardeille would like to join us, and doesn't consider our breakfast unworthy of him, he would give us great pleasure by accepting my invitation."

Our dandy's face became radiant. He bowed and said:

"Unworthy of me! A repast over which you preside! Why, on the contrary, it will seem delicious to me, and I accept your kind invitation with all my heart. But I will ask your permission to bring a few bottles of wine from my cellar; that will do no harm."

"Oh! bring whatever you choose; we are not proud; we accept whatever anyone offers us."

"In that case, my charming neighbor, it's a bargain; I will breakfast with you to-morrow. Meanwhile, I will leave you, for you may have a thousand messages to give monsieur for your relations and friends, commissions to intrust to him, and I should be very sorry to incommode you. Au revoir, my dear neighbor!—Bonjour, monsieur, until to-morrow!—At what hour do you breakfast, neighbor?"

"At ten o'clock, monsieur."

"Very good; I will be on time."

And the ex-beau retired, as well pleased as he had been furious when he arrived; a few words from Georgette had sufficed to effect this revolution in his humor; to be sure, she had a way of saying them which precluded the possibility of a reply.

After Monsieur de Mardeille had gone, Colinet seemed to be reflecting profoundly, and Georgette asked him:

"What are you thinking about, my friend?"

"About that gentleman who was here just now. How he spoke to you when he came in!"

"And you heard how I answered him."

"Oh! that did my heart good! Is that old beau making love to you?"

"Yes; but don't be alarmed, Colinet; he's no more dangerous to me than Monsieur Dupont was."

"I believe you, as you say so. But what made you ask him to breakfast with us to-morrow? I should have liked it better to be with you alone."

"And so should I, my friend; but I did what I thought it best to do, for I don't want to break with my neighbor yet, and that is what would have happened if I hadn't invited him. I am going to answer my sister Suzanne's letter now, and then write to Aimée. I'll give you the letters to-morrow."

"Then, I'll go out and do some errands; for you know how it is in the country: when anyone comes to Paris, people try to see who can give him the most errands to do. I promised to dine with some friends; so I shan't see you again till to-morrow."

"Come early, then, so that we can have time to talk a little before breakfast."

"Yes, Mamzelle Georgette. Oh! what a pity that we two aren't going to breakfast all alone together!"

"A time will come, Colinet, when we two shall often be alone; but perhaps you won't be so anxious for it then."

"Ah! Georgette! you don't think that!"

The girl's only reply was to hold out her hand to her old playfellow. He squeezed it, then covered it with kisses; and Georgette was obliged to remind him of all his commissions before he could make up his mind to leave her.

XV

A DAINY BREAKFAST

At nine o'clock the following morning, Frontin carried to Georgette's apartment a *terrine* de foie gras, a small Reims ham, cakes, some superb fruit, bordeaux, madeira, and champagne. The valet, remembering the tone in which the shirtmaker had spoken to him, was as polite to her now as he had formerly been impertinent.

Georgette received all these supplies with no indication of surprise, whereas Colinet, who had already arrived at his compatriot's rooms, opened his eyes in amazement and exclaimed:

"What! are we going to eat all that? Why, what a feast, Mamzelle Georgette! what a feast! That gentleman must be head over heels in love with you to send you so many good things!"

"Do you think that that proves his love, Colinet?"

"Well! it must prove something, anyway!"

"Yes, it proves that he would like to seduce me; for there are women who allow themselves to be seduced through their appetite."

"Oh, yes! there are lots of 'em. Why, at home, there's Manette, who went into the woods with Blaise for a plum tart! But you ain't one of that kind, Georgette!"

"Not I! I will eat all these things, and my neighbor won't be any further ahead. You won't forget to give my sisters the letters I gave you, will you, Colinet?"

"I should think not! Do I ever forget anything you tell me? Especially as Suzanne and Aimée are always terribly impatient to get your letters."

"I can believe it. Poor sisters!"

"Have you told them that you're coming home soon?"

"Not yet, my friend, not yet."

"Are you going to stay in Paris much longer?"

"Mon Dieu! I haven't any idea."

"And your mother, dear Maman Granery! Oh! she longs so for you!"

"My mother! Oh! Colinet, please tell her that I love her as dearly as ever, that she will never have to blush for me, and that I— But, hush! I hear Monsieur de Mardeille."

The neighbor from the first floor entered the room, all smiles and amiability and merriment. He presented his respects to Georgette and slapped Colinet familiarly on the shoulder.

"Really, monsieur, you are very kind to us," said Georgette; "you have sent us so many things! My poor little pie won't dare to appear beside your gifts!"

"You are jesting, my dear neighbor! We will punish your pie with the rest—eh, Monsieur Colinet?"

"Yes, monsieur, I ask nothing better."

"In that case, messieurs, let us begin."

They took their seats at a table which was not elegantly furnished, but was exquisitely neat. Flowers took the place of the wonderful *surtouts* which adorn the tables of the wealthy; and women have the art of arranging flowers with so much taste, that they always achieve lovely decorative effects with them. And then, too, Georgette did the honors of the table without embarrassment or awkwardness; and lastly, she still wore her little silk petticoat and her jacket, which made her altogether fascinating.

"You will excuse me, monsieur, for not dressing for the occasion," she said to her neighbor; "but I am more comfortable this way; and then I should have been afraid of spoiling my beautiful gown."

"You are enchanting in this costume, my little neighbor; I should have been terribly distressed if you had made your toilet.—Don't you agree with me, Monsieur Colinet? don't you think that Mademoiselle Georgette is very seductive in this charming *négligé*?"

Colinet was busy eating; however, he replied, shaking his head:

"I am used to seeing mamzelle like this! At home, we never dress up, except for the church festivals."

"Where is your home, Monsieur Colinet?"

The young man glanced at Georgette, who guessed that he had forgotten the name she had told him; so she replied for him:

"Belair, monsieur."

"Belair! I don't know of any town of that name in Normandie."

"It isn't a town; it's a village."

"Oh! if it's only a village, that makes a difference. Drink, Monsieur Colinet. Are you fond of wine?"

"Yes, monsieur; especially when it's as good as this."

"And then, you don't drink much of anything but cider in your province, I suppose?"

"Cider?"—And Colinet looked surprised; but Georgette kicked him, under the table, saying:

"Why, yes! cider, of course. Cider is much more common at home—in Normandie—than wine. So I advise you not to drink too much of this, Colinet, for it would soon make you tipsy!"

"Oh! no, you need have no fear," rejoined Monsieur de Mardeille; "natural wines never do any harm."

"Well! that's his business. But if you make him tipsy, he won't be able to start for home to-day."

This suggestion from Georgette checked the ex-dandy, who was about to fill the young man's glass, but reflected that it would be very foolish to prevent the old playfellow from going away from Paris.

The breakfast lasted a long while; Colinet succeeded in retaining his reason, while doing honor to the neighbor's wines. Georgette was careful to change the subject when Monsieur de Mardeille mentioned Normandie. When the clock struck one, the latter rose and said:

"I must go to the Bourse."

"And I," said Colinet, "must think about starting for home."

"A pleasant journey, Monsieur Colinet! We shall meet again, I hope."

"Oh, yes!" said Georgette; "you will certainly see him again."

When Monsieur de Mardeille had gone, Colinet said, with a sigh:

"He's luckier than I am, that man is; for he stays with you, and I am going to leave you again!"

"No, Colinet, he isn't luckier than you, for I love you, and I shall never have either love or friendship for that man."

"Ah! if that's so, you're right, I am luckier than he is! His breakfast was mighty good! But, for all that, I'd rather have nothing but potatoes, with nobody but you!"

"So would I, my friend."

"Then you ought not to have invited him!"

"Are you going to begin your questions again, Colinet?"

"Oh! no, no! forgive me; I'm done."

"Then kiss me and go; and kiss my father and mother and sisters for me."

"Oh! never you fear; I won't fail."

Colinet kissed Georgette and went away, weeping as bitterly as on the previous occasion.

XVI

TWELVE THOUSAND FRANCS

About five o'clock in the afternoon, Monsieur de Mardeille returned to Georgette's room, having seen her sitting at the window, alone.

"Well, so your young compatriot has gone?" he said, taking a seat by her side.

"Yes, monsieur, a long while ago; almost as soon as you went."

"That young man seems to be very fond of you."

"Yes; he's a true friend."

"But isn't he your lover?"

"I have told you, monsieur, that I have no lover; and I can add, without lying, that I have never had one."

"I believe you, my dear neighbor, I believe you; although it's a rare thing to find in Paris a girl of twenty—for you are twenty, are you not?"

"And six months, monsieur."

"And six months! that makes it all the more remarkable! A girl who is virtuous and always has been. Oh! that is very pretty! But, after all, I suppose that you do not intend to retain your—heart always?"

"I don't know, monsieur; one cannot tell what may happen."

"Bravo! very well answered!"

And Monsieur de Mardeille moved his chair nearer to Georgette's, and murmured:

"And suppose circumstances should bring you in contact with a man who adores you, whose happiness consists in making you happy,—like myself, for instance,—then would you yield to him?"

"But women are so weak!"

"Ah! fascinating girl, I am the happiest of men! you fill my cup to the brim!"

As he spoke, Monsieur de Mardeille extended his hand toward the little black petticoat; but Georgette quickly moved her chair away and struck him a smart blow on the fingers, saying in a very serious tone:

"Well! monsieur, what sort of manners are these? I have told you before that I did not like that!"

The ex-beau stamped on the floor in a rage, crying:

"Sapristi! mademoiselle, so you propose to make a fool of me to the end! You give me reason to hope that you will cease to be cruel, and then you forbid me the slightest liberty! What does it all mean? Where do we stand? I would like very much to know what to expect."

"I am not making a fool of you, monsieur; but what led you to think that I was about to yield to you already?"

"Already! *already* is very pretty, on my word! When I have been making love to mademoiselle more than two months! when I have made great sacrifices for her! I am not talking about the dress—that was a trifle; but you seemed to want a diamond brooch, and I sent it to you instantly. That was no trifle, allow me to tell you; and when a woman accepts such presents——"

"She immediately becomes the mistress of the man who gives them; is that it, monsieur?"

"Faith, yes! at least, that's the general rule."

"Well, monsieur, it isn't according to my ideas!"

"In that case, mademoiselle, what are your ideas, or rather your demands? for, really, I don't understand you."

"Look you, Monsieur de Mardeille, do you wish me to explain myself frankly? do you wish me to tell you what I have resolved upon?"

"Oh, yes! pray explain yourself! that will give me great pleasure! Speak! I am impatient to hear you."

"Listen to me, then, monsieur. If I, being touched and flattered by your present of a brooch, should yield to you to-day, as you claim that I ought to do, what would happen, monsieur? This: that when your love, or rather your caprice, was once satisfied—for, with most men of your stamp, this ardent love is only a caprice——"

"Oh! can you believe——"

"Yes, monsieur, yes, I do believe it; indeed, I haven't the least doubt of it; but let me finish, I beg.—Well! if I were weak enough, foolish enough—let us not mince words—to cease to resist, then, in a month, or two months, say three months, if you choose, you would have had enough of your little grisette; she would bore you, and you would cease to see her; more than that, you would avoid her as zealously as you now seek her. So the girl is abandoned by the man to whom she sacrificed everything, whose oaths she believed! And that man, after making her unaccustomed to work by a life of idleness and dissipation, leaves her, in most cases, with no resource against destitution! But even that is not all! If the girl alone were unhappy, that would be much, no doubt, but still she alone would be punished for her fault. It is not always so. Often, too often, a wretched child is born of that passing connection. Then the poor girl, who can hardly support herself by her labor, has no means of supporting her child! Isn't that horrible? Ought not one to shrink in dismay from such a terrible future?"

"Oh! mademoiselle, you are imagining chimeras! You are romancing!"

