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A ROMANCE OF YOUTH

By FRANCOIS COPPEE

BOOK 2.

CHAPTER V

AMEDEE MAKES FRIENDS

Meanwhile the allegorical old fellow with the large wings and white beard, Time, had emptied his hour-glass many times; or, to speak plainer, the postman, with a few flakes of snow upon his blue cloth coat, presents himself three or four times a day at his customers' dwelling to offer in return for a trifling sum of money a calendar containing necessary information, such as the ecclesiastical computation, or the difference between the Gregorian and the Arabic Hegira; and Amedee Violette had gradually become a young man.

A young man! that is to say, a being who possesses a treasure without knowing its value, like a Central African negro who picks up one of M. Rothschild's cheque-books; a young man ignorant of his beauty or charms, who frets because the light down upon his chin has not turned into hideous bristles,

a young man who awakes every morning full of hope, and artlessly asks himself what fortunate thing will happen to him to-day; who dreams, instead of living, because he is timid and poor.

It was then that Amedee made the acquaintance of one of his comrades—he no longer went to M. Batifol's boarding-school, but was completing his studies at the Lycee Henri IV—named Maurice Roger. They soon formed an affectionate intimacy, one of those eighteen-year-old friendships which are perhaps the sweetest and most substantial in the world.

Amedee was attracted, at first sight, by Maurice's handsome, blond, curly head, his air of frankness and superiority, and the elegant jackets that he wore with the easy, graceful manners of a gentleman. Twice a day, when they left the college, they walked together through the Luxembourg Gardens, confiding to each other their dreams and hopes, lingering in the walks, where Maurice already gazed at the grisettes in an impudent fashion, talking with the charming abandon of their age, the sincere age when one thinks aloud.

Maurice told his new friend that he was the son of an officer killed before Sebastopol, that his mother had never married again, but adored him and indulged him in all his whims. He was patiently waiting for his school-days to end, to live independently in the Latin Quarter, to study law, without being hurried, since his mother wished him to do so, and he did not wish to displease her. But he wished also to amuse himself with painting, at least as an amateur; for he was passionately fond of it. All this was said by the handsome, aristocratic young man with a happy smile, which expanded his sensual lips and nostrils; and Amedee admired him without one envious thought; feeling, with the generous warmth of youth, an entire confidence in the future and the mere joy of living. In his turn he made a confidant of Maurice, but not of everything. The poor boy could not tell anybody that he suspected his father of a secret vice, that he blushed over it, was ashamed of it, and suffered from it as much as youth can suffer. At least, honest-hearted fellow that he was, he avowed his humble origin without shame, boasted of his humble friends the Gerards, praised Louise's goodness, and spoke enthusiastically of little Maria, who was just sixteen and so pretty.

"You will take me to see them some time, will you not?" said Maurice, who listened to his friend with his natural good grace. "But first of all, you must come to dinner some day with me, and I will present you to my mother. Next Sunday, for instance. Is it agreeable?"

Amedee would have liked to refuse, for he suddenly recalled—oh! the torture and suffering of poor young men! that his Sunday coat was almost as seedy as his everyday one, that his best pair of shoes were run-over at the heels, and that the collars and cuffs on his six white shirts were ragged on the edges from too frequent washings. Then, to go to dinner in the city, what an ordeal! What must he do to be presented in a drawing-room? The very thought of it made him shiver. But Maurice invited him so cordially that he was irresistible, and Amedee accepted.

The following Sunday, then, spruced up in his best-what could have possessed the haberdasher to induce him to buy a pair of red dog-skin gloves? He soon saw that they were too new and too startling for the rest of his costume—Amedee went up to the first floor of a fine house on the Faubourg St. Honore and rang gently at the door on the left. A young and pretty maid—one of those brunettes who have a waist that one can clasp in both hands, and a suspicion of a moustache—opened the door and ushered the young man into a drawing-room furnished in a simple but luxurious manner. Maurice was alone, standing with his back to the fire, in the attitude of master of the house. He received his friend with warm demonstrations of pleasure. Amedee's eyes were at once attracted by the portrait of a handsome lieutenant of artillery, dressed in the regimental coat, with long skirts, of 1845, and wearing a sword-belt fastened by two lion's heads. This officer, in parade costume, was painted in the midst of a desert, seated under a palm-tree.

"That is my father," said Maurice. "Do I not resemble him?"

The resemblance was really striking. The same warm, pleasant smile, and even the same blond curls. Amedee was admiring it when a voice repeated behind him, like an echo:

"Maurice resembles him, does he not?"

It was Madame Roger who had quietly entered. When Amedee saw this stately lady in mourning, with a Roman profile, and clear, white complexion, who threw such an earnest glance at her son, then at her husband's portrait, Amedee comprehended that Maurice was his mother's idol, and, moved by the sight of the widow, who would have been beautiful but for her gray hair and eyelids, red from so much weeping, he stammered a few words of thanks for the invitation to dinner.

"My son has told me," said she, "that you are the one among all his comrades that he cares for most. I know what affection you have shown him. I am the one who should thank you, Monsieur Amedee."

They seated themselves and talked; every few moments these words were spoken by Madame Roger with an accent of pride and tenderness, "My son . . . my son Maurice." Amedee realized how pleasant his friend's life must be with such a good mother, and he could not help comparing his own sad childhood, recalling above all things the lugubrious evening repasts, when, for several years now, he had buried his nose in his plate so as not to see his father's drunken eyes always fastened upon him as if to ask for his pardon.

Maurice let his mother praise him for a few moments, looking at her with a pleasant smile which became a trifle saddened. Finally he interrupted her:

"It is granted, mamma, that I am a perfect phoenix," and he gayly embraced her.

At this moment the pretty maid announced, "Monsieur and Mesdemoiselles Lantz," and Madame Roger arose hastily to receive the newcomers. Lieutenant-Colonel Lantz, of the Engineer Corps, was with Captain Roger when he died in the trench before Mamelon Vert; and might have been at that time pleasant to look upon, in his uniform with its black velvet breastplate; but, having been promoted some time ago to the office, he had grown aged, leaning over the plans and draughts on long tables covered with rules and compasses. With a cranium that looked like a picked bird, his gray, melancholy imperial, his stooping shoulders, which shortened still more his tightly buttoned military coat, there was nothing martial in his appearance. With his head full of whims, no fortune, and three daughters to marry, the poor Colonel, who put on only two or three times a year, for official solemnities, his uniform, which he kept in camphor, dined every Sunday night with Madame Roger, who liked this estimable man because he was her husband's best friend, and had invited him with his three little girls, who looked exactly alike, with their turned-up noses, florid complexions, and little, black, bead-like eyes, always so carefully dressed that one involuntarily compared them to three pretty cakes prepared for some wedding or festive occasion. They sat down at the table.

Madame Roger employed an excellent cook, and for the first time in his life Amedee ate a quantity of good things, even more exquisite than Mamma Gerard's little fried dishes. It was really only a very comfortable and nice dinner, but to the young man it was a revelation of unsuspected pleasures. This decorated table, this cloth that was so soft when he put his hand upon it; these dishes that excited and satisfied the appetite; these various flavored wines which, like the flowers, were fragrant—what new and agreeable sensations! They were quickly and silently waited upon by the pretty maid. Maurice, seated opposite his mother, presided over the repast with his elegant gayety. Madame Roger's pale face would light up with a smile at each of his good-natured jokes, and the three young ladies would burst into discreet little laughs, all in unison, and even the sorrowful Colonel would arouse from his torpor.

He became animated after his second glass of burgundy, and was very entertaining. He spoke of the Crimean campaign; of that chivalrous war when the officers of both armies, enemies to each other, exchanged politenesses and cigars during the suspension of arms. He told fine military anecdotes, and Madame Roger, seeing her son's face excited with enthusiasm at these heroic deeds, became gloomy at once. Maurice noticed it first.

"Take care, Colonel," said he. "You will frighten mamma, and she will imagine at once that I still wish to enter Saint-Cyr. But I assure you, little mother, you may be tranquil. Since you wish it, your respectful and obedient son will become a lawyer without clients, who will paint daubs during his spare moments. In reality, I should much prefer a horse and a sword and a squadron of hussars. But no matter! The essential thing is not to give mamma any trouble."

This was said with so much warmth and gentleness, that Madame Roger and the Colonel exchanged softened looks; the young ladies were also moved, as much as pastry can be, and they all fixed upon Maurice their little black eyes, which had suddenly become so soft and tender that Amedee did not doubt but that they all had a sentimental feeling for Maurice, and thought him very fortunate to have the choice between three such pretty pieces for dessert.