"No, monsieur, I am not romancing; I am simply stating what is seen, what happens every day! And you yourself, monsieur, who claim that I am inventing chimeras, be frank, if such a thing is possible, and tell me if you never seduced and then abandoned a girl in the situation I have just sketched? Think over your life, your love affairs, your numerous conquests, and tell me, monsieur, if you are quite sure that such a thing never happened to you?"

Monsieur de Mardeille changed color; he rose, with a sullen expression on his face, and paced the floor, muttering:

"Mon Dieu! mademoiselle, my numerous conquests, my adventures, aren't in question here. I can't go over everything that has happened to me; it would take too long. Besides, I don't remember."

"Say, rather, that you don't choose to remember."

"In heaven's name, let us drop this and return to you. According to what you have said, if I understand you, you will not yield to anyone——"

"Until he has placed me in such a position that I need have no fear of poverty, and that I can support and educate my child—if I should have one. Yes, monsieur, that is my firm and irrevocable resolution, and I promise you that I shall not change."

The dandified neighbor made a horrible grimace, and continued to pace the floor, mumbling:

"The devil! the devil! you look ahead, mademoiselle; you take your precautions."

"Is that forbidden, monsieur?"

"No; but it's very uncommon—luckily. For you, love, sentiment, a man's attractions—everything that ordinarily captivates a young girl glides over your heart without stirring it. Sensibility is not your strong point."

"Do you think so? And are you yourself so very sensitive, monsieur?"

"I am—to your charms, most assuredly. But my love does not touch you; you are very cruel to me."

"I am less stupid than other women, that's all!"

"However, mademoiselle, if one must settle a fortune on you in order to obtain your favors, you must understand that everybody can't afford to indulge in such a passion."

"A fortune! Oh! no, monsieur, I am not so ambitious as all that; a fortune is not what I ask, but simply the means to bring up the child that is so often the result of a woman's fault."

"Ah! you have in mind only the result! But suppose there isn't any result?"

"Why, then it will be for the poor girl herself, who will at least be secure against want."

"Ah! it will be for the girl, if it isn't needed for the child! Very good! You think of everything! You would make an excellent cashier for a broker!"

"Why, I should not object to that. As a general rule, men earn more with the pen than women do with the needle."

"That is why women don't look to their needle to satisfy their coquetry."

"They have no choice, since they are forced to it."

"Nobody forces them to be coquettes."

"But you would be very sorry if they were not!"

Monsieur de Mardeille continued to pace the floor, humming between his teeth:

"When one knows how to love and please, what other boon can one desire?"

No, no! that song isn't appropriate!—

'A bandage covers the eyes of the god that makes men love!'

That is nearer the truth.—

'Come, lady fair, I await thee, I await thee, I await thee!'

Georgette went on with her work, as if he were not there. When he was tired of singing, he went to the shirtmaker's side and said to her abruptly:

"What ought it to cost for a child's porridge?"

Georgette replied, with a smile:

"Seek and ye shall find."

"Ah! now you are quoting the Gospel at me! But Saint Peter was scoffing at us when he said that; for there's one thing that I have constantly sought and have never found. I won't tell you what it is, out of respect for your sex, but any man will guess my meaning. But I return to what I asked you just now. It seems to me that with two or three thousand francs one ought to be able to provide porridge in large quantities and for a long time!"

"Do you expect a child to live on nothing but porridge?"

"That or something like it. A child eats so little!"

"But food isn't the only thing it needs. When it grows up, its education must be attended to, mustn't it? and then, it must be apprenticed and taught a trade. It must know how to earn its living, so that it can help its mother when the time comes."

"Oh! tra la la! there's no reason why you shouldn't go on! Why don't you ask me at once to buy a substitute for him if it's a boy, or to give her a dowry if it's a girl?"

"Why, that would be no more than right!"

"Didn't I tell you, mademoiselle, that you demanded a fortune?"

"No, monsieur, you exaggerate. For it seems to me—yes, let us suppose that there's a boy to be brought up—I am inclined to think that with twelve thousand francs it might be done."

"Twelve thousand francs!"—And Monsieur de Mardeille jumped so high that his head nearly struck the ceiling.—"Twelve thousand francs!" he repeated. "Do you think that that is nothing, mademoiselle?"

"I think that it is no more than is necessary to make a child into a man. Why, by putting that sum in the savings bank at once, one would have a little income, which would keep increasing. Oh! you may be sure, monsieur, that the mother would keep nothing for herself; but she would at least be at ease with respect to her child's future."

"And as she would use none of that little income for herself, she would still have to be supported, I suppose?"

"Oh! no, monsieur! That sum, once given, would be the whole; she would accept nothing more."

The elderly beau began once more to stride back and forth, ejaculating from time to time:

"The world is getting to be a curious place; it's a good school; one learns something every day!—But women are becoming sharper and sharper! We're nothing but children beside them! Twelve thousand francs! Why, not long ago, a man might have had more than a hundred mistresses with that money! I am not speaking for myself, for God knows I never ruined myself for women! I always triumphed without untying my purse strings. I prefer that way; at all events, I was sure that I was loved on my own account. They didn't offer to break the bargain!"

"Do you know, monsieur, that these reflections of yours are not very polite!" said Georgette, annoyed by his soliloquies.

"Why, mademoiselle, it seems to me that I might at least be permitted to complain!"

"No, monsieur, you may not. You criticise my conduct! But if I choose, monsieur, I should have to say but a word to make you blush for yours; to force you to lower your crest before me and ask my pardon for all your impertinence."

Monsieur de Mardeille stared at her and stammered:

"I don't understand a word of what you say, mademoiselle. If you would explain yourself a little more clearly——"

"It doesn't suit me to do so at this moment; but, never fear, you won't lose anything by waiting."

The neighbor took his hat to go, saying to himself:

"I won't lose anything? That's a question. I am very much afraid I shall have nothing to show for my brooch. If I dared, I'd ask her to give it back; but I don't dare, especially as I have an idea that she wouldn't do it. This little vixen holds me in awe; she has such a way of speaking, such a decided tone! What an idiot I have been! This will teach me to make sacrifices for women!"

He turned to Georgette, and with a curt nod to her left the room, infinitely less radiant than he had been in the morning, and muttering between his teeth:

"Twelve thousand francs! a little shirtmaker! What are we coming to? Great God! what are we coming to?"

XVII

A PARCEL

For a week following this interview, the tenant of the first floor front was in an unapproachable humor. He went in and out at all hours of the day, scolded his servant, ate hardly anything, slept badly, and did not once go to the

windows looking on the courtyard. One day Frontin attempted to speak of the young tenant of the entresol; but his master abruptly interposed, saying:

"If you so much as refer to the shirtmaker, if you venture to repeat a single word relating to her, I'll put you out of doors with a kick—you know where!"

But at the end of the week, Monsieur de Mardeille, alarmed by his loss of appetite and his inability to sleep, and observing in dismay that his rosy, smiling face was assuming the semblance of a baked apple, that his brow was becoming wrinkled and his cheeks sunken, and that, if that sort of thing continued, he would soon appear at least as old as he really was, said to himself:

"Things can't go on like this! I try to divert my thoughts, and I can't do it! I pay court to other women, they welcome me with open arms, yet I don't go back to them! The image of that little Georgette is always before my eyes! I see her going back and forth in her chamber, in her jacket and short skirt. Her voluptuous shape turns my head! Decidedly I am mad over that girl. And after all, I should be a great fool to pine away with longing, when it is in my power to be that girl's happy lover! I know what it will cost me. But, still, twelve thousand francs won't ruin me; especially as she said in so many words that she would not ask for anything more after that. And there are women who ask all the time. You don't give them so much at one time, but it amounts to the same thing, indeed it costs more in the end!"

While making these reflections, Monsieur de Mardeille walked about the room, and finally said to Frontin:

"Frontin, is it long since you met our little neighbor?"

The valet, recalling his master's prohibition, stared at him in amazement, and then replied:

"Madame Picotée? No; I met her in the courtyard no longer ago than this morning."

"What's that? who said anything about Madame Picotée, you idiot? Didn't I say our little neighbor? What do you suppose I care for that old party? I am talking about the girl on the entresol, the charming Georgette."

When he heard the pretty shirtmaker's name, Frontin said to himself:

"This is a test; monsieur forbade me to speak of her; he is trying to test me."

Whereupon he put a finger to his lip and turned to his master, shaking his head and laughing, as if to say:

"Not such a fool as you think!"

And Monsieur de Mardeille, thoroughly out of patience, shook his servant's arm, crying:

"Will you answer me, you clown?"

"You forbade me to mention the young girl on the entresol, monsieur."

"I retract that order, numskull!"

"Oh! I couldn't guess that!"

"I want you to mention her now, and to tell me everything you know about her. And you must know something, for you're always in the concierge's lodge."

"Bless me! monsieur, it's the same old story: Monsieur Bistelle keeps sending Mamzelle Georgette bouquets and billets-doux, begging her to receive him; but, *nisco!* she won't receive him, and she sends back his billets-doux."

"Really? Georgette refuses to receive that fellow? That's good! She received me; and my neighbor is rich and must have made her handsome offers! So she gave me the preference; therefore she must have a penchant for me! She resists me only because she's got that wretched notion of dread of possible results in her head. But I am preferred; therefore she loves me; it's just the same thing. Is that all you know, Frontin?"

"Oh! the gentleman—the old bachelor, Monsieur Renardin, has been trying to send something else to our little neighbor. He ordered a superb Savoy biscuit. I don't know how Mademoiselle Arthémise found out about it, but she did. So then she did sentry duty in the concierge's lodge, and stopped the pastry cook's boy as he passed, got possession of the Savoy biscuit, hollowed it out, and put it on her head, so that she looked like a Turk. She went all over the house with the biscuit on her head, and waited on her master at dinner that way. He happened to have company, too!"

"That was well done! Think of that man flattering himself that he could seduce her with biscuits! What a jackass!"

Monsieur de Mardeille went to the window and raised the curtain. Georgette was in her usual place, and seemed to him even more seductive than ever. He feared that she might be offended with him; however, he could not resist the desire to open the window and seat himself at it; then he watched for a glance from her. It was not long before she raised her eyes in his direction; whereupon he made her a low bow, to which she replied by a most affable smile. He was enchanted, radiant; he passed an hour at the window; and Georgette looked at him and smiled several times.

"She isn't angry; she will receive me kindly—I saw that in her eyes," he said to himself. "Yes, I can call on her without fear. True; but if I don't follow out her suggestion, I shall not make any progress."

The day passed, and Monsieur de Mardeille had been unable to decide what course to pursue. He went to his desk several times, looked through his cashbox, counted the banknotes, gazed at them with a sigh, then restored them to their place. Love and avarice were fighting a battle to the death in his heart, and his long-standing habits were being subjected to a cruel shock.

The next day he was still wavering, hesitating, unable to decide upon any plan, when Frontin suddenly came to him and said:

"Do come and look out of the window, monsieur; Mamzelle Georgette is in the courtyard, pumping; if you could see how gracefully she pumps!"

"Yes, yes, let's see that!"

Our lover hastened to take his place at a window that overlooked the pump. Georgette was there, in the little petticoat that clung about her hips; and the exercise of pumping developed all her good points most happily. Did the girl suspect it? Probably, for she seemed to take pleasure in what is to most people tiresome labor.

Monsieur de Mardeille, having gazed for several minutes at the animated picture before him, hurried to his cashbox and took out a bundle of banknotes. His hesitation was at an end; he stuffed them hastily into a wallet, which he put in his pocket; then, making a rapid toilet, he left his room and betook himself to Georgette's apartment, saying to himself, like Cæsar as he passed the Rubicon: "*Alea jacta est!*"

The young shirtmaker had hardly time enough to leave the pump, reach her room, and resume her work, ere she saw Monsieur de Mardeille enter, eager, agitated, and throbbing with hope. He rushed toward Georgette, took a seat near her, and said:

"My dear little neighbor, I have come to ask your pardon——"

"My pardon! Why, I have no recollection that you have offended me, monsieur."

"Oh! yes, yes! The last time that I was here I said things to you that I shouldn't have said."

"If you did, monsieur, I have forgotten them."

"Ah! that is well done! how amiable of you! But I could not live away from you, charming Georgette; I was too unhappy!"

"Really?"

"It is so true, that to prove my love I have decided to submit to every sacrifice—which I never did before for any woman. But what would one not do to touch that bewitching petticoat, which always flies when I try to catch it! See, fascinating girl; take this wallet; it contains twelve thousand francs in banknotes! Will this put an end to your rigorous treatment of me?"

Georgette's cheeks flushed; a gleam of joy, of triumph, shone in her eyes; she took the portfolio, looked at it without opening it, and said in an uncertain voice:

"As you have done this, I must needs yield to you. But I ask you for a respite of one more day. I want to think of my family to-day, to recall my childish memories; but to-morrow, oh! to-morrow, you will no longer find me cruel!"

"I cannot refuse anything to her who promises me perfect bliss! So to-morrow you will not be wild and shy any more—you will let me touch that little villain of a skirt that puts my heart in a flutter?"

"Oh! I promise you that you shall touch it all you choose to-morrow, and that I shall not object!"

"Enough, enough, my divinity! I do not care to hear any more, and I leave you until to-morrow; for if I should stay with you, I would not answer for my self-restraint. Until to-morrow! We will breakfast together, and your windows will be closed, won't they?"

"They will be, you will see."

Monsieur de Mardeille took his leave; he was in raptures, and said to himself:

"She put me off till to-morrow. I have an idea that, before yielding to me, she wanted to know by count if there really was the amount I mentioned in the wallet. She's a cautious damsel; she won't allow herself to be caught very easily! But what difference does it make to me? She will find that I haven't deceived her; and this time she will keep her promise, I am sure."

An afternoon and evening are interminable when the next day is to witness the fulfilment of all one's hopes. Monsieur de Mardeille did what he could to kill the time: he called on some friends, dined at a restaurant, looked in at several theatres, went home very late, went to bed, and fell asleep at last, dreaming of Georgette.

The so ardently desired day broke at last. Our gallant awoke rather late, and rang for Frontin, who came in on tiptoe.

"What time is it, Frontin?"

"Nearly ten o'clock, monsieur."

"What! you let me sleep so late as this without waking me?"

"Wake monsieur! He did not tell me to, and I should never think of taking the liberty!"

"No matter! prepare everything for my toilet. You must curl my hair, and take pains with it; I want to be very handsome this morning."

"Oh! monsieur always is that!"

"Not bad, for a numskull!"

"I mean that when a man is rich he is always handsome."

"You are talking nonsense now. By the way, Frontin, look out of the dining-room window and tell me if my little neighbor Georgette is at her window."

Frontin obeyed; in a moment he returned and said:

"It's very extraordinary, monsieur; all the windows are closed in Mamzelle Georgette's rooms, and usually they're all wide open!"

"Closed!" repeated Monsieur de Mardeille, with a smile. "Oh! I remember; that's what I asked her to do, yesterday; that proves that she is expecting me. Stupid of me to sleep so late!—Come, Frontin, be quick about my hair."

The servant dressed his master's hair in haste. When he had put the finishing touches to it, Monsieur de Mardeille said to him:

"Now, go to the sideboard and get some madeira, bordeaux, and champagne, which you will carry to my little neighbor, and tell her that I am at your heels. I will be at her room in five minutes."

Frontin disappeared; but he returned before his master had finished dressing; he had two bottles under his arms and the third in his hand, and his face wore a more inane expression than usual.

"How is this, imbecile? Haven't you done yet what I told you? Why don't you carry those bottles to Georgette's?" shouted Monsieur de Mardeille.

"I beg your pardon, monsieur; I've been there, but I couldn't find anyone. That's why I've come back with my bottles."

"Couldn't find anyone! She has gone out to buy something, no doubt.—Couldn't you wait on her landing a minute?"

"That is what I thought of doing at first, monsieur; but it was just as well I didn't, for it seems that I should have wasted my time."

"Wasted your time? What do you mean? Come, come! explain yourself!"

"When I was coming back, monsieur, I met the concierge.—'Has Mamzelle Georgette gone out already?' I said. 'Do you know whether she'll be back soon?'—At that he began to laugh, and he said: 'Pardi! if you wait for her, you'll waste your time; she went away last night.'"

"Went away last night? Nonsense! you don't know what you're saying; you misunderstood! Went away! where did she go?"

"That's what I asked, monsieur. It seems that the girl has moved. She paid the concierge last night; she sent for an upholsterer, and sold him all her furniture; then she took a cab, and off she went without saying where she was going."

Monsieur de Mardeille turned green, red, and ash-colored in turn.

"A glass of water, Frontin! a glass of water!" he stammered, dropping on a chair. "I think I am going to faint."

The servant hastily gave his master a glass of water, saying:

"Was monsieur so very much in love with our little neighbor?"

At that, Monsieur de Mardeille threw the water in Frontin's face.

"Hold your tongue, you brute! I am robbed, that's what I am! Fetch the concierge; I must speak to him."

"He has something for you from Mamzelle Georgette, monsieur; for he said to me: 'Is your master awake? I've got something to give him in person from this young woman, who gave me the parcel before she went away.'"

"And you didn't tell me that, you idiot! Go, run, and tell him to come up instantly!"

"Hark! monsieur, someone's ringing; that must be him. I'll go and let him in."

The old beau was still wavering between hope and fear.

"This package—why, she must have returned me my banknotes," he thought. "She has probably reflected, and concluded to remain virtuous. If that's how it is, I must make the best of it."

The concierge entered his tenant's apartment, bringing a rather large parcel, carefully wrapped in paper; he carried it on his outstretched arms, as if he were delivering the keys of a city on a salver, and handed it to Monsieur de Mardeille, who looked at it, scrutinized it, and at once said to himself:

"I didn't give her enough banknotes to make so large a parcel as this!"

"This is what the young woman on the entresol told me to give you, monsieur, when she went away."

"Went away! But why did you let the girl go away? Did you give her notice to quit?"

"No, monsieur; but she paid in full and one quarter ahead, so I couldn't prevent her from going, especially as she seemed in a great hurry."

"And you didn't ask her where she was going?"

"I beg your pardon; she told me that she was going back to her province, but that she should come to Paris again in a week."

"And she didn't leave you her address?"

"No, monsieur; but she left me this little note for you."

"Give it to me! you should have begun with that! Leave me now.—You go, too, Frontin."

The concierge and the valet left the room together, agreeing that it was too bad that he had not opened the parcel in their presence.

"I should have liked to know what it was the little shirtmaker sent him," said the concierge.

"You had it in your hands; couldn't you feel what there was inside the paper?"

"Faith, no!"

"Was it hard?"

"No; it was soft."

"Then it's probably a cheese that she had sent to her from her province."

When he was alone, Monsieur de Mardeille lost no time in opening the parcel; it contained the little black petticoat that Georgette usually wore.

"Her petticoat! She sends me her petticoat!" cried Monsieur de Mardeille. "What bitter mockery!"

Then he unsealed the letter and read these words:

"I told you that to-day you would be able to hold and fondle my little petticoat at your leisure. You see that I keep my word; here it is. You will think very badly of me, will you not, monsieur? Before you condemn me, wait until you have seen me again, which will be as soon as I can possibly arrange it. Yes, have no fear; you shall hear from me."

Monsieur de Mardeille was speechless; the letter dropped from his hands.

XVIII

A BLASÉ YOUNG MAN

It was a fortnight after the events we have narrated.

In a very handsome apartment on Rue de la Chaussée-d'Antin, a young man attired in a superb robe de chambre was strolling listlessly from one room to another, smoking a cigarette.

This young man was the Vicomte de Sommerston. The descendant of a very wealthy Irish family, Edward de Sommerston was born in France and had never chosen to visit the home of his ancestors. He had come into possession of an income of eighty thousand francs at the age of twenty-one, and had immediately plunged into the life of pleasure, dissipation, and debauchery which ages men so rapidly.

He was tall, well built, handsome, and rich—this was twice more than enough to kill in ten years a man who was unable to resist his passions. The viscount was now twenty-nine; he was not dead yet, but he was not much better than that; he had not only used, but abused everything. The list of his mistresses was enormously long, especially as there were many of them whom he had known no more than a week, as he was an essentially fickle and capricious youth. The woman he adored to-day was an object of indifference to him to-morrow. Unluckily for him, he had never

fallen in with any cruel charmers, his reputation as a rake and *mauvais sujet* being, on the contrary, a powerful recommendation with the ladies to whom he addressed his homage.

Edward had run through the half of his fortune; he had enough remaining to enable him to live comfortably, if he had known how to make a wise use of it; but he did not know how to do anything, even to amuse himself: everything was a burden and a bore to him. He was no longer capable of loving; he had ruined his stomach by flooding it with champagne and malvoisie; he still gambled from time to time, but without enjoyment unless luck was exceedingly unfavorable to him; when he lost heavily, he experienced a sort of excitement which brought a little life to his pallid, wasted face.

A single passion retained its power over him: he still smoked. It was impossible to meet him without a cigarette in his mouth; and that was followed by another and another and another; wherever he might be, at home or elsewhere, he smoked continually; he could not do without it, he said. He owed that lamentable habit to the foolish good nature of those ladies who allowed him to smoke in their rooms, and sometimes smoked with him. What do you think about the fair sex smoking?

To no purpose had the doctors told the viscount:

"You make a mistake to smoke so much; it's injuring your health; you cough constantly, your lungs are weak, and you'll dry them up completely by smoking as you do; you'll go into a consumption."

These warnings, instead of being acted upon, had produced the opposite effect on the young man, who insisted that he knew better than the doctors.

"Bah!" he said to himself; "they tell me not to smoke. Well! I'll smoke more than ever, to let them see how much I think of their advice."

In fact, the number of cigarettes he smoked in a day reached such a fabulous figure, that his valet's sole occupation was to make them for his master.

From time to time, Edward had travelled, hoping to find new sensations amid new scenes. He had visited Switzerland, Spain, Italy, and England; but, unluckily, the man who can scatter gold along his path meets with no obstacles to his desires in any country; women are coquettish, men are selfish, innkeepers have an eye to the main chance, servants are flatterers, everywhere. In Spain, thanks to the national jealousy, the viscount had fought several duels; but as he handled both sword and pistol with skill, he was always victorious, which fact afforded him no pleasure at all.

Once, as he was travelling in Switzerland, and trying to climb some glacier, he fell over a precipice, and lay there nearly six hours before he was rescued by guides, by means of rope ladders. He was half frozen, but well content, and he remembered that day as one of the pleasantest during his travels.

He had returned to Paris, after a trip to Italy, only three weeks before we first meet him strolling about his apartments, smoking cigarettes, which he rarely finished, and followed at a distance by his valet, Lépinette, preparing others. Suddenly he halted in the middle of his salon, and asked:

"What time is it, Lépinette?"

"Nearly three o'clock, monsieur le vicomte."

"Really? Give me a cigarette."

"Here it is, monsieur."

"I will finish dressing.—What in the devil am I going to do to-day, Lépinette? Do you know?"

"I think that monsieur told three of his friends, Messieurs Florville, Dumarsey, and Lamberlong, to call for him to ride in the Bois."

"Ah, yes! you are right. Yes, those gentlemen were to call for me.—This one isn't well made; give me another."

"Here is one, monsieur."

"To ride in the Bois—always the same thing; it's horribly monotonous.—Lépinette, you must find something to amuse me."