How all loved this charming and graceful Maurice, and how well he knew how to make himself beloved!

Later, when they served the champagne, he arose, glass in hand, and delivered a burlesque toast, finding some pleasant word for all his guests. What frank gayety! what a hearty laugh went around the table! The three young ladies giggled themselves as red as peonies. A sort of joyous chuckle escaped from the Colonel's drooping moustache. Madame Roger's smile seemed to make her grow young; and Amedee noticed, in a corner of the dining-room, the pretty maid, who restrained herself no more than the others; and when she showed her teeth, that were like a young puppy's, she was charming indeed.

After the tea the Colonel, who lived at some distance, near the Military

School, and who, as the weather was fine, wished to walk home and avoid the expense of a cab, left with his three marriageable daughters, and Amedee in his turn took his departure.

In the ante-chamber, the maid said to Maurice, as she helped him on with his topcoat.

"I hope that you will not come in very late this evening, Monsieur Maurice."

"What is that, Suzanne?" replied the young man, without anger, but a trifle impatiently. "I shall return at the hour that pleases me."

As he descended the stairs ahead of Amedee, he said, with a laugh

"Upon my word! she will soon make her jealousy public."

"What!" exclaimed Amedee, glad that his companion could not see his blushes.

"Well, yes! Is she not pretty? I admit it, Violette; I have not, like you, the artlessness of the flower whose name you bear. You will have to resign yourself to it; you have a very bad fellow for a friend. As to the rest, be content. I have resolved to scandalize the family roof no longer. I have finished with this bold-faced creature. You must know that she began it, and was the first to kiss me on the sly. Now, I am engaged elsewhere. Here we are outside, and here is a carriage. Here, driver! You will allow me to bid you adieu. It is only a quarter past ten. I still have time to appear at Bullier's and meet Zoe Mirilton. Until tomorrow, Violette."

Amedee returned home very much troubled. So, then, his friend was a libertine. But he made excuses for him. Had he not just seen him so charming to his mother and so respectful to the three young ladies? Maurice had allowed himself to be carried away by his youthful impetuosity, that was all! Was it for him, still pure, but tormented by the temptations and curiosity of youth, to be severe? Would he not have done as much had he dared, or if he had had the money in his pocket? To tell the truth, Amedee dreamed that very night of the pretty maid with the suspicion of a moustache.

The next day, when Amedee paid his visit to the Gerards, all they could talk of was the evening before. Amedee spoke with the eloquence of a young man who had seen for the first time a finger-bowl at dessert.

Louise, while putting on her hat and getting her roll of music—she gave lessons now upon the piano in boarding-schools—was much interested in Madame Roger's imposing beauty. Mamma Gerard would have liked to know how the chicken-jelly was made; the old engraver listened with pleasure to the Colonel's military anecdotes; while little Maria exacted a precise description of the toilettes of the three demoiselles Lantz, and turned up her nose disdainfully at them.

"Now, then, Amedee," said the young girl, suddenly, as she looked at herself in a mirror that was covered with flyspecks, "tell me honestly, were these young ladies any prettier than I?"

"Do you see the coquette?" exclaimed Father Gerard, bursting into laughter without raising his eyes from his work. "Do people ask such questions as that, Mademoiselle?"

There was a general gayety, but Amedee blushed without knowing why. Oh! no, certainly those three young ladies in their Savoy-cake skirts and nougat waists were not as pretty as little Maria in her simple brown frock. How she improved from day to day! It seemed to Amedee as if he never had seen her before until this minute. Where had she found that supple, round waist, that mass of reddish hair which she twisted upon the top of her head, that lovely complexion, that mouth, and those eyes that smiled with the artless tenderness of young flowers?

Mamma Gerard, while laughing like the others, scolded her daughter a little for her attack of feminine vanity, and then began to talk of Madame Roger in order to change the conversation.

Amedee did not cease to praise his friend. He told how affectionate he was to his mother, how he resisted the military blood that burned in him, how graceful he was, and how, at eighteen years, he did the honor of the drawing-room and table with all the manner of a grand seigneur.

Maria listened attentively.

"You have promised to bring him here, Amedee," said the spoiled child, with a serious air. "I should like very much to see him once."

Amedee repeated his promise; but on his way to the Lycee, for his afternoon class, he recalled the

incident of the pretty maid and the name of Zoe Mirilton, and, seized with some scruples, he asked himself whether he ought to introduce his friend to the young Gerard girls. At first this idea made him uneasy, then he thought that it was ridiculous. Was not Maurice a good-hearted young man and well brought up? Had he not seen him conduct himself with tact and reserve before Colonel Lantz's daughters?

Some days later Maurice reminded him of the promised visit to the Gerards, and Amedee presented him to his old friends.

Louise was not at home; she had been going about teaching for some time to increase the family's resources, for the engraver was more red-faced than ever, and obliged to change the number of his spectacles every year, and could not do as much work as formerly.

But the agreeable young man made a conquest of the rest of the family by his exquisite good-nature and cordial, easy manner. Respectful and simple with Madame Gerard, whom he intimidated a little, he paid very little attention to Maria and did not appear to notice that he was exciting her curiosity to the highest pitch. He modestly asked Father Gerard's advice upon his project of painting, amusing himself with the knickknacks about the apartments, picking out by instinct the best engravings and canvases of value. The good man was enchanted with Maurice and hastened to show him his private museum, forgetting all about his pipe—he was smoking at present a Garibaldi—and presented him his last engraving, where one saw—it certainly was a fatality that pursued the old republican!—the Emperor Napoleon III, at Magenta, motionless upon his horse in the centre of a square of grenadiers, cut down by grape and canister.

Maurice's visit was short, and as Amedee had thought a great deal about little Maria for several days, he asked his friend, as he conducted him a part of the way:

"What did you think of her?"

Maurice simply replied, "Delicious!" and changed the conversation.

CHAPTER VI

DREAMS OF LOVE

Solemn moment approached for the two friends. They were to take their examinations for graduation. Upon the days when M. Violette—they now called him at the office "Father Violette," he had grown so aged and decrepit—was not too much "consoled" in the cafe in the Rue du Four, and when he was less silent and gloomy than usual, he would say to his son, after the soup:

"Do you know, Amedee, I shall not be easy in my mind until you have received your degree. Say what they may, it leads to everything."

To everything indeed! M. Violette had a college friend upon whom all the good marks had been showered, who, having been successively schoolmaster, journalist, theatrical critic, a boarder in Mazas prison, insurance agent, director of an athletic ring—he quoted Homer in his harangue—at present pushed back the curtains at the entrance to the Ambigu, and waited for his soup at the barracks gate, holding out an old tomato-can to be filled.

But M. Violette had no cause to fear! Amedee received his degree on the same day with his friend Maurice, and both passed honorably. A little old man with a head like a baboon—the scientific examiner—tried to make Amedee flounder on the subject of nitrogen, but he passed all the same. One can hope for everything nowadays.

But what could Amedee hope for first? M. Violette thought of it when he was not at his station at the Rue du Four. What could he hope for? Nothing very great.

Probably he could enter the ministry as an auxiliary. One hundred francs a month, and the gratuities, would not be bad for a beginner! M. Violette recalled his endless years in the office, and all the trouble he had taken to guess a famous rebus that was celebrated for never having been solved. Was Amedee to spend his youth deciphering enigmas? M. Violette hoped for a more independent career for his son, if it were possible. Commerce, for example! Yes! there was a future in commerce. As a proof of it there was the grocer opposite him, a simpleton who probably did not put the screws on enough and had just

hanged himself rather than go into bankruptcy. M. Violette would gladly see his son in business. If he could begin with M. Gaufre? Why not? The young man might become in the end his uncle's partner and make his fortune. M. Violette spoke of it to Amedee.

"Shall we go to see your uncle Sunday morning?"

The idea of selling chasubles and Stations of the Cross did not greatly please Amedee, who had concealed in his drawer a little book full of sonnets, and had in his mind the plan of a romantic drama wherein one would say "Good heavens!" and "My lord!" But first of all, he must please his father. He was glad to observe that for some time M. Violette had interested himself more in him, and had resisted his baneful habit somewhat. The young man offered no resistance. The next day at noon he presented himself at the Rue Servandoni, accompanied by his father.