"I should like nothing better; but monsieur le vicomte is so exacting! Things that would delight other gentlemen are indifferent to him, or displease him."

"That is true; I am hard to amuse. I resemble Louis XIV in that. I hoped to find something new when I came back to Paris.—This one draws badly; give me another."

"Here is one, monsieur."

"But no—nothing new or exciting!"

"There are some very pretty women in the quarter, monsieur."

"Bah! according to your taste, not mine!—But don't I hear horses in the courtyard?"

"Yes, monsieur; they are your friends, who have called for monsieur le vicomte, no doubt."

"Bigre! and I am not dressed! Never mind! they can wait.—Give me a cigarette."

XIX

THE VISCOUNT'S FRIENDS

The viscount's friends entered his salon in riding costume, hunting crop in hand.

The first was a tall youth of nearly six feet, and so slender and frail that he seemed in danger of breaking in two when he stooped; especially as he was always dressed in the latest style, and squeezed and pinched himself so that not the slightest crease could be detected in his clothes. Many ladies envied that young man his figure. His name was Florville, and his face was not unattractive.

The second was a young man of medium stature, whose hair was bright red, as were the rims of his eyes; which

did not prevent him from esteeming himself a very good-looking fellow; he dared not turn his head, for fear of rumpling his collar or disarranging the knot of his cravat. He was an habitu  of the Th atre-Italien; he never missed a performance, insisted on posing as a great connoisseur in music, and declared that he could easily have reached high C, if his voice had been cultivated; but it had not been. This individual, so laughable by reason of his manners and his pretensions, was Monsieur Lamberlong.

The third of the viscount's visitors was a man of about thirty, remarkable neither for beauty nor ugliness, rather stout than thin, with a good-humored, smiling face, and all the manners of a high liver. His name was Dumarsey.

Florville and Dumarsey had enormous cigars in their mouths. The young man with the red hair did not smoke; by way of compensation, he had a little square glass over his right eye, and kept it in place almost all the time; his kind friends declared that he ought to wear one on the left eye as well, in order to conceal both his albino-like lids.

"Here we are! here we are, Edward!—The deuce! he's not ready!"

"I was sure he wouldn't be; I'd have bet on it."

"Well! what's your hurry, messieurs? In the first place, it's too early to go to the Bois. We have time enough. I will finish dressing.—L pinette, give me a cigarette."

"Here is one, monsieur."

"Will you allow me to complete my toilet in your presence?"

"Go on, go on, take all the time you want!" said Dumarsey; "I have a good Londres; that's enough for me."

"For my part," said Florville, "I am not satisfied with this so-called Havana."

"If you would like a cigar, Monsieur Lamberlong, you'll find a box on the console yonder. I smoke nothing but cigarettes myself, but I always keep a few cigars for my friends."

"Exceedingly obliged, dear viscount; but I don't care about smoking; there was a man at the Bouffes last night who smelt very strongly of tobacco; it made a number of ladies ill."

"As there is no performance at the Bouffes to-night, you have nothing to fear."

"Oh! but I am going to a concert to-night, at which Alboni is to sing."

"You stick to music, don't you?"

"It's my element."

"You know, Edward," laughed Dumarsey, "Lamberlong would have been able to reach high C, if his natural faculties had been cultivated. What a pity to have neglected them!"

"Is there any chance of catching the lost note, if we should take an express train?"

"You are pleased to jest, messieurs. None the less, it is true that a gentleman in the balcony at the Bouffes said to me not long ago: 'This is where you ought to be!'"

"In the balcony?"

"No; but at the Bouffes, with a salary of sixty thousand francs!"

"Had he heard your high C?"

"Yes; just as I left school."

"It can't be denied that there are some very fortunate mortals. There was a man who had heard Lamberlong's high C! And we poor devils might pay fabulous prices, yes, hire the whole auditorium of the Bouffes, and not hear it! It's heartrending!"

The red-haired young man rose impatiently, and began to inspect the pictures that adorned the salon.

"What do you hear that's new, messieurs?" said Edward, tying his cravat.

"Oh! nothing piquant or interesting. There's been a great scarcity lately of scandalous intrigues in which we know the leading parties."

"Who is the woman most in vogue? Remember that I am just from Italy, messieurs, and that I am not at all posted as to what is going on in Paris."

"There are five or six in high favor; but you must have seen them, for you were at Saint-Phar the banker's great crush night before last."

"I saw nothing wonderful. If that's all you have to offer me, why——"

"There was a dazzling blonde at the Bouffes last night. She attracted every eye."

"Well! of course, you made inquiries about her, Lamberlong?"

"Yes; she's the wife of a rich Spaniard, who is taking her to Brazil."

"If he's taking her to Brazil, that's too far to follow her. But you must have had some romantic adventures in Italy, viscount? The women there are very revengeful, they say."

"No more so than in France! I saw two or three little stilettoes glisten in the girdle or the garter, but I didn't feel the point of one."

"No great passions, then?"

"Nothing, nothing! it's maddening! Love is vanishing, messieurs."

"That isn't what says a young man who is always in the orchestra chairs at the Bouffes; he's in a fair way of dying of love for an actress; he won't say who she is."

"Oh! but one must be an habitu  of the Bouffes to do that sort of thing!—A cigarette, L pinette."

"Here is one, monsieur."

"How many do you smoke a day, Edward?"

"I don't know; I never counted them."

"I'll bet that it's two dozen!"

"I'll bet it's three!"

"Pardieu! all you have to do is to ask my valet; he can give you more accurate information than anyone else on that subject."

"L pinette, how many cigarettes does your master smoke in a day—about?"

Lépinette reflected a moment, then replied:

"I have sometimes given monsieur le vicomte as many as sixty, messieurs; but it's never less than forty."

"Ha! ha! ha! that is magnificent! sixty cigarettes a day! You deserve a prize, Edward. We'll order a wreath of cigarettes for you!"

"Well, messieurs, what would you have? a man must do something; and when one has no other amusement——"

"Oh! viscount, you can't make us believe that you haven't some beauty to whom you are devoted."

"No, Florville, at this moment I love nobody. I am so utterly blasé on the subject of love! It is all over; my heart has lost the power of taking fire; the incendiary glances of my fair friends leave it as cold as ice. And then, when one knows women, one knows how much reliance may be placed on their oaths."

"Oh! there are exceptions," said Dumarsey. "I remember, Edward, when you had a pretty young girl for a mistress—I think you had abducted her, found her at a linen draper's. She came from Lorraine. She was almost a peasant, and you sophisticated her."

"Oh! yes, I remember! You mean Suzanne, don't you?"

"Suzanne, yes, that was what you called her. She seemed to be very fond of you."

"In other words, she loved me too much; it got to be insufferable. She was far too sentimental."

"What did you do with the girl?"

"What did I do with her? Faith, nothing! What do you expect a man to do with a girl of that sort, when she has once been his mistress, and he has had enough of her? I don't see that there's anything for him to do with her."

"Then you don't know what became of her?"

"No, indeed; and I should be very sorry to know. I had enough trouble to rid myself of the little one's importunities.—Give me a cigarette, Lépinette."

And the viscount, with a testy exclamation, threw on the floor the cigarette he had in his mouth, which he had smoked only a few seconds. Since the mention of the young woman named Suzanne, his brow had clouded, and his face had assumed an ill-humored expression. But young Lamberlong brought back a smile to his lips by exclaiming:

"Oh! mon Dieu! I have entirely forgotten what they give at the Bouffes to-morrow. Can you tell me, messieurs?"

"Oh! give us a moment's peace with your Bouffes, Lamberlong!—Can you understand, messieurs, how a man can attend every blessed performance at the Italiens, when he doesn't know a word of that language?"

"Who told you that I don't know a word of Italian? It's false; I understand it quite well."

"You understand it, but you don't comprehend it."^[H]

"You say you understand it; very well! answer this: *Pone nos recede*."

The young man with red hair scratched his head, looked at the ceiling, and muttered:

"I never heard those words at the Bouffes."

Thereupon the dandy laughed heartily, and Florville exclaimed:

"Didn't you know that Dumarsey was talking Latin to you?"

"Latin! How do you suppose I could understand him, then? What do I know about Latin—a dead language! They don't sing in Latin at the Bouffes."

"Monsieur le vicomte's horse is saddled," said a little groom, putting his nose in at the door.

"All right!—Let us go, messieurs.—By the way, Lépinette, have you filled my pockets with cigarettes?"

"Yes, monsieur, I have put some everywhere, even in your fob."

"That's right.—To horse, messieurs!"

XX

THE THIRD PETTICOAT

Two days after this riding party, Edward de Sommerston was in his smoking room, stretched out on a divan, smoking and intensely bored, as usual, and watching the puffs of smoke ascend and float about the room until they formed a fog so dense that one could hardly see from one side to the other. Suddenly the door was softly opened; Lépinette appeared, and, trying to distinguish his master through the clouds that filled the room, said in an undertone:

"Is monsieur le vicomte asleep?"

"What! No, I'm not asleep! I wish I were, but smoking never puts me to sleep! What do you want of me?"

"I came to tell monsieur that I have just made a find."

"A find! Have you found a treasure? So much the better for you; keep it!"

"Oh! monsieur, it isn't a treasure in money; it's something of another sort, which will be much more to monsieur's taste."

The viscount half rose, saying:

"What in the deuce is it?"

"It's a woman, monsieur; or rather, an enchanting girl!"

The viscount fell back on the couch, muttering:

"And you came here and disturbed me for that, did you? That's what you call a treasure!"

"I thought that monsieur would not be sorry to learn that there is in the house a young woman who is really deserving of a moment's attention."

"Aha! so this beauty lives in the house, does she?"

"Yes, monsieur. The concierge, who represents the owner, has several rooms at the top of the house which he furnishes neatly and rents on his own account."

"Oh, yes! his little perquisites; I understand. Well?"

"Well, it's one of those rooms that he has rented to Mademoiselle Georgette, an exceedingly virtuous person, so it seems, who rarely goes out and receives no visitors."

"Ah! very good! So it's a real model of virtue, is it? Did the concierge undertake to swear to that?"

"No, monsieur, the concierge didn't say positively that it was so; I simply repeat what I heard."

"And what does this chaste creature do?"

"She makes small articles in embroidery, monsieur; charming little things, such as mats for candlesticks, little rugs to put under your feet, and cigar cases—oh! lovely cigar cases!"

"How do you know? Have you bought something of the girl already?"

"No, monsieur; but the concierge showed me one that his new tenant made for a present to him; it is exceedingly pretty."

"The concierge smokes, does he?"

"Oh! like a porter, monsieur."

"Those knaves take every conceivable liberty!—Well! how does all this concern me?"

"I thought that monsieur might be curious to see the little one from upstairs."

"Just an ordinary face, I am sure; one of those affected little minxes—the grisette who wants to be followed; I know all about it."

"Oh, no! this one has no ordinary face. I will not say that she is precisely a beauty; that would not be true; but it is the whole aspect of her that attracts—and, above all, a figure so well set up—superb outlines—a shapely leg and such a tiny foot!"

"Really! has she all those things? You have examined her very closely, haven't you?"

"I was on the landing just now, monsieur, as she came upstairs, in a jacket and a short petticoat, both white; and the petticoat has an embroidered hem. Oh! she doesn't seem to be at all hard up! And she was humming between her teeth as she came up. I stood aside to let her pass; at that, she gave me a very pleasant bow; and as she was going on, I said: 'Are we to have the good fortune to have you for a neighbor, mademoiselle?'"

"This devil of a Lépinette doesn't waste any time; he makes acquaintances at once!"

"When one has the honor of being in monsieur le vicomte's service, one should understand how to deal with the fair sex."

"That's not bad. Go on!"

"The young woman stopped, and answered very pleasantly: 'Yes, monsieur, I live in the house.'—Then she bowed again and went on upstairs."

"Is that all?"

"No, monsieur. As that meeting was very agreeable to me, I went out on the landing several times. It was a happy thought. A moment ago, the young woman came downstairs very fast."

"It seems to me that she spends a good deal of time on the stairs for a girl who never goes out!"

"She had forgotten to buy some coffee, monsieur; coffee is her passion, it seems; she can't do without it!"

"Did she tell you that?"

"Yes, monsieur; but she didn't stop; she went on downstairs. She'll probably come back very soon; if monsieur chooses, I will keep watch on the landing, and as soon as I see Mademoiselle Georgette in the hall below I will let him know."

"Nonsense! Do you suppose I am going to put myself out to see this grisette? You are crazy, Lépinette!"

"I would just like to have monsieur see her in her jacket and short petticoat; they're so becoming to her!"

"Pardieu! there's a very simple way for me to see this girl without disturbing myself. She embroiders cigar cases, you say? I'll order one of her. Go out and watch for her, and, when she comes, ask her to step into my apartment a moment. You may tell her why."

"Very good, monsieur; I will go on sentry duty, in order to give her your message."

"If you don't see her pass, you may as well go up to her room; there's no need of standing on ceremony with a mere working girl."

"Very well, monsieur; if she has already come in, I will go up and do your errand."

Lépinette left the room, and Edward de Sommerston surrendered anew to the charms of the cigarette; but five minutes had not passed when the valet reappeared and said to him:

"The young person is here, monsieur."

"Whom do you mean?"

"The girl from upstairs who makes cigar cases."

"Oh! I had already forgotten your protégée. Well! show her in."

"Here, monsieur?"

"To be sure; you don't suppose I am going to put myself out to go into the salon to receive this grisette, do you?"

"Then I will show her in here."

The servant went out, returned in a moment, and announced: "Mademoiselle Georgette!"—And the Georgette with whom we are already acquainted, having seen her on Rue de Seine and Boulevard Beaumarchais, entered the smoking room in her morning costume; but this time there was something in the simple *négligé* that denoted more thought, more coquetry: the jacket was trimmed with lace, the white petticoat had an embroidered hem; and the hair was arranged according to the prevailing style; plainly, she realized that she was now in the Chaussée d'Antin.

Georgette advanced three steps and retreated two, crying:

"Mon Dieu! what a horrible smell!"

Thereupon the viscount turned over on his couch, and said:

"So you don't like the smell of tobacco, my girl?"

"Hallo! there's someone here. But I can't see anything; it's like being in the clouds! Well! I won't stay here! I don't propose to have people think that I've been in barracks!"

And Georgette walked quickly from the smoking room, followed a corridor, opened the first door she saw, and found herself in a charming salon, where she paused a moment.

"This is better! one can at least see something here, and it isn't reeking with tobacco smoke!"

Meanwhile, the young man, surprised by his visitor's abrupt exit, rose from his couch, laughing, and saying to himself:

"This is a most amusing creature! But, after all, I couldn't have seen her here. Where in the devil has she gone! Let's look for her, let's play hide-and-peek; it will remind me of my boyhood!"

Passing from one room to another, the young dandy arrived at last in that one in which Mademoiselle Georgette had taken refuge; he discovered her seated in an easy-chair and turning the leaves of an album that lay on a table near by. The girl's utter lack of ceremony, and her perfect ease of manner in that elegant salon, astonished Edward, who gazed at her for several seconds, then said:

"It seems to amuse you to look at caricatures?"

Georgette rose and courtesied gracefully, as she replied:

"I was waiting for you to come, monsieur, and I thought there was no harm in looking through this album."

"No, indeed! you have done nothing wrong, except running away from my smoking room, as if it were a bear's den."

"Faith! monsieur, I am not sure that I should not prefer a bear's den to a room where the smoke is so thick that you can't see, and makes your eyes smart and your head ache, to say nothing of the insufferable odor!"

While Georgette was speaking, Edward examined her from head to foot; and his examination was evidently favorable to her, for he muttered from time to time:

"Very good, on my word! very seductive! That devil of a Lépinette didn't deceive me!"

Then the viscount began to walk around the girl, who was standing in the middle of the salon; and he smiled as he observed the little white petticoat that outlined her hips so perfectly; until at last, vexed by this inspection, she exclaimed:

"Haven't you nearly finished staring at me, monsieur?"

"Why, you are exceedingly pleasant to look at!"

"Is that why you sent for me?"

"Well! suppose it were? My valet had praised your face and figure, and I wanted to see if he told the truth."

"If I had known that, I certainly would not have come into your apartment. Adieu, monsieur!"

"One moment, I pray! What a hurry you're in, Mademoiselle Georgette!—for Georgette is your name, I believe?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"From what part of the country do you come?"

"From Bordeaux, monsieur."

"From the South. I'd have bet on it."

"Why so?"

"Because you seem to have a little head that is very quick to take offence."

"Oh! I have a very good head."

"Do you live alone upstairs?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"How many lovers have you, Mademoiselle Georgette?"

The girl stared at the viscount with an impertinent expression, and finally answered:

"I have none, monsieur."

"What! not one? not the least little bit of a one?"

"No, monsieur."

"That is very strange."

"What is there strange about it, monsieur? Do you think that a girl cannot remain virtuous, and live without a lover?"

"It seems to me to be very difficult, to say no more, in Paris."

"No more difficult in Paris than elsewhere; a woman always does just what she chooses."

"Oh! not always! There is the desire to please, the instinct of coquetry, which is inborn in woman. She wants to have pretty gowns, and she can't buy them with what she earns. She wants to wear silk dresses and cashmere shawls! You are fascinating in this déshabillé; still, you wouldn't go to Mabelle's in such a costume."

"Oh! I have no desire to go to Mabelle's."

"You don't mean what you say."

"Yes, I do, monsieur."

"No lover! what a phenomenon! Surely, with that figure, that dainty foot, you must have made many conquests?"

"Oh, yes!"

"And you have never listened to any man?"

"Never."

"Then you must have a lover in your province—some secret passion that fills your heart?"

"No, monsieur; I have no secret passion."

"In that case, I say again, you are a phenomenon, and I am very proud to have such a rarity for a neighbor. Are you

afraid of loving, pray? afraid of love?"

"I! I am not afraid of anything."

"Ha! ha! ha! you are very amusing!"

"You think me amusing, monsieur? How lucky for me!"

"I think you provoking, alluring, fascinating!"

And the young man tried to take Georgette in his arms; but she quickly extricated herself and pushed him away, saying in a very decided tone:

"I don't like such manners, monsieur; and they will never succeed with me, I warn you."

"Pardon, mademoiselle, pardon! I forgot that I was dealing with a Lucretia."

"Is this all you have to say to me, monsieur?"

"Why, no; I wanted to order an embroidered cigar case; my servant tells me that you make lovely ones."

"I do my best, at all events. Would you like one?"

"If you will make it for me."

"What color do you want?"

"Oh! I leave all those details to you."

"Very good, monsieur! I charge fifteen francs."

"Whatever you choose! The price is of little consequence to me."

"Very well, monsieur; in three days, you shall have your cigar case."

"All right. Will you be kind enough to bring it yourself?"

"Certainly, monsieur."

"Don't be afraid; I won't receive you in my smoking room."

"So much the better! for, really, that smell of tobacco makes my head ache. I have the honor to salute you, monsieur!"

Georgette executed a bewitching little reverence, and the viscount said to himself as he looked after her:

"Pardieu! that little brunette must be mine, for she is really a most original creature!"

XXI

AN ATTACK

Edward de Sommerston did not believe what Georgette had told him on the subject of lovers; he was sceptical concerning the virtue of a girl who lived alone and worked for a living.

"This girl," he said to himself, "tries to pass herself off for a model of virtue so as to secure more generous treatment; that's a trick that doesn't fool me. She will submit like the others; for she's a woman, so she must love finery; that's the bait to catch them with."

During the three days that elapsed before she brought him what he had ordered, the young man asked his servant several times if he had happened to meet on the stairs the young woman who lived at the top of the house; but Lépinette had not seen Georgette, which fact seemed to vex him; he flattered himself, perhaps, that he could make a conquest of the girl more easily than his master could.

On the day that Georgette had appointed, Edward, attired in a coquettish morning *négligé*, awaited the young woman in a pretty little salon which might at need have passed for a *boudoir*. He was smoking cigarettes, but had ordered them made of a very mild tobacco, in which there was a touch of perfume.

About noon, Lépinette announced: "Mademoiselle Georgette!" and the young woman appeared, still in her little morning costume.

"I beg your pardon, monsieur," she said, as she courtesied to the viscount, "for presenting myself in this *négligé*; but I have none too much time to work, and I never dress when I expect to stay at home."

"The hussy knows perfectly well that she is more alluring in this dress," thought Edward, "and that is why she comes in her short petticoat. If she weren't so well built, she'd be all bundled up in clothes. We know all about that. Mademoiselle Georgette desires me to admire her good points; therefore, she desires to please me."

And the young man, without stirring from his couch, pointed to a chair and said:

"Take a seat, I beg! You are very attractive thus. Besides, one doesn't dress to call on a neighbor. Will it annoy you if I continue to smoke?"

"Oh! I didn't come here to interfere with your pleasures, monsieur."

"This tobacco is very mild, and the odor is not disagreeable, even to people who don't like tobacco."

"That is true; it smells like patchouli."

"Have you been good enough to remember my cigar case?"

"Here it is, monsieur."

And Georgette handed him a lovely little affair, lined with silk.

"Why, this is delicious! it's an admirable piece of work!" cried Edward.

"Do you like it? So much the better!"

"I should be very exacting if I did not like it. The colors of the little diamonds are blended perfectly. You have no less taste than talent. And it took you only three days to make it?"

"That was quite long enough."

"It should be worth fifty francs, at least."

"No, that would be too much; I am content with the price I told you."

"But in that case you earn less than five francs a day, for you have to buy your wool and your silk."

"Oh! if I earned five francs a day, that would be too fine; I should be too rich!"

"So you are not ambitious, eh? You have no desire to change your position?"

"Hum! that depends. To change it for a short time would hardly be worth while. Sometimes I have had dreams: at such times, I see myself in a superb apartment; I have diamonds and handsome dresses, a carriage, and servants to wait on me; oh! it's magnificent!"

"I understand the moral!" said Edward to himself. "We would like to obtain all those things! The damsel seems to be decidedly calculating!"

While making these reflections, the young man left his couch and planted himself in front of the chair occupied by Georgette; and there, with his head thrown back and one hand on his hip, he eyed her coolly and laughed in her face, saying:

"Do you know that you're nobody's fool, my dear?"

Georgette supported his stare and his question without the slightest trace of emotion; she simply rose from her chair and said:

"I am very glad that you have so good an opinion of me, monsieur."

"Pray keep your seat; do you think of running away already?"

"Yes, monsieur; for I don't pass my time doing nothing, myself; I can't afford it."

"One moment—let us talk a little. In the first place, you can't go away till I have paid you."

"Oh! I am not worried! I'll trust you."

"You might make a mistake.—Do give me a few seconds. It affords me much pleasure to talk with you."

Edward took her hand, and she consented to resume her chair; whereupon he seated himself very close to her, saying:

"Shall I tell you something?"

"What is it?"

"I am in love with you!"

"Ha! ha! ha! what folly!"

"It may perhaps be folly! But, whatever it is, it's the truth all the same! Yes, I am in love with you. That rather surprises me; for I haven't been able to fall in love for some time past. It must be that there is in you something—I don't know what—more enticing than in other women. Look you! I verily believe, God forgive me! that it's your little petticoat that has turned my head!"

"Then, monsieur, I will run upstairs and send you the petticoat, so that you may have nothing more to wish for."

"Hum! you scamp! No, that would not be enough for me! I want the petticoat and all it contains!—What a sweet little hand!"