The "dealer in pious goods" received them with great good-humor. He had just come from high mass and was about to sit down at the table. He even invited them to follow his example and taste of his stewed kidneys, one of Berenice's triumphs, who served the dinner with her hands loaded with rings. The Violettes had dined, and the father made known his desire.

"Yes," said Uncle Isidore, "Amedee might enter the house. Only you know, Violette, it will be another education to be learned over again. He must begin at the very beginning and follow the regular course. Oh! the boy will not be badly treated! He may take his meals with us, is not that so, Berenice? At first he would be obliged to run about a little, as I did when I came from the province to work in the shop and tie up parcels."

M. Violette looked at his son and saw that he was blushing with shame. The poor man understood his mistake. What good to have dazzled M. Patin before the whole University by reciting, without hesitation, three verses of Aristophanes, only to become a drudge and a packer? Well! so Amedee would yawn over green boxes and guess at enigmas in the Illustration. It had to be so.

They took leave of Uncle Isidore.

"We will reflect over it, Monsieur Gaufre, and will come to see you again."

But Berenice had hardly shut the door upon them when M. Violette said to his son:

"Nothing is to be expected of that old egotist. Tomorrow we will go to see the chief of my department, I have spoken of you to him, at all events."

He was a good sort of fellow, this M. Courtet, who was head clerk, though too conceited and starched up, certainly. His red rosette, as large as a fifty-cent piece, made one's eyes blink, and he certainly was very imprudent to stand so long backed up to the fireplace with limbs spread apart, for it seemed that he must surely burn the seat of his trousers. But no matter, he has stomach enough. He has noticed M. Violette's pitiful decline—"a poor devil who never will live to be promoted." Having it in his power to distribute positions, M. Courtet had reserved a position for Amedee. In eight days the young man would be nominated an auxiliary employe at fifteen hundred francs a year. It is promised and done.

Ugh! the sickening heat from the stove! the disgusting odor of musty papers! However, Amedee had nothing to complain of; they might have given him figures to balance for five hours at a time. He owed it to M. Courtet's kindness, that he was put at once into the correspondence room. He studied the formulas, and soon became skilful in official politeness. He now knew the delicate shades which exist between "yours respectfully" and "most respectfully yours;" and he measured the abyss which separates an "agreeable" and "homage."

To sum it all up, Amedee was bored, but he was not unhappy; for he had time to dream.

He went the longest way to the office in the morning, while seeking to make "amour" rhyme with "jour" without producing an insipid thing; or else he thought of the third act of his drama after the style of 1830, and the grand love scene which should take place at the foot of the Montfaucon gallows. In the evening he went to the Gerards, and they seated themselves around—the lamp which stood on the dining-room table, the father reading his journal, the women sewing. He chatted with Maria, who answered him the greater part of the time without raising her eyes, because she suspected, the coquette! that he admired her beautiful, drooping lids.

Amedee composed his first sonnets in her honor, and he adored her, of course, but he was also in love with the Lantz young ladies, whom he saw sometimes at Madame Roger's, and who each wore Sunday evenings roses in her hair, which made them resemble those pantheons in sponge-cake that pastry-cooks put in their windows on fete days.

If Amedee had been presented to twelve thousand maidens successively, they would have inspired twelve thousand wishes. There was the servant of the family on the first floor, whose side-glance troubled him as he met her on the staircase; and his heart sank every time he turned the handle of the door of a shop in the Rue Bonaparte, where an insidious clerk always forced him to choose ox-colored kid gloves, which he detested. It must not be forgotten that Amedee was very young, and was in love with love.

He was so extremely timid that he never had had the audacity to tell the girl at the glove counter that he preferred bronze-green gloves, nor the boldness to show Maria Gerard his poems composed in her honor, in which he now always put the plural "amours," so as to make it rhyme with "toujours," which was an improvement. He never had dared to reply to the glance of the little maid on the second floor; and he was very wrong to be embarrassed, for one morning, as he passed the butcher's shop, he saw the butcher's foreman put his arm about the girl's waist and whisper a love speech over a fine sirloin roast.

Sometimes, in going or coming from the office, Amedee would go to see his friend Maurice, who had obtained from Madame Roger permission to install himself in the Latin Quarter so as to be near the law school.

In a very low-studded first-floor room in the Rue Monsieur-le-Prince, Amedee perceived through a cloud of tobacco-smoke the elegant Maurice in a scarlet jacket lying upon a large divan. Everything was rich and voluptuous, heavy carpets, handsomely bound volumes of poems, an open piano, and an odor of perfumery mingled with that of cigarettes. Upon the velvet-covered mantel Mademoiselle Irma, the favorite of the master of the apartment, had left the last fashionable novel, marking, with one of her hairpins, where she had left off reading. Amedee spent a delightful hour there. Maurice always greeted him with his joyful, kind manner, in which one hardly minded the slight shade of patronage. He walked up and down his room, expanding his finely moulded chest, lighting and throwing away his cigarettes, seating himself for two minutes at the piano and playing one of Chopin's sad strains, opening a book and reading a page, showing his albums to his friend, making him repeat some of his poems, applauding him and touching lightly upon different subjects, and charming Amedee more and more by his grace and manners.

However, Amedee could not enjoy his friend much, as he rarely found him alone. Every few moments—the key was in the door—Maurice's comrades, young pleasure-seekers like himself, but more vulgar, not having his gentlemanly bearing and manners, would come to talk with him of some projected scheme or to remind him of some appointment for the evening.

Often, some one of them, with his hat upon his head, would dash off a polka, after placing his lighted cigar upon the edge of the piano. These fast fellows frightened Amedee a little, as he had the misfortune to be fastidious.

After these visitors had left, Maurice would ask his friend to dinner, but the door would open again, and Mademoiselle Irma, in her furs and small veil—a comical little face—would enter quickly and throw her arms about Amedee's neck, kissing him, while rumpling his hair with her gloved hands.

"Bravo! we will all three dine together."

No! Amedee is afraid of Mademoiselle Irma, who has already thrown her mantle upon the sofa and crowned the bronze Venus de Milo with her otter toque. The young man excuses himself, he is expected at home.

"Timid fellow, go!" said Maurice to him, as he conducted him to the door, laughing.

What longings! What dreams! They made up all of poor Amedee's life. Sometimes they were sad, for he suffered in seeing his father indulge himself more and more in his vice. No woman loved him, and he never had one louis in his pocket for pleasure or liberty. But he did not complain. His life was noble and happy! He smiled with pleasure as he thought of his good friends; his heart beat in great throbs as he thought of love; he wept with rapture over beautiful verses. The spectacle of life, through hope and the ideal, seemed to him transfigured. Happy Amedee! He was not yet twenty years old!

CHAPTER VII

One sombre, misty, winter morning, as Amedee lingered in his bed, his father entered, bringing him a letter that the wife of the concierge had just brought up. The letter was from Maurice, inviting his friend to dinner that evening at seven o'clock at Foyots, to meet some of his former companions at the Lycee Henri IV.

"Will you excuse me for not dining with you this evening, papa?" said Amedee, joyfully. "Maurice Roger entertains us at a restaurant."

The young man's gayety left him suddenly when he looked at his father, who had seated himself on the side of the bed. He had become almost frightful to look at; old before his time, livid of complexion, his eyes bloodshot, the rebellious lock of hair straggling over his right temple. Nothing was more heartbreaking than his senile smile when he placed his bony trembling hands upon his thighs. Amedee, who knew, alas, why his father had reached such a pass, felt his heart moved with pity and shame.

"Are you suffering to-day?" asked the young man. "Would you prefer that we should dine together as usual? I will send word to Maurice. Nothing is easier."

"No, my child, no!" replied M. Violette, in a hollow tone. "Go and amuse yourself with your friends. I know perfectly well that the life you lead with me is too monotonous. Go and amuse yourself, it will please me—only there is an idea that troubles me more than usual—and I want to confide it to you."

"What is it then, dear papa?"