"Oh! monsieur, don't touch me, I beg! I have told you before that I don't like such manners."

"That is true; I keep forgetting that you are a vestal! I am so unaccustomed to meeting such!"

"Oh! you have a very bad opinion of women! Surely you must have met some virtuous ones, whom you seduced and then deserted, like the others!"

"It is possible; I don't remember. With me the past is always in the wrong."

"Oh! I am sure of that! That is why it is necessary to take precautions for the future."

"What an amusing creature! Do you [*tu*] know that you [*tu*] are most amusing?"

"I forbid you to *thou* me, monsieur. You have no excuse for doing it."

"Because you are not my mistress yet? That is true; but you will be before long; it amounts to the same thing."

"No, monsieur, I shall not be your mistress. I tell you again not to talk to me in that way; if you do, I shall go away and not come again."

"Come, come, be calm, Mademoiselle Georgette! you shall be treated respectfully. Tell me, darling, you will take me for your lover, won't you?"

"No, monsieur."

"What! Am I so very disagreeable to you?"

"Oh, no! it isn't that."

"Oho! as long as it isn't that, then you will listen to me."

"No, I will not listen to you; because I know that you are too fickle, that you never keep a mistress more than a month at the longest; and I don't choose to be cast aside like that."

"Somebody has been telling you fairy tales. I won't say that I love forever. Pardieu! my fair, if we did not leave them, they would leave us. Someone must begin, and I prefer that I should be the one."

"You have a way of settling matters which doesn't cause me to change my opinion about you. You are too much run after, too popular in good society, to attach yourself to a grisette!"

"There's some truth in what you say! You argue well, my charming friend; but allow me to tell you that I've had my fill and more of great ladies, and that I am absolutely indifferent to what people may say and think of me."

"I don't believe you.—Adieu, monsieur! I must go home."

"Oh! I don't let you go until I have an answer from you."

"Later—we will see."

"Then you will come again to see me? By the way, I must have two more cigar cases; I want them to give to my friends. Meanwhile, let me pay you for this one."

And the young man took a purse full of gold from his pocket and tossed it into Georgette's lap. She looked at it for a moment, then weighed it in her hand, and said:

"What is this?"

"It's what I owe you."

The pretty creature opened the purse and amused herself by counting its contents.

"Almost five hundred francs! Really, that's a high price for a cigar case!"

"But you are going to make me two more; that will pay for them all."

"Oh! no, monsieur; I can't accept so much; I will take what is due me, but no more."

As she spoke, Georgette took fifteen francs in gold from the purse, which she proceeded to place on the table. Then she ran from the room, crying:

"Adieu, monsieur le vicomte! I will come again when your cigar cases are done."

Edward was so surprised by the girl's abrupt departure, that he did not even think of detaining her.

XXII

TERTIA SOLVET

As may be imagined, Georgette's refusal to accept the purse of gold had not diminished in the least degree the rich young man's caprice for the maiden; on the contrary, it was certain to intensify it, as she who had adopted that course of action well knew. The desires that are quickly satisfied last but a short time; our passions do not increase in force and deprive us of repose altogether, unless they encounter obstacles in their path. Good fortune that comes of itself—bah! no one cares for that! It is an unseasoned dish.

But, thanks to this new fancy, which rapidly became tyrannical in its demands, the viscount ceased to be bored, and smoked a few less cigarettes; which proves that love is always of some benefit. His friends noticed the change.

"My dear fellow, you have some new passion on the brain," said Florville; "I would stake my head on it!"

"Oh! that is visible to the naked eye," added Dumarsey. "We have a new intrigue on hand, which is waxing warm."

"Faith! messieurs, you have guessed right!" replied Edward. "Yes, I have a very violent fancy. Deuce take me! I believe I am really in love!"

"Really! Is she so very pretty?"

"She's better than pretty; she is piquant—enchanting!"

"Did you see her at the Bouffes?" inquired the simpering Lamberlong.

"At the Bouffes? Oh! she never goes there, I can promise you that!"

The red-haired worthy made a wry face.

"A woman who never goes to the Bouffes!" he murmured; "mon Dieu! what sort of a creature can she be?"

"I say, Edward, what style of woman is your new passion?"

"What style? Oh! the most modest that you can imagine; but I adapt Boileau's verse to women:

"Tous les genres sont bons, hors le genre ennuyeux."^[1]

"When will you show us your charmer?"

"Oh! messieurs, I'll show her to you when I am her fortunate vanquisher."

"Then it isn't a finished affair?"

"No; and I shall be careful not to let you see her now; for I know you—you would try to steal her from me."

"To be sure; that is done among friends."

"Do you expect to sigh for long?" asked the tall Florville; "you, my dear viscount, who ordinarily put a love affair through at railroad speed?"

"Ah! this time I have to do with a little minx who is not so easily brought to terms."

"Well! Edward, tell us when you will show her to us, as a proof that you have triumphed? I'll give you three days; is that enough?"

"Hum! I am not sure."

"Come, messieurs, let's do the square thing; we'll give him a week; and if, within a week, he doesn't invite us to dinner with his new conquest, why, we will assign him a place among the gulls.—Is it a bargain, Edward?"

"Yes, messieurs, within a week. I accept that proposition."

"If you bring your lady, we are to pay for the dinner; if you don't, you are to treat us."

"Agreed—within a week!—Oh! I hope to be on firm ground before that."

This agreement was made two days after the conversation which had resulted in Georgette's refusal of the purse containing five hundred francs.

When his friends had gone, the viscount said to himself:

"Now I must act. The little one refused gold—but gold doesn't take the eye like fine clothes. She had a magnificent outburst of pride. But this time I'll send her some things that she won't be able to resist."

The young man ordered his carriage and drove to the most fashionable shops. He bought a handsome shawl, silks and velvets for dresses, and even a pretty little bonnet which he considered well adapted to the face he desired to seduce. He returned home with his purchases, and said to Lépinette:

"Take all this to the girl upstairs, Mademoiselle Georgette. Give her my compliments, and tell her I would like to have the cigar cases I ordered from her; that I shall expect her to-morrow, during the morning, even if she has only one finished."

Lépinette took the handsome gifts in his arms with great care, and went to do his master's errand, while the latter sallied forth again to go to the races.

On returning home at night, the viscount's first thought was to ask his servant how his presents had been

received. Lépinette replied, assuming a serious expression:

"Monsieur, I saw something to-day that I never saw before!"

"What did you see? You remind me of a sibyl."

"Well, monsieur, I saw a young girl, a mere working girl, who lives in an attic, refuse a cashmere shawl, velvets, silks—in a word, a magnificent outfit!"

"What! you saw that? Do you mean to say that Georgette——"

"Yes, monsieur; Mademoiselle Georgette refused your presents."

"Impossible!"

"It is true, monsieur."

"Then you must have gone about it awkwardly."

"No; monsieur is well aware that I am accustomed to such commissions. I spread the things out—the shawl on a table before that amazing creature's eyes; she let me go on at first, and watched me without saying a word; but finally she exclaimed: 'What am I to do with all this, monsieur?'—'Whatever you please, mademoiselle,' I replied; 'my master begs you to accept it all, and he presents his compliments and requests you to bring him the cigar cases to-morrow, even if they are not done!'"

"That's very clever of you! Go on."

"Then Mademoiselle Georgette walked to where I had put the presents, and said: 'All these things are very pretty, very elegant, but I don't want them. You may thank monsieur le vicomte for me, take all these beautiful things back to him, and tell him that I will bring what he ordered to-morrow.'—'But I can't take them back, mademoiselle,' I said; 'my master told me to leave them with you.'—'Because your master thought it would make me very happy to receive such beautiful things; but, as he has made a mistake, you must take them back.'—'Mademoiselle,' I added, with a supplicating expression, 'you may do whatever you choose with these garments and materials; but for heaven's sake keep them, or my master will scold me.'—'I am very sorry, but I will not keep them.'—And with that, the young woman, who struck me as being exceedingly obstinate, piled them all on my arms: the shawl, the fabrics, and the bonnet box, and pushed me gently toward the door, which she closed behind me. That is just what happened."

"So that you brought back my presents?"

"I had to do it, monsieur."

"No, you weren't obliged to; you're a fool! You ought to have thrown them all on the floor and run away."

"I am sure that she'd have thrown them out on the landing."

"Well, suppose she had? we should have seen whether she would or not. However, she said that she would come to-morrow?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"Very good!"

Edward was surprised beyond words by the girl's behavior. He paced the floor of his apartment in great agitation. At times he was tempted to go up to Georgette's room himself; but she might refuse to admit him, and he did not choose to make an exhibition of himself before the other tenants; so he went to bed at last, saying to himself:

"She will come to-morrow; I shall see her and find out why she refused my presents; for I had not as yet asked her for anything in exchange. To be sure, the request may be foreseen. Ah! Mademoiselle Georgette, you will not resist me forever! I believe that I am really in love with her! At all events, my honor is involved in the affair now. I must not be the one to pay for that dinner with my friends."

All night the viscount was haunted by the image of the girl who had refused his splendid gifts. He rose early, attempted to smoke, and threw away several cigarettes as soon as he lighted them. The things he had sent to Georgette, he ordered taken into the small salon; and as he gazed at the rich fabrics spread out on a couch, he said to himself:

"Perhaps she doesn't like these colors! But the shawl is lovely! No, that cannot be her reason. Can it be that she really means to remain virtuous? But there was that dream of hers, in which she imagined that she was very rich. The little minx has something in her head, and she will have to tell me what it is."

At last, about noon, Mademoiselle Georgette arrived. Lépinette ushered her at once into the small salon, where the viscount was impatiently awaiting her. She bowed to him, with a charming smile; while he, on the contrary, pretended to be sulky. He pointed to a chair, saying:

"Be seated, mademoiselle."

"Your cigar cases are finished, monsieur; here they are."

"Very well! but I am not thinking about them."

"Your servant told me that you wanted them."

"My servant is an ass!—However, you are well aware that the cigar cases are only a pretext for seeing you. What is the use of beating about the bush, when one can speak frankly?"

"Why, no, monsieur, I didn't know——"

Edward pointed to the objects spread out on the couch, and asked abruptly:

"Why did you refuse those?"

"Why did you send them to me?" she rejoined, in the same tone.

The young man did not know what reply to make; he began to laugh, and finally exclaimed:

"Gad! one can never get the last word with you! Come, charming girl, let us play with our cards exposed—what do you say?"

"I don't know how to play cards."

"Oh! you know perfectly well what I mean by that. However, I will explain my meaning literally. I adore you."

"So you told me before."

"In love, one may be allowed to repeat one's self; indeed, that is one of its great charms. I was saying, then, that I adore you."

"And I say that I don't believe you."

"I will compel you to believe me. You don't expect to pass your whole youth without knowing what love is, do you?"

"I can't say, monsieur; but I have always heard that it isn't safe to swear to anything."

"Now you're talking reasonably. Very well! let me be the fortunate mortal to make love known to you. I am in a position to make you happy, to make your lot an enviable one."

"A man always says that to the poor girl he is trying to seduce—but afterward——"

"I always keep my promises. In the first place, I will give you a pretty apartment, which I will furnish with taste. You shall have handsome clothes and jewels. I will take you to the play and to drive; you shall have a carriage at your disposal. I will pay all your tradesmen's bills, and in addition you shall have a thousand francs a month to spend.—Tell me, isn't that attractive?"

"Yes, indeed, most attractive! But how long will it last?"

"So long as you love me."

"You mean, so long as *you* love *me*; and you gentlemen who are able to gratify all your whims—your love affairs never last long."

"I have but one whim henceforth, and that is to please you. Well, Georgette, you have heard what I have to offer; you consent to make me happy, do you not?"

And the viscount tried to seize the girl's hand; but she hastily pulled it away.

"No, monsieur, no!" she replied.

"What! you refuse my offers?"

"I refuse them."

"In heaven's name, have you some ground for hating me? Do you detest me?"

"Not at all, I assure you!"

"Then it must be that what I offer doesn't satisfy you, eh? Well! tell me what you want—what you desire. In short, explain yourself, I entreat you!"

Georgette was silent for a moment, then said in a low tone:

"If I should tell you what I want, you would think me very ridiculous, I am sure."

"Oh! no, no! tell me; women are entitled to have caprices without number."

"Oh! this is no caprice; it is simply forethought for the future.—Monsieur le vicomte, how much do you think it would cost to bring up a little girl, from the cradle till she was about sixteen years old—that is to say, to make a woman of her?"

The young man stared blankly at her, as he replied:

"What in the devil does that question mean? what connection has it with my offers?"

"Much, I assure you. At all events, be good enough to answer; what is the probable cost of a girl's education, and her support—everything?"

"As if I knew! As if I ever paid any attention to such things!"

"No, I suppose you never have paid any attention to them; but, no matter! make a guess at it."

"Well! about three or four thousand francs, I suppose."

"No, monsieur, you're a long way off. I reckon that it would cost fully twenty thousand francs."

"Twenty thousand francs! Nonsense! that isn't possible! Twenty thousand francs for a child?"

"Yes, monsieur, when that child is a daughter; when one wishes to give her a good education, and to cultivate her talents until she is a woman grown. Really, monsieur, I should have said that you were more generous! Forty thousand francs a year is too little for your pleasures, and you think that twenty thousand is too much for bringing up and educating a woman, and assuring her of a bare existence! Ah! that's just like you men!"

"No, no, you are right: twenty thousand francs is none too much. But, for God's sake, let us drop this subject and return to you—to you, who will not always be so cruel to me, I trust. What do you want? you haven't told me yet."

"Well, monsieur le vicomte, if I should yield to your solicitations, as I might have a little girl, I want the means of bringing her up, of giving her an education; and as I have no faith in a seducer's promises, I want it—before I give myself to him.—Do you understand me now?"

The viscount was speechless with surprise; he frowned, moved his chair away from Georgette's, and muttered at last:

"Hum! all this means that you want twenty thousand francs before you surrender?"

"Yes, monsieur, that's it exactly."

"That's a little expensive, mademoiselle."

"It's not I who am expensive, monsieur," retorted the girl, with a glance of disdain, almost of contempt; "it's the little girl—the child."

"The little girl! the little girl! but you haven't one yet! Wait at least until you have it, before you make such a demand!"

"No, no! for it would be too late then, and I should be very sure of being refused."

"Do you think so?"

"I don't think so; I am certain of it."

As she spoke, Georgette fixed her eyes on the young man's face with such a meaning expression that he could not support it but lowered his eyes and faltered:

"In truth—it is possible."

After a brief pause, Georgette rose, saying:

"Adieu, monsieur!"

"What! are you going, mademoiselle?"

"To be sure; I believe that we have nothing more to say to each other."

"I beg your pardon, but we have; only, your *ultimatum* requires reflection. Will you allow me to consider it a little?"

"Oh! as much as you please! You have compelled me to put my thoughts into words. It is a foolish idea; let us think no more about it."

"Why so? Unless you said it as a joke."

"No, I spoke most seriously; but I am fully persuaded that you will not make a sacrifice for me—of which I am not worthy."

"But I don't say that. Only, one hasn't such a large sum always at his disposal."

"There is no hurry, monsieur; we shall see each other again. Excuse me; I cannot stay any longer, I have work to do. Au revoir, monsieur le vicomte!"

Georgette eluded the grasp of the young man, who tried to detain her, and who exclaimed when she had gone:

"I suspected as much; she's a sly little fox, as cunning as a demon! As bright as she is mischievous! But, twenty thousand francs—all at one stroke! No, no! I won't make such a fool of myself for a grisette; that would be too absurd! With her talk about a little girl, she reminded me of that poor Suzanne, who had one, I believe. But what the devil am I mooning about? I'll go to the club and forget it all!"

The viscount went to his club, then to a friend's house, where there was sure to be high play. He tried to divert his thoughts, took a hand at baccarat, lost ten thousand francs at the outset, then wound up by winning three thousand.

"I might have lost twenty thousand," he said to himself, as he left the game, "and I should have had to pay it within twenty-four hours. Oh! I can obtain the money easily enough—it isn't that; I have only to sell a few railroad shares. But, no, no! it would be too asinine! I am sure that I should be sorry afterward!"

Two days passed, during which the viscount did his utmost to avoid thinking about Georgette; but on the third day, being still haunted by her image, he rose early, saying to himself:

"Pardieu! I am a great fool to torment myself like this, when it rests entirely with me to obtain the pleasure I crave! After all, what do a few banknotes more or less amount to? I'll save money in some other direction. I may as well go to my broker and settle the matter. Besides, I am to dine with those fellows the day after to-morrow; it shall not be said that I had to pay for the dinner."

Edward called at his broker's and procured the sum that he needed by selling certain securities. He returned home, placed the twenty thousand francs in a dainty pocketbook, and, having ordered Lépinette to burden himself anew with all the things that he had previously sent to Georgette, said to him:

"Go up to that young lady's room; give her first this pocketbook, then all this finery, and ask her when I shall see her. Go; I propose to watch you from the hall; so no stupid blunders this time!"

The valet went up the two flights of stairs, and the viscount impatiently awaited his return. Lépinette's face was fairly radiant when he appeared.

"Well?" said Edward.

"The young woman opened the pocketbook. I was not inquisitive enough to look at what she was counting, but I think it was banknotes."

"Idiot! What next?"

"She seemed delighted, and she said to me, with a most amiable expression: 'Please inform your master that if he can come up to-night, between eleven o'clock and twelve, it will give me great pleasure. I wish to thank him in person.'"

"Bravo! at last! *tandem! denique tandem felix!* Ah! I knew that I should attain my ends! And those fellows won't have the laugh on me!"

The young man was insanely hilarious. He instantly demanded cigarettes, which he had neglected utterly since he had had something to occupy his mind; then he went out to try to kill time.

He returned to his apartment at eleven o'clock, but had the patience to wait until midnight, so that he might not meet anyone in the hall. Then he took a candle, and ran quickly up the two flights. He had learned from Lépinette which was Georgette's door: it was the last on the right; there was no possibility of a mistake. The viscount soon found the door, and saw that the key was in the lock.

"She thinks of everything!" he said to himself; "there is no need of knocking, and I don't have to wait on the landing; it's well done of her."

He softly opened the door and entered the room, where it was absolutely dark.

"So she has gone to bed already!" thought the viscount, walking toward the bed, which was at the back of the room. He put forward his light: no one; the bed was empty and had not been slept in. Utterly at sea, the young man looked in all directions; at last, he discovered on a table near the fireplace all the dry goods he had sent to Georgette a second time; nothing was missing, not even the bonnet; but the little white petticoat was laid on a piece of material, and on the petticoat was a letter addressed to Monsieur le Vicomte Edward de Sommerston.

Our lover seized the letter and hurriedly ran his eye over it.

"MONSIEUR LE VICOMTE:

"I have gone away; do not look for me. I carry with me your pocketbook and its contents; I need only that, so I leave you all the rest. I leave you, in addition, my little white petticoat, which seemed to please you immensely; but some day I shall ask you to return it to me; for I expect to see you again, in order to explain my conduct; then, perhaps, you will consider that it was perfectly natural, rather than blamable."

The viscount stood for some time, lost in amazement, gazing alternately at the letter and the petticoat; but suddenly he burst into a laugh, saying to himself:

"Gad! she's a most amusing little hussy! And it has been a racy adventure. I will regale my friends with it when I give them that dinner, the day after to-morrow."

THE GENTLEMEN WITH THE THREE PETTICOATS

Toward the close of the month of September following, one fine day, about two o'clock in the afternoon, a gentleman was walking back and forth along the path in front of the monkey house at the Jardin des Plantes.

This gentleman was no other than our old acquaintance Monsieur Dupont, of whom we lost sight some time ago. We left him in the private dining-room, where he had dined with Georgette, who quitted him abruptly because he thought that he could easily triumph over a girl who had consented to dine with him alone at a restaurant; so that his *bonne fortune* was limited to the possession of a little striped petticoat which had been left in his hands.

Dupont had returned to his wife at Brives-la-Gaillarde. He had carried the little petticoat with him, but had been careful not to show it to his wife, who might have thought it strange that her husband should bring nothing back from Paris save a second-hand petticoat. However, Dupont had been much less inclined to sleep since his return; that was something in favor of the capital. From time to time, when he was alone, he took the grisette's little petticoat from its hiding place and gazed fondly at it, sighing as he remembered her who had worn it and to whom it was so becoming. On those days, Dupont was even less sleepy than usual, and his wife would say to him:

"My dear, it was an excellent idea for you to pass a few weeks in Paris; you came back much more wide awake; it did you good."

Finally, about the middle of September, Dupont received a letter thus conceived:

"If you desire to see Mademoiselle Georgette again, whose acquaintance you made during your stay in Paris last spring, monsieur, be good enough to be at the Jardin des Plantes, on the path facing the monkey house, about two o'clock in the afternoon of the 25th of this month; she will join you there. You will confer a great favor by bringing with you the little striped petticoat that Mademoiselle Georgette left in your hands."

Dupont quivered with joy when he read this letter:

"The charming girl wants to see me again!" he thought "The petticoat is only a pretext; she regrets her ill treatment of me and means to reward my love at last. Yes, indeed; I will certainly keep the appointment she gives me."

He went to his wife, and said to her:

"My dear love, I must make another little trip to Paris. It is necessary for me to see Jolibois, and I believe that it will be good for my health too. I could hardly wake up this morning."

"Yes, my dear, yes, go to Paris," replied madame; "it can't help doing you good; but don't stay so long as you did the last time."

That is why our old acquaintance was walking in the Jardin des Plantes, on the designated avenue, on the 25th of September, feeling from time to time in the pocket of his full-skirted coat, in which he had bestowed the little striped petticoat he was requested to return.

Ere long Dupont noticed that he kept passing a person of mature years, but dressed with much elegance; this was no other than Monsieur de Mardeille, who had received the following note a few days before:

"If Monsieur de Mardeille will take the trouble to be at the Jardin des Plantes, on the path in front of the monkey house, on the 25th of this month, about two o'clock in the afternoon, he will find there Mademoiselle Georgette, who will explain her conduct toward him. It would be very obliging on his part if he would bring with him her little black petticoat."

Monsieur de Mardeille was very careful not to miss that appointment, for he was consumed by a longing to see Georgette once more.

"Perhaps she means to return the twelve thousand francs I was stupid enough to give her," he said to himself.

And having made a neat parcel of the little black petticoat, he put it in his overcoat pocket and betook himself to the place indicated in the note.

After a little time, a third personage appeared on the same path; this was the young Vicomte Edward de Sommerston, who had received a letter of precisely the same tenor as Monsieur de Mardeille's, except that he was requested to bring with him a *white* petticoat. As our young dandy was not inclined to carry a petticoat in his pocket, he was accompanied by a very diminutive groom, who carried the garment in question under his arm and had an abundant supply of cigarettes in his hand.

As these three gentlemen were walking back and forth along the same path, they soon noticed one another.

"Anyone would say that those two dandies also have appointments here," said Dupont to himself.

"Those two fellows are evidently waiting here for someone," thought the viscount, as he puffed at his cigarette.

And Monsieur de Mardeille made a similar reflection as he passed the other two.

Before long there was a smart shower. Instantly all the promenaders and monkey fanciers disappeared, except the three gentlemen with the petticoats. They continued to walk to and fro on the same path; and as there was no one else left there save themselves and the little groom, they could not doubt that they were all there by appointment. They began to smile as they passed one another; it was easy to see that they divined one another's motives for being there, and that they had at their tongue's end some such words as:

"How tedious this waiting is! Gad! if it weren't for a charming woman, I'd have gone away long ago!"