"Amedee, last March your mother had been dead fifteen years. You hardly knew her. She was the sweetest and best of creatures, and all that I can wish you is, that you may meet such a woman, make her your companion for life, and be more fortunate than I, my poor Amedee, and keep her always. During these frightful years since your mother's death I have suffered, do you see? suffered horribly, and I have never, never been consoled. If I have lived—if I have had the strength to live, in spite of all, it was only for you and in remembrance of her. I think I have nearly finished my task. You are a young man, intelligent and honest, and you have now an employment which will give you your bread. However, I often ask myself—oh, very often—whether I have fulfilled my duty toward you. Ah! do not protest," added the unhappy man, whom Amedee had clasped in his arms. "No, my poor child, I have not loved you sufficiently; grief has filled too large a place in my heart; above all, during these last few years I have not been with you enough. I have sought solitude. You understand me, Amedee, I can not tell you more," he said, with a sob. "There are some parts of my life that you must ignore, and if it grieves you to know what I have become during that time, you must never think of it; forget it. I beg of you, my child, do not judge me severely. And one of these days, if I die—ah! we must expect it—the burden of my grief is too heavy for me to bear, it crushes me! Well, my child, if I die, promise me to be indulgent to my memory, and when you think of your father only say: 'He was very unhappy!'"

Amedee shed tears upon his father's shoulder, who softly stroked his son's beautiful hair with his trembling hands.

"My father, my good father!" sobbed Amedee, "I love and respect you with all my heart. I will dress myself quickly and we will go to the office together; we will return the same way and dine like a pair of good friends. I beg of you, do not ask me to leave you to-day!"

But M. Violette suddenly arose as if he had formed some resolution.

"No, Amedee," said he, firmly. "I have said what I had to say to you, and you will remember it. That is sufficient. Go and amuse yourself this evening with your friends. Sadness is dangerous at your age. As for myself, I shall go to dine with Pere Bastide, who has just received his pension, and has invited me more than twenty times to come and see his little house at Grand Montrouge. It is understood; I wish it. Now then, wipe your eyes and kiss me."

Having tenderly embraced his son, M. Violette left the room. Amedee could hear him in the vestibule take down his hat and cane, open and close the door, and go down the stairs with a heavy step. A quarter of an hour after, as the young man was crossing the Luxembourg to go to the office, he met Louise Gerard with her roll of music in her hand, going to give some lessons in the city. He walked a few steps beside her, and the worthy girl noticed his red eyes and disturbed countenance.

"What is the matter with you, Amedee?" she inquired, anxiously.

"Louise," he replied, "do you not think that my father has changed very much in the last few months?"

She stopped and looked at him with eyes shining with compassion.

"Very much changed, my poor Amedee. You would not believe me if I told you that I had not remarked it. But whatever may be the cause—how shall I say it?—that has affected your father's health, you should think of only one thing, my friend; that is, that he has been tender and devoted to you; that he became a widower very young and he did not remarry; that he has endured, in order to devote himself to his only child, long years of solitude and unhappy memories. You must think of that, Amedee, and that only."

"I never shall forget it, Louise, never fear; my heart is full of gratitude. This morning, even, he was so affectionate and kind to me— but his health is ruined; he is now a weak old man. Soon—I not only fear it, but I am certain of it—soon he will be incapable of work. I can see his poor hands tremble now. He will not even have a right to a pension. If he could not continue to work in the office he could hardly obtain a meagre relief, and that by favor only. And for long years I can only hope for an insufficient salary. Oh! to think that the catastrophe draws near, that one of these days he may fall ill and become infirm, perhaps, and that we shall be almost needy and I shall be unable to surround him with care in his old age. That is what makes me tremble!"

They walked along side by side upon the moist, soft ground of the large garden, under the leafless trees, where hung a slight penetrating mist which made them shiver under their wraps.

"Amedee," said she, looking at the young man with a serious gentleness, "I have known you from a child, and I am the elder. I am twenty-two; that makes me almost an old maid, Amedee, and gives me the right to scold you a little. You lack confidence in life, my friend, and it is wrong at your age. Do you think I do not see that my father has aged very much, that his eyesight fails, that we are much more cramped in circumstances in the house than formerly? Are we any the more sad? Mamma makes fewer little dishes and I teach in Paris, that is all. We live nearly the same as before, and our dear Maria—she is the pet of us all, the joy and pride of the house—well, our Maria, all the same, has from time to time a new frock or a pretty hat. I have no experience, but it seems to me that in order to feel really unhappy I must have nobody to love—that is the only privation worth the trouble of noticing. Do you know that I have just had one of the greatest pleasures of my life? I noticed that papa did not smoke as much as usual, in order to be economical, poor man! Fortunately I found a new pupil at Batignolles, and as soon as I had the first month's pay in my pocket I bought a large package of tobacco and put it beside his work. One must never complain so long as one is fortunate enough to keep those one loves. I know the secret grief that troubles you regarding your father; but think what he has suffered, that he loves you, that you are his only consolation. And when you have gloomy thoughts, come and see your old friends, Amedee. They will try to warm your heart at the fireside of their friendship, and to give you some of their courage, the courage of poor people which is composed of a little indifference and a little resignation."

They had reached the Florentine Terrace, where stand the marble statues of queens and ladies, and on the other side of the balustrade, ornamented with large vases, they could see through the mist the reservoir with its two swans, the solitary gravel walks, the empty grass-plots of a pale green, surrounded by the skeletons of lilac-trees, and the facade of the old palace, whose clock-hands pointed to ten.

"Let us hasten," said Louise, after a glance at the dial. "Escort me as far as the Odeon omnibus. I am a little late."

As he walked by her side he looked at her. Alas! Poor Louise was not pretty, in spite of her large eyes, so loving but not coquettish. She wore a close, ugly hat, a mantle drawn tightly about her shoulders, colored gloves, and heavy walking-shoes. Yes, she was a perfect picture of a "two francs an hour" music-teacher. What a good, brave girl! With what an overflowing heart she had spoken of her family! It was to earn tobacco for her father and a new frock for her pretty sister that she left thus, so early in the misty morning, and rode in public conveyances, or tramped through the streets of Paris in the mud. The sight of her, more than what she said, gave the weak and melancholy Amedee courage and desire for manly resolutions.

"My dear Louise," said he, with emotion, "I am very fortunate to have such a friend as you, and for so many years! Do you remember when we used to have our hunts after the bearskin cap when we were children?"

They had just left the garden and found themselves behind the Odeon. Two tired-out omnibus horses, of a yellowish-white, and showing their ribs, were rubbing their noses against each other like a caress; then the horse on the left raised his head and placed it in a friendly way upon the other's mane. Louise pointed to the two animals and said to Amedee, smilingly:

"Their fate is hard, is it not? No matter! they are good friends, and that is enough to help them endure it."

Then, shaking hands with Amedee, she climbed lightly up into the carriage.

All that day at the office Amedee was uneasy about his father, and about four o'clock, a little before the time for his departure, he went to M. Violette's office. There they told him that his father had just left, saying that he would dine at Grand Montrouge with an old friend; and Amedee, a trifle reassured, decided to rejoin his friend Maurice at the Foyot restaurant.

CHAPTER VIII

BUTTERFLIES AND GRASSHOPPERS

Amedee was the first to arrive at the rendezvous. He had hardly pronounced Maurice Roger's name when a voice like a cannon bellowed out, "Now then! the yellow parlor!" and he was conducted into a room where a dazzling table was laid by a young man, with a Yankee goatee and whiskers, and the agility of a prestidigitateur. This frisky person relieved Amedee at once of his hat and coat, and left him alone in the room, radiant with lighted candles.

Evidently it was to be a banquet. Piled up in the centre of the table was a large dish of crayfish, and at each plate—there were five—were groups of large and small glasses.

Maurice came in almost immediately, accompanied by his other guests, three young men dressed in the latest fashion, whom Amedee did not at first recognize as his former comrades, who once wore wrinkled stockings and seedy coats, and wore out with him the seats of their trousers on the benches of the Lycee Henri IV.

After the greetings, "What! is it you?" "Do you remember me?" and a shaking of hands, they all seated themselves around the table.

What! is that little dumpy fellow with the turned-up nose, straight as an arrow and with such a satisfied air, Gorju, who wanted to be an actor? He is one now, or nearly so, since he studies with Regnier at the Conservatoire. A make-believe actor, he puts on airs, and in the three minutes that he has been in the room he has looked at his retrousse nose and his coarse face, made to be seen from a distance, ten times in the mirror. His first care is to inform Amedee that he has renounced his name Gorju, which was an impossible one for the theatre, and has taken that of Jocquelet. Then, without losing a moment, he refers to his "talents," "charms," and "physique."

Who is this handsome fellow with such neat side-whiskers, whose finely cut features suggest an intaglio head, and who has just placed a lawyer's heavy portfolio upon the sofa? It is Arthur Papillon, the distinguished Latin scholar who wished to organize a debating society at the Lycee, and to divide the rhetoric class into groups and sub-groups like a parliament. "What have you been doing, Papillon?" Papillon had studied law, and was secretary of the Patru Conference, of course.

Amedee immediately recognized the third guest.

"What! Gustave!" exclaimed he, joyously.

Yes! Gustave, the former "dunce," the one they had called "Good-luck" because his father had made an immense fortune in guano. Not one bit changed was Gustave! The same deep-set eyes and greenish complexion. But what style! English from the tips of his pointed shoes to the horseshoe scarfpin in his necktie. One would say that he was a horse-jockey dressed in his Sunday best. What was this comical Gustave doing now? Nothing. His father has made two hundred thousand pounds' income dabbling in certain things, and Gustave is getting acquainted with that is all—which means to wake up every morning toward noon, with a bitter mouth caused from the last night's supper, and to be surprised every morning at dawn at the baccarat table, after spending five hours saying "Bac!" in a stifled, hollow voice. Gustave understands life, and, taking into consideration his countenance like a death's-head, it may lead him to make the acquaintance of something entirely different. But who thinks of death at his age? Gustave wishes to know life, and when a fit of coughing interrupts him in one of his idiotic bursts of laughter, his comrades at the Gateux Club tell him that he has swallowed the wrong way. Wretched Gustave, so be it!

Meanwhile the boy with the juggler's motions appeared with the soup, and made exactly the same gestures when he uncovered the tureen as Robert Houdin would have made, and one was surprised not

to see a bunch of flowers or a live rabbit fly out. But no! it was simply soup, and the guests attacked it vigorously and in silence. After the Rhine wine all tongues were unloosened, and as soon as they had eaten the Normandy sole—oh! what glorious appetites at twenty years of age!—the five young men all talked at once. What a racket! Exclamations crossed one another like rockets. Gustave, forcing his weak voice, boasted of the performances of a "stepper" that he had tried that morning in the Allee des Cavaliers. He would have been much better off had he stayed in his bed and taken cod-liver oil. Maurice called out to the boy to uncork the Chateau-Leoville. Amedee, having spoken of his drama to the comedian Gorju, called Jocquelet, that person, speaking in his bugle-like voice that came through his bugle-shaped nose, set himself up at once as a man of experience, giving his advice, and quoting, with admiration, Talma's famous speech to a dramatic poet: "Above all, no fine verses!" Arthur Papillon, who was destined for the courts, thought it an excellent time to lord it over the tumult of the assembly himself, and bleated out a speech of Jules Favre that he had heard the night before in the legislative assembly.

The timid Amedee was defeated at the start in this melee of conversation. Maurice also kept silent, with a slightly disdainful smile under his golden moustache, and an attack of coughing soon disabled Gustave. Alone, like two ships in line who let out, turn by turn, their volleys, the lawyer and the actor continued their cannonading. Arthur Papillon, who belonged to the Liberal opposition and wished that the Imperial government should come around to "a pacific and regular movement of parliamentary institutions," was listened to for a time, and explained, in a clear, full voice the last article in the 'Courrier du Dimanche'. But, bursting out in his terrible voice, which seemed like all of Gideon's trumpets blowing at once, the comedian took up the offensive, and victoriously declared a hundred foolish things—saying, for example, that the part of Alceste should be made a comic one; making fun of Shakespeare and Hugo, exalting Scribe, and in spite of his profile and hooked nose, which should have opened the doors of the Theatre-Francais and given him an equal share for life in its benefits, he affirmed that he intended to play lovers' parts, and that he meant to assume the responsibility of making "sympathetic" the role of Nero, in Britannicus.

This would have become terribly tiresome, but for the entrance upon the scene of some truffled partridges, which the juggler carved and distributed in less time than it would take to shuffle a pack of cards. He even served the very worst part of the bird to the simple Amedee, as he would force him to choose the nine of spades. Then he poured out the chambertin, and once more all heads became excited, and the conversation fell, as was inevitable, upon the subject of women.

Jocquelet began it, by speaking the name of one of the prettiest actresses in Paris. He knew them all and described them exactly, detailing their beauties like a slave-dealer.

"So little Lucille Prunelle is a friend of the great Moncontour—"

"Pardon me," interrupted Gustave, who was looking badly, "she has already left him for Cerfbeer the banker."

"I say she has not."

"I say that she has."

They would have quarrelled if Maurice, with his affable, bantering air, had not attacked Arthur Papillon on the subject of his love-affairs; for the young advocate drank many cups of Orleanist tea, going even into the same drawing-rooms as Beule and Prevost-Paradol, and accompanying political ladies to the receptions at the Academie Francaise.

"That is where you must make havoc, you rascal!"

But Papillon defends himself with conceited smiles and meaning looks. According to him—and he puts his two thumbs into the armholes of his vest—the ambitious must be chaste.

"Abstineo venere," said he, lowering his eyes in a comical manner, for he did not fear Latin quotations. However, he declared himself very hard to please in that matter; he dreamed of an Egeria, a superior mind. What he did not tell them was, that a dressmaker's little errand-girl, with whom he had tried to converse as he left the law-school, had surveyed him from head to foot and threatened him with the police.

Upon some new joke of Maurice's, the lawyer gave his amorous programme in the following terms:

"Understand me, a woman must be as intelligent as Hypatia, and have the sensibility of Heloise; the smile of a Joconde, and the limbs of an Antiope; and, even then, if she had not the throat of a Venus de Medicis, I should not love her."

Without going quite so far, the actor showed himself none the less exacting. According to his ideas, Deborah, the tragedienne at the Odeon—a Greek statue!—had too large hands, and the fascinating Blanche Pompon at the Varietes was a mere wax doll.

Gustave, after all, was the one who is most intractable; excited by the Bordeaux wine—a glass of mineral water would be best for him—he proclaimed that the most beautiful creature was agreeable to him only for one day; that it was a matter of principle, and that he had never made but one exception, in favor of the illustrious dancer at the Casino Cadet, Nina l'Auvergnate, because she was so comical! "Oh! my friends, she is so droll, she is enough to kill one!"

"To kill one!" Yes! my dear Monsieur Gustave, that is what will happen to you one of these fine mornings, if you do not decide to lead a more reasonable life—and on the condition that you pass your winters in the South, also!

Poor Amedee was in torture; all his illusions—desires and sentiments blended—were cruelly wounded. Then, he had just discovered a deplorable faculty; a new cause for being unhappy. The sight of this foolishness made him suffer. How these coarse young men lied! Gustave seemed to him a genuine idiot, Arthur Papillon a pedant, and as to Jocquelet, he was as unbearable as a large fly buzzing between the glass and the curtain of a nervous man's room. Fortunately, Maurice made a little diversion by bursting into a laugh.

"Well, my friends, you are all simpletons," he exclaimed. "I am not like you, thank fortune! I do not sputter over my soup. Long life to women! Yes, all of them, pretty and otherwise! For, upon my word, there are no ugly ones. I do not notice that Miss Keepsake has feet like the English, and I forget the barmaid's ruddy complexion, if she is attractive otherwise. Now do not talk in this stupid fashion, but do as I do; nibble all the apples while you have teeth. Do you know the reason why, at the moment that I am talking to the lady of the house, I notice the nose of the pretty waitress who brings in a letter on a salver? Do you know the reason why, just as I am leaving Cydalize's house, who has put a rose in my buttonhole, that I turn my head at the passing of Margoton, who is returning from the market with a basket upon her arm? It is because it is one other of my children. One other! that is a great word! Yes, one thousand and three. Don Juan was right. I feel his blood coursing in my veins. And now the boy shall uncork some champagne, shall he not? to drink to the health of love!"

Maurice was cynical, but this exposition of his philosophy served a good purpose all the same. Everybody applauded him. The prestidigitateur, who moved about the table like a schoolboy in a monkey-house, drew the cork from a bottle of Roederer—it was astonishing that fireworks did not dart out of it—and good-humor was restored. It reigned noisily until the end of the repast, when the effect was spoiled by that fool of a Gustave. He insisted upon drinking three glasses of kummel—why had they not poured in maple sirup?—and, imagining that Jocquelet looked at him askance, he suddenly manifested the intention of cutting his head open with the carafe. The comedian, who was very pale, recalled all the scenes of provocation that he had seen in the theatre; he stiffened in his chair, swelled out his chest, and stammered, "At your orders!" trying to "play the situation." But it was useless.