Dupont had been tempted more than once to enter into conversation with his fellow promenaders, but he had not dared.

"The time wouldn't seem so long, if I were talking with these gentlemen," he said to himself; "that would divert my thoughts and make it easier to be patient; but perhaps they are not in a mood for talking."

Suddenly Edward stopped and drew his watch. Monsieur de Mardeille did the same; whereupon Monsieur Dupont

walked up to them, drew his own watch, and ventured to say:

"I beg pardon, messieurs, but will you allow me to ask what time you make it? My watch may be a little fast, and I should like to be certain of the time. I say twenty-two minutes past two."

"Two twenty-two; that's my time, too," said Monsieur de Mardeille.

"Faith! messieurs, we go better than Charles the Fifth's clocks," said the viscount, after consulting his watch; "I agree with you exactly."

"Didn't Charles the Fifth's clocks go well?" inquired Dupont.

"Don't you know that that monarch, after abdicating, cultivated a passion for clockmaking? He amused himself mending and improving clocks; he had an enormous number of them, and they went so well together that sometimes, as a reward of his labors, he had the pleasure of hearing them strike twelve for a whole hour!"

They laughed heartily over Charles the Fifth's clocks; then Dupont observed:

"I had a rendezvous for two o'clock, here in this path."

"So had I."

"And I."

"But women are never on time!"

"No, never!"

"Especially when they are young and pretty; they know that we'll wait for them."

"Yes, they are too anxious to make us long for them to come."

"As for myself," said Edward, "I propose to wait just five minutes more; but if Mademoiselle Georgette hasn't arrived at the half-hour, I am going away!"

"Georgette!" cried Monsieur de Mardeille.

"Georgette!" muttered Monsieur Dupont. "On my word! this is strange; it's a Georgette I am waiting for, too!"

"And I."

"Pardieu! this is rather unique! A dark girl, medium height, but built like a Venus! And such a foot! and a leg! altogether enchanting!"

"That is the exact portrait of the person I am waiting for."

"It is the exact portrait of the Georgette who wrote to me."

"This becomes decidedly interesting!" said the viscount. "I have her letter here."

"So have I."

"And I."

"Let us compare them. Yes, it certainly is the same writing! Well, messieurs, I have a petticoat of hers here, which she left in my hands and asked me to bring back to her.—Tom! come here and show what you have under your arm."

The little groom drew near and unfolded the white petticoat; Monsieur de Mardeille and Dupont instantly took the petticoats out of their pockets, and exhibited them, saying:

"I also have brought her a petticoat."

"And so have I, as you see."

Thereupon the three gentlemen laughed so uproariously that the monkeys tried to imitate them. When their outburst of hilarity had subsided, the viscount said:

"Don't you believe that the girl has made fools of us by writing to us all to meet her at the same place?"

"I begin to think so," said Mardeille.

"And she made us come in front of the monkeys!" exclaimed Dupont. "She selected this place purposely."

"She certainly won't come; it is past the half-hour. I am going away."

"Wait a moment, monsieur; there's a lady coming in this direction."

"But she is with a gentleman."

"Mademoiselle Georgette didn't write us that she would come alone."

"I can't distinguish her features yet, for she has on a bonnet. But it isn't her figure at all. This one has an enormous funnel-shaped skirt."

"That's a hoopskirt—the latest fashion."

"Great God! how ugly she is! The Georgette I am expecting used to dress in such excellent taste! One could see how she was built."

"Still, the nearer she comes, the more I think that I recognize her."

"Why, yes, that's so! I would swear that it is she."

"It is she! it certainly is, messieurs. See, she's coming toward us! There's no doubt about it now."

XXIV

THE MOTIVE

It was, in fact, Georgette, dressed in good taste, but very simply, and wearing one of the skirts then in fashion, which transformed a woman into a sugar loaf. She was arm in arm with Colinet, who had entirely laid aside his artless, timid manner.

Georgette and her escort walked up to the three gentlemen, and the young woman bowed pleasantly to them, saying:

"Excuse me, messieurs, for having kept you waiting. It was our driver's fault, for his horses hardly crawled. Allow

me, first of all, to present my husband, Monsieur Colinet."

Colinet gravely saluted the three men, who returned his salutation.

"Did she send for us to introduce her husband?" they said to themselves. "That was hardly worth while!"

"I asked you to meet me in this garden, messieurs," continued Georgette, "because I know that there are paths here where very few people pass, and where we can talk as if we were at home. I see one on the other side of these flower beds, where we shall be very comfortable; will you have the kindness to go there with me?"

The three gentlemen bowed, and the whole party walked to a path, usually quite deserted, where there were benches. Georgette and her husband having seated themselves, the others did the same, and the little groom stood at some distance. Then the young woman turned to Messieurs de Sommerston and de Mardeille, and addressed them thus:

"A few words will suffice to inform you why I acted as I did with respect to you. In the first place, messieurs, I am neither from Normandie nor from Bordeaux; I am a Lorrainer; Toul is my native place; my parents, who are poor but honorable farmers, are named Granery; I am the sister of Aimée and Suzanne."

The viscount and Monsieur de Mardeille made a gesture of surprise and their brows grew dark when they heard those names; while Dupont thought:

"What has this to do with me?"

"Yes," continued Georgette, addressing Mardeille, "I am the sister of that poor Aimée, who came to Paris, where she hoped, by means of her skill in embroidery, to be able to help her parents. As ill luck would have it, she fell in with you. Aimée was beautiful, and she caught your fancy; being innocent and inexperienced, she believed your fine speeches, your promises, your oaths—in short, she allowed herself to be seduced. A child, a son, was the result of her misstep. But you had already begun to act differently toward her, your visits became more rare; and when she asked you for the means to support and bring up her child, then you ceased entirely to see her. Ah! monsieur, a man must be very hard-hearted to behave like that. To stop loving a person is possible, I admit; but to spurn a mother who asks you for bread for her child! Oh! that is shameful!"

Monsieur de Mardeille hung his head and made no reply. Thereupon Georgette turned to the viscount:

"Do I need to remind you, monsieur, that your treatment of my sister Suzanne was exactly the same as this gentleman's treatment of Aimée? You seduced a poor girl who was innocence itself—you cannot deny it; then, after making her the mother of a daughter, you abandoned her, and, to avoid seeing her tears and hearing her complaints, you went away, you left Paris. My sisters returned to the province, in utter despair. They threw themselves at our parents' feet, with the children they were nursing; and, instead of cursing them, my parents wept with them and tried to comfort them; for with us, people don't curse their children when they are unfortunate. Isn't it more natural to forgive them? But I, seeing my sisters weep every day over their children's cradles, said to myself: 'I will go to Paris, too, but I will go to avenge them!'—I was twenty years old, I was well and strong, and I was especially noted for a resolute will. My parents tried in vain to oppose my determination. I started for Paris. Unfortunately, Aimée did not know Monsieur de Mardeille's address, and Suzanne did not know whether Monsieur de Sommerston had returned to Paris. But nothing could deter me.—'I shall succeed in finding them,' I said to myself; 'and something leads me to hope that my enterprise will be successful.'—I flattered myself that I should be able to make your acquaintance, messieurs. You know whether I succeeded.—Now, Monsieur de Mardeille, is it necessary for me to tell you that the twelve thousand francs I asked of you was for your son, that it has been invested in his name, and will be used to bring him up?—And you, monsieur le vicomte, whom I asked for twenty thousand francs, because I knew that you were a richer man, and because a girl's education costs more than a boy's—you know now that that sum will be used to bring up Suzanne's daughter, and to provide her with a dowry.—Well, messieurs, do you consider now that my conduct was so blamable? That money, with which you intended to seduce and ruin me, as you ruined my sisters, I have put to a good use. It will make it possible to bring up your children carefully; and what you would have employed in an evil action will accomplish a result that will do you honor. Tell me, messieurs, do you bear me a grudge now?"

"Faith! no," cried the viscount; "the play was well acted! You performed your part perfectly! Accept my congratulations, madame, together with this petticoat, which I hasten to restore to you.—Here, Tom! hand that garment to madame."

Monsieur de Mardeille did not seem to have accepted the inevitable so gracefully as the viscount; however, he realized that he must resign himself, and at least pretend to repent of his wrongdoing. Consequently, he said to Georgette:

"Madame, I judged you ill, that is true. I did treat your sister Aimée somewhat inconsiderately, and you have repaired my neglect, my fault. We men are drawn on by the current of business and pleasure, and are sometimes at fault when we do not mean to be. Present my compliments to your sister. Here is the little petticoat that became you so well!"

"But why am I mixed up in this affair, madame, I who never seduced any of your sisters?"

"You, monsieur," replied Georgette, with a smile—"I took you at first for an honorable, loyal man, whose arm I could accept without fear, for I was alone in Paris. I did not then know the addresses of these gentlemen, which my sisters succeeded in obtaining for me later. I wanted to go to the play and to the fashionable promenades, hoping to discover, to meet there, the persons I was absolutely determined to find."

"I understand; you used me as an escort."

"Something like it, monsieur. As for your love, that didn't frighten me. When I learned that you had lied to me, that you were married, as it was a matter of perfect indifference to me, I might have forgiven you; but you attempted to take most unbecoming liberties with me! So then, monsieur, I left you without ceremony, abandoning in your hands a little petticoat—which you have brought to me, I hope?"

"Yes, madame, here it is."

And Dupont, hanging his head rather sheepishly, produced his little parcel and handed it to Georgette. She took it and gave it to her husband; then she rose, and, with a graceful courtesy to the three men who had been in love with her, said:

"Now that I am rehabilitated in your eyes, messieurs, it remains for me only to wish you whatever may be most

agreeable to you."

And, after bowing once more, Georgette took her husband's arm and walked away with him.

Her three ex-lovers looked after her, and the viscount exclaimed:

"Sapristi! what a difference between that huge funnel and the little petticoat that outlined her form so perfectly! Ah! if I had seen her dressed as she is to-day, all this wouldn't have happened!"

"Indeed, it wouldn't!" cried Monsieur de Mardeille; "indeed, it wouldn't have happened; I should still have my twelve thousand francs."

"I agree with you entirely, messieurs," said Dupont; "what a difference in her shape! And the change is not to her advantage! The idea of getting into that sugar-loaf affair, instead of letting us see her graceful outlines! Ah! madame! what a scurvy trick to play on us!"

FOOTNOTES:

[A] Naught save the true is beautiful or lovable.

[B]

How now! you say nothing!
My friend, 'tis not nice of you!
Once it was different,
Remember, I pray you!

[C] True joys have fixed their abiding place in the fields; We fear the gods more there, and there make love more at our ease.

[D]

I saw you of late, as you worked at the pump;
In you all is charming, all is true, nothing false;
'Tis then you display in your movements such grace that
One would gladly be damned, if he might pump with you.

[E]

You have a saucy countenance,
A graceful figure;
A killing eye, a tiny foot,
And piquant bearing;
Your petticoat, too, I admire,
And all that one divines
Beneath,
And all that one divines!

[F]

My candle's gone out,
No fire have I;
Pray open your door,
For the love of the Lord!

[G] Colinet is misled by the twofold meaning of the French word *broche*.—*Mettre une broche*—to put on a brooch. *Mettre à la broche*—to put on the spit; *i.e.*, to roast.

[H] This play upon words cannot be reproduced in English. L. says: *Je l'entends très-bien!* But *entendre* means to *hear*, as well as to *understand*; so the other retorts: *Tu l'entends, mais tu ne le comprends pas*; you hear, but you don't understand.

[I] All styles are good, except the tiresome style.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK FRÉDÉRIQUE, VOL. 2 ***

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