Gustave, restrained by Maurice and Amedee, and as drunk as a Pole, responded to his friend's objurgations by a torrent of tears, and fell under the table, breaking some of the dishes.

"Now, then, we must take the baby home," said Maurice, signing to the boy. In the twinkling of an eye the human rag called Gustave was lifted into a chair, clothed in his topcoat and hat, dressed and spruced up, pushed down the spiral staircase, and landed in a cab. Then the prestidigitateur returned and performed his last trick by making the plate disappear upon which Maurice had thrown some money to pay the bill.

It was not far from eleven o'clock when the comrades shook hands, in a thick fog, in which the gaslights looked like the orange pedlers' paper lanterns. Ugh! how damp it was!

"Good-by."

"I will see you again soon."

"Good-night to the ladies."

Arthur Papillon was in evening dress and white cravat, his customary attire every evening, and still had time to show himself in a political salon on the left side, where he met Moichod, the author of that famous *Histoire de Napoleon*, in which he proves that Napoleon was only a mediocre general, and that all his battles were gained by his lieutenants. Jocquelet wished to go to the Odeon and hear, for the tenth time, the fifth act of a piece of the common-sense school, in which the hero, after haranguing against money for four acts in badly rhymed verse, ends by marrying the young heiress, to the great satisfaction of the bourgeois. As to Maurice, before he went to rejoin Mademoiselle Irma at the Rue

Monsieur-le-Prince, he walked part of the way with Amedee.

"These comrades of ours are a little stupid, aren't they?" said he to his friend.

"I must say that they almost disgust me," replied the young man. "Their brutal way of speaking of women and love wounded me, and you too, Maurice. So much the worse! I will be honest; you, who are so refined and proud, tell me that you did not mean what you said—that you made a pretence of vice just to please the others. It is not possible that you are content simply to gratify your appetite and make yourself a slave to your passions. You ought to have a higher ideal. Your conscience must reproach you."

Maurice brusquely interrupted this tirade, laughing in advance at what he was about to say.

"My conscience? Oh, tender and artless Violette; Oh, modest wood-flower! Conscience, my poor friend, is like a Suede glove, you can wear it soiled. Adieu! We will talk of this another day, when Mademoiselle Irma is not waiting for me."

Amedee walked on alone, shivering in the mist, weary and sad, to the Rue Notre-Dame-des-Champs.

No! it could not be true. There must be another love than that known to these brutes. There were other women besides the light creatures they had spoken of. His thoughts reverted to the companion of his childhood, to the pretty little Maria, and again he sees her sewing near the family lamp, and talking with him without raising her eyes, while he admires her beautiful, drooping lashes. He is amazed to think that this delicious child's presence has never given him the slightest uneasiness; that he has never thought of any other happiness than that of being near her. Why should not a love like that he has dreamed of some day spring up in her own heart? Have they not grown up together? Is he not the only young man that she knows intimately? What happiness to become her fiancee! Yes, it was thus that one should love! Hereafter he would flee from all temptations; he would pass all his evenings with the Gerards; he would keep as near as possible to his dear Maria, content to hear her speak, to see her smile; and he would wait with a heart full of tenderness for the moment when she would consent to become his wife. Oh! the exquisite union of two chaste beings! the adorable kiss of two innocent mouths! Did such happiness really exist?

This beautiful dream warmed the young man's heart, and he reached his home joyous and happy. He gave a vigorous pull to the bell, climbed quickly up the long flights of stairs and opened the door to their apartment. But what was this? His father must have come home very late, for a stream of light shines under the door of his sleeping-room.

"Poor man!" thought Amedee, recalling the scene of the morning.
"He may be ill. Let us see."

He had hardly opened the door, when he drew back uttering a shriek of horror and distress. By the light of a candle that burned upon the mantel, Amedee had caught sight of his father extended upon the floor, his shirt disordered and covered with blood, holding in his clenched right hand the razor with which he had cut his throat.

Yes! the union of two loving hearts had at last taken place. Their love was happiness on earth; but if one of the two dies the other can never be consoled while life lasts.

M. Violette never was consoled.

CHAPTER IX

THORNS OF JEALOUSY

Now Amedee had no family. The day after his father's death he had a violent rupture with M. Isidore Gaufre. Under the pretext that a suicide horrified him, he allowed his niece's husband to be carried to the cemetery in a sixth-class hearse, and did not honor with his presence the funeral, which was even prohibited from using the parish road. But the saintly man was not deterred from swallowing for his dinner that same day, while thundering against the progress of materialism, tripe cooked after the Caen fashion, one of Berenice's weekly works of art.

Amedee had now no family, and his friends were dispersed. As a reward for passing his examinations in law, Madame Roger took her son with her on a trip to Italy, and they had just left France together.

As to the poor Gerards, just one month after M. Violette's death, the old engraver died suddenly, of apoplexy, at his work; and on that day there were not fifty francs in the house. Around the open grave where they lowered the obscure and honest artist, there was only a group of three women, in black, who were weeping, and Amedee in mourning for his father, with a dozen of Gerard's old comrades, whose romantic heads had become gray. The family was obliged to sell at once, in order to get a little money, what remained of proof-sheets in the boxes, some small paintings, old presents from artist friends who had become celebrated, and the last of the ruined knickknacks—indeed, all that constituted the charm of the house. Then, in order that her eldest daughter might not be so far from the boarding-school where she was employed as teacher of music, Madame Gerard went to live in the Rue St.-Pierre, in Montmartre, where they found a little cheap, first-floor apartment, with a garden as large as one's hand.

Now that he was reduced to his one hundred and twenty-five francs, Amedee was obliged to leave his too expensive apartment in the Rue Notre-Dame- des-Champs, and to sell the greater part of his family furniture. He kept only his books and enough to furnish his little room, perched under the roof of an old house in the Faubourg St.-Jacques.

It was far from Montmartre, so he could not see his friends as often as he would have liked, those friends whom grief in common had made dearer than ever to him. One single consolation remained for him—literary work. He threw himself into it blindly, deadening his sorrow with the fruitful and wonderful opiate of poetry and dreams. However, he had now begun to make headway, feeling that he had some thing new to say. He had long ago thrown into the fire his first poems, awkward imitations of favorite authors, also his drama after the style of 1830, where the two lovers sang a duet at the foot of the scaffold. He returned to truth and simplicity by the longest way, the schoolboy's road. Taste and inclination both induced him to express simply and honestly what he saw before him; to express, so far as he could, the humble ideal of the poor people with whom he had lived in the melancholy Parisian suburbs where his infancy was passed; in a word, to paint from nature. He tried, feeling that he could succeed; and in those days lived the most beautiful and perfect hours of his life—those in which the artist, already master of his instrument, having still the abundance and vivacity of youthful sensations, writes the first words that he knows to be good, and writes them with entire disinterestedness, not even thinking that others will see them; working for himself alone and for the sole joy of putting in visible form and spreading abroad his ideas, his thoughts—all his heart. Those moments of pure enthusiasm and perfect happiness he never could know again, even after he had nibbled at the savory food of success and had experienced the feverish desire for glory. Delicious hours they were, and sacred, too, such as can only be compared to the divine intoxication of first love.

Amedee worked courageously during the winter months that followed his father's death. He arose at six o'clock in the morning, lighted his lamp and the little stove which heated his room, and, walking up and down, leaning over his page, the poet would vigorously begin his struggle with fancies, ideas, and words. At nine o'clock he would go out and breakfast at a neighboring creamery; after which he would go to his office. There, his tiresome papers once written, he had two or three hours of leisure, which he employed in reading and taking notes from the volumes borrowed by him every morning at a reading-room on the Rue Rorer-Collard; for he had already learned that one leaves college almost ignorant, having, at best, only learned how to study. He left the office at nightfall and reached his room through the Boulevard des Invalides, and Montparnasse, which at this time was still planted with venerable elms; sometimes the lamplighter would be ahead of him, making the large gas-jets shoot out under the leafless old trees. This walk, that Amedee imposed upon himself for health's sake, would bring him, about six o'clock, a workman's appetite for his dinner,—in the little creamery situated in front of Val-de-Grace, where he had formed the habit of going. Then he would return to his garret, and relight his stove and lamp, and work until midnight. This ardent, continuous effort, this will-tension kept in his mind the warmth, animation, and excitement indispensable for poetical production. His mind expanded rapidly, ready to receive the germs that were blown to him by the mysterious winds of inspiration. At times he was astonished to see his pen fill the sheet so rapidly that he would stop, filled with pride at having thus reduced to obedience words and rhythms, and would ask himself what supernatural power had permitted him to arm these divine wild birds.

On Sundays, he had his meals brought him by the concierge, working all day and not going out until nearly five o'clock in the afternoon, to dine with Mamma Gerard. It was the only distraction that he allowed himself, or rather the only recompense that he permitted himself. He walked halfway across Paris to buy a cake in the Rue Fontaine for their dessert; then he climbed without fatigue, thanks to his young legs, to the top of Montmartre, lighted by swinging lamps, where one could almost believe one's self in the distant corner of some province. They would be waiting for him to serve the soup, and the young man would seat himself between the widow and the two orphans.

Alas, how hard these poor ladies' lives had become! Damourette, a member of the Institute, remembered that he had once joked in the studios with Gerard, and obtained a small annual pension for the widow; but it was charity—hardly enough to pay the rent. Fortunately Louise, who already looked like an old maid at twenty-three, going about the city all day with her roll of music under her black shawl, had many pupils, and more than twenty houses had well-nigh become uninhabitable through her exertions with little girls, whose red hands made an unendurable racket with their chromatic scales. Louise's earnings constituted the surest part of their revenue. What a strange paradox is the social life in large cities, where Weber's Last Waltz will bring the price of a four-pound loaf of bread, and one pays the grocer with the proceeds of Boccherini's Minuet!

In spite of all, they had hard work to make both ends meet at the Gerards. The pretty Maria wished to make herself useful and aid her mother and sister. She had always shown great taste for drawing, and her father used to give her lessons in pastel. Now she went to the Louvre to work, and tried to copy the Chardins and Latours. She went there alone. It was a little imprudent, she was so pretty; but Louise had no time to go with her, and her mother had to be at home to attend to the housework and cooking. Maria's appearance had already excited the hearts of several young daubers. There were several cases of persistent sadness and loss of appetite in Flandrin's studio; and two of Signol's pupils, who were surprised hovering about the young artist, were hated secretly as rivals; certain projects of duels, after the American fashion, were profoundly considered. To say that Maria was not a little flattered to see all these admirers turn timidly and respectfully toward her; to pretend that she took off her hat and hung it on one corner of her easel because the heat from the furnace gave her neuralgia and not to show her beautiful hair, would be as much of a lie as a politician's promise. However, the little darling was very serious, or at least tried to be. She worked conscientiously and made some progress. Her last copy of the portrait of that Marquise who holds a pug dog in her lap, with a ribbon about his neck, was not very bad. This copy procured a piece of good luck for the young artist.

Pere Issacar, a bric-a-brac merchant on the Quay Voltairean—an old-fashioned Jew with a filthy overcoat, the very sight of which made one long to tear it off—approached Maria one day, just as she was about to sketch a rose in the Marquise's powdered wig, and after raising a hat greasy enough to make the soup for a whole regiment, said to her:

"Matemoiselle, would you make me von dozen vamily bordraits?"

The young girl did not at first understand his abominable language, but at last he made her comprehend.

Every thing is bought nowadays, even rank, provided, of course, that one has a purse sufficiently well filled. Nothing is simpler! In return for a little money you can procure at the Vatican—second corridor on your right, third door at the left—a brand-new title of Roman Count. A heraldic agency—see advertisement—will plant and make grow at your will a genealogical tree, under whose shade you can give a country breakfast to twenty-five people. You buy a castle with port-holes—port-holes are necessary—in a corner of some reactionary province. You call upon the lords of the surrounding castles with a gold fleur-de-lys in your cravat. You pose as an enraged Legitimist and ferocious Clerical. You give dinners and hunting parties, and the game is won. I will wager that your son will marry into a Faubourg St.-Germain family, a family which descends authentically from the Crusaders.

In order to execute this agreeable buffoonery, you must not forget certain accessories—particularly portraits of your ancestors. They should ornament the castle walls where you regale the country nobles. One must use tact in the selection of this family gallery. There must be no exaggeration. Do not look too high. Do not claim as a founder of your race a knight in armor hideously painted, upon wood, with his coat of arms in one corner of the panel. Bear in mind the date of chivalry. Be satisfied with the head of a dynasty whose gray beard hangs over a well-crimped ruff. I saw a very good example of that kind the other day on the Place Royale. A dog was just showing his disrespect for it as I passed. You can obtain an ancestor like this in the outskirts of the city for fifteen francs, if you haggle a little. Or you need not give yourself so much trouble. Apply to a specialist, Pere Issacar, for instance. He will procure magnificent ancestors for you; not dear either! If you will consent to descend to simple magistrates, the price will be insignificant. Chief justices are dirt cheap. Naturally, if you wish to be of the military profession, to have eminent clergy among your antecedents, the price increases. Pere Issacar is the only one who can give you, at a reasonable rate, ermine-draped bishops, or a colonel with a Louis XIV wig, and, if you wish it, a blue ribbon and a breast-plate under his red coat. What produces a good effect in a series of family portraits is a series of pastels. What would you say to a goggle-eyed abbe, or an old lady indecently décolletée, or a captain of dragoons wearing a tigerskin cap (it is ten francs more if he has the cross of St. Louis)? Pere Issacar knows his business, and always has in reserve thirty of these portraits in charming frames of the period, made expressly for him in the Faubourg St.-Antoine, and which have all been buried fifteen days and riddled with shot, in order to have the musty appearance and indispensable worm holes.

You can understand now why the estimable Jew, in passing through the Louvre for his weekly promenade, took an interest in little Maria copying the charming Marquise de Latour. He was just at this time short of powdered marquises, and they are always very much in demand. He begged the young woman to take her copy home and make twelve more of it, varying, only the color of the dress and some particular detail in each portrait. Thus, instead of the pug dog, marquise No. 2 would hold a King Charles spaniel, No. 2 a monkey, No. 3 a bonbon box, No. 4 a fan. The face could remain the same. All marquises looked alike to Pere Issacar; he only exacted that they should all be provided with two black patches, one under the right eye, the other on the left shoulder. This he insisted upon, for the patch, in his eyes, was a symbol of the eighteenth century.

Pere Issacar was a fair man and promised to furnish frames, paper, and pastels, and to pay the young girl fifteen francs for each marquise. What was better yet, he promised, if he was pleased with the first work, to order of the young artist a dozen canonesses of Remiremont and a half-dozen of royal gendarmes.

I wish you could have seen those ladies when Maria went home to tell the good news. Louise had just returned from distributing semiquavers in the city; her eyes and poor Mother Gerard's were filled with tears of joy.

"What, my darling," said the mother, embracing her child, "are you going to trouble yourself about our necessaries of life, too?"

"Do you see this little sister?" said Louise, laughing cordially. "She is going to earn a pile of money as large as she is herself. Do you know that I am jealous—I, with my piano and my displeasing profession? Good-luck to pastel! It is not noisy, it will not annoy the neighbors, and when you are old you can say, 'I never have played for anybody.'"

But Maria did not wish them to joke. They had always treated her like a doll, a spoiled child, who only knew how to curl her hair and tumble her frocks. Well, they should see!

When Amedee arrived on Sunday with his cake, they told him over several times the whole story, with a hundred details, and showed him the two marquises that Maria had already finished, who wore patches as large as wafers.

She appeared that day more attractive and charming than ever to the young man, and it was then that he conceived his first ambition. If he only had enough talent to get out of his obscurity and poverty, and could become a famous writer and easily earn his living! It was not impossible, after all. Oh, with what pleasure he would ask this exquisite child to be his wife! How sweet it would be to know that she was happy with, and proud of, him! But he must not think of it now, they were too poor; and then, would Maria love him?

He often asked himself that question, and with uneasiness. In his own heart he felt that the childish intimacy had become a sincere affection, a real love. He had no reason to hope that the same transformation had taken place in the young girl's heart. She always treated him very affectionately, but rather like a good comrade, and she was no more stirred by his presence now than she was when she had lain in wait with him behind the old green sofa to hunt Father Gerard's battered fur hat.

Amedee had most naturally taken the Gerard family into his confidence regarding his work. After the Sunday dinner they would seat themselves around the table where Mamma Gerard had just served the coffee, and the young man would read to his friends, in a grave, slow voice, the poem he had composed during the week. A painter having the taste and inclination for interior scenes, like the old masters of the Dutch school, would have been stirred by the contemplation of this group of four persons in mourning. The poet, with his manuscript in his right hand and marking the syllables with a rhythmical movement of his left, was seated between the two sisters. But while Louise—a little too thin and faded for her years—fixes her attentive eyes upon the reader and listens with avidity, the pretty Maria is listless and sits with a bored little face, gazing mechanically at the other side of the table. Mother Gerard knits with a serious air and her spectacles perched upon the tip of her nose.

Alas! during these readings Louise was the only one who heaved sighs of emotion; and sometimes even great tear-drops would tremble upon her lashes. She was the only one who could find just the right delicate word with which to congratulate the poet, and show that she had understood and been touched by his verses. At the most Maria would sometimes accord the young poet, still agitated by the declamation of his lines, a careless "It is very pretty!" with a commonplace smile of thanks.

She did not care for poetry, then? Later, if he married her, would she remain indifferent to her husband's intellectual life, insensible even to the glory that he might reap? How sad it was for Amedee to have to ask himself that question!

Soon Maria inspired a new fear within him. Maurice and his mother had been already three months in Italy, and excepting two letters that he had received from Milan, at the beginning of his journey, in the first flush of his enthusiasm, Amedee had had no news from his friend. He excused this negligence on the part of the lazy Maurice, who had smilingly told him, on the eve of departure, not to count upon hearing from him regularly. At each visit that Amedee paid the Gerards, Maria always asked him:

"Have you received any news from your friend Maurice?"

At first he had paid no attention to this, but her persistency at length astonished him, planting a little germ of suspicion and alarm in his heart. Maurice Roger had only paid the Gerards a few visits during the father's lifetime, and accompanied on each occasion by Amedee. He had always observed the most respectful manner toward Maria, and they had perhaps exchanged twenty words. Why should Maria preserve such a particular remembrance of a person so nearly a stranger to her? Was it possible that he had made a deep impression, perhaps even inspired a sentiment of love? Did she conceal in the depths of her heart, when she thought of him, a tender hope? Was she watching for him? Did she wish him to return?

When these fears crossed Amedee's mind, he felt a choking sensation, and his heart was troubled. Happy Maurice, who had only to be seen to please! But immediately, with a blush of shame, the generous poet chased away this jealous fancy. But every Sunday, when Maria, lowering her eyes, and with a slightly embarrassed voice, repeated her question, "Have you received any news from Monsieur Maurice?" Amedee felt a cruelly discouraged feeling, and thought, with deep sadness:

"She never will love me!"

To conquer this new grief, he plunged still more deeply into work; but he did not find his former animation and energy. After the drizzling rain of the last days of March, the spring arrived. Now, when Amedee awoke, it was broad daylight at six o'clock in the morning. Opening his mansard window, he admired, above the tops of the roofs, the large, ruddy sun rising in the soft gray sky, and from the convent gardens beneath came a fresh odor of grass and damp earth. Under the shade of the arched lindens which led to the shrine of a plaster Virgin, a first and almost imperceptible rustle, a presentiment of verdure, so to speak, ran through the branches, and the three almond trees in the kitchen-garden put forth their delicate flowers. The young poet was invaded by a sweet and overwhelming languor, and Maria's face, which was commonly before his inner vision upon awakening, became confused and passed from his mind. He seated himself for a moment before a table and reread the last lines of a page that he had begun; but he was immediately overcome by physical lassitude, and abandoned himself to thought, saying to himself that he was twenty years old, and that it would be very good, after all, to enjoy life.

CHAPTER X

A BUDDING POET

It is the first of May, and the lilacs in the Luxembourg Gardens are in blossom. It has just struck four o'clock. The bright sun and the pure sky have rendered more odious than ever the captivity of the office to Amedee, and he departs before the end of the sitting for a stroll in the Medicis garden around the pond, where, for the amusement of the children in that quarter, a little breeze from the northeast is pushing on a miniature flotilla. Suddenly he hears himself called by a voice which bursts out like a brass band at a country fair.

"Good-day, Violette."

It is Jocquelet, the future comedian, with his turned-up nose, which cuts the air like the prow of a first-class ironclad, superb, triumphant, dressed like a Brazilian, shaved to the quick, the dearest hope of Regnier's class at the Conservatoire-Jocquelet, who has made an enormous success in an act from the "Precieuses," at the last quarter's examination—he says so himself, without any useless modesty—Jocquelet, who will certainly have the first comedy prize at the next examination, and will make his debut with out delay at the Comedie Francaise! All this he announces in one breath, like a speech learned by heart, with his terrible voice, like a quack selling shaving-paste from a gilded carriage. In two minutes that favorite word of theatrical people had been repeated thirty times, punctuating the phrases: "I! I! I! I!"

Amedee is only half pleased at the meeting. Jocquelet was always a little too noisy to please him. After all, he was an old comrade, and out of politeness the poet congratulated him upon his success.

Jocquelet questioned him. What was Amedee doing? What had become of him? Where was his literary work? All this was asked with such cordiality and warmth of manner that one would have thought that Jocquelet was interested in Amedee, and had a strong friendship for him. Nothing of the sort. Jocquelet was interested in only one person in this world, and that person was named Jocquelet. One is either an actor or he is not. This personage was always one wherever he was—in an omnibus, while putting on his suspenders, even with the one he loved. When he said to a newcomer, "How do you do?" he put so much feeling into this very original question, that the one questioned asked himself whether he really had not just recovered from a long and dangerous illness. Now, at this time Jocquelet found himself in the presence of an unknown and poor young poet. What role ought such an eminent person as himself to play in such circumstances? To show affection for the young man, calm his timidity, and patronize him without too much haughtiness; that was the position to take, and Jocquelet acted it.

Amedee was an artless dupe, and, touched by the interest shown him, he frankly replied:

"Well, my dear friend, I have worked hard this winter. I am not dissatisfied. I think that I have made some progress; but if you knew how hard and difficult it is!"

He was about to confide to Jocquelet the doubts and sufferings of a sincere artist, but Jocquelet, as we have said, thought only of himself, and brusquely interrupted the young poet:

"You do not happen to have a poem with you—something short, a hundred or a hundred and fifty lines—a poem intended for effect, that one could recite?"

Amedee had copied out that very day, at the office, a war story, a heroic episode of Sebastopol that he had heard Colonel Lantz relate not long since at Madame Roger's, and had put into verse with a good French sentiment and quite the military spirit, verse which savored of powder, and went off like reports of musketry. He took the sheets out of his pocket, and, leading the comedian into a solitary by-path of sycamores which skirted the Luxembourg orangery, he read his poem to him in a low voice. Jocquelet, who did not lack a certain literary instinct, was very enthusiastic, for he foresaw a success for himself, and said to the poet:

"You read those verses just like a poet, that is, very badly. But no matter, this battle is very effective, and I see what I could do with it— with my voice. But what do you mean?" added he, planting himself in front of his friend. "Do you write verses like these and nobody knows anything about them? It is absurd. Do you wish, then, to imitate Chatterton? That is an old game, entirely used up! You must push yourself, show yourself. I will take charge of that myself! Your evening is free, is it not? Very well, come with me; before six o'clock I shall have told your name to twenty trumpeters, who will make all Paris resound with the news that there is a poet in the Faubourg Saint-Jacques. I will wager, you savage, that you never have put your foot into the Cafe de Seville. Why, my dear fellow, it is our first manufactory of fame! Here is the Odeon omnibus, get on! We shall be at the Boulevard Montmartre in twenty minutes, and I shall baptize you there, as a great man, with a glass of absinthe."

Dazzled and carried away, Amedee humored him and climbed upon the outside of the omnibus with his comrade. The vehicle hurried them quickly along toward the quay, crossed the Seine, the Carrousel, and passed before the Theatre-Francais, at which Jocquelet, thinking of his approaching debut, shook his fist, exclaiming, "Now I am ready for you!" Here the young men were planted upon the asphalt boulevard, in front of the Cafe de Seville.

Do not go to-day to see this old incubator, in which so many political and literary celebrities have been hatched; for you will only find a cafe, just like any other, with its groups of ugly little Jews who discuss the coming races, and here and there a poor creature, painted like a Jezebel, dying of chagrin over her pot of beer.

At the decline of the Second Empire—it was May 1, 1866, that Amedee Violette entered there for the first time—the Cafe de Seville passed for, and with reason too, one of the most remarkable places in Paris. For this glorious establishment had furnished by itself, or nearly so, the eminent staff of our third Republic! Be honest, Monsieur le Prefet, you who presided at the opening of the agricultural meeting in our province, and who played the peacock in your dress-coat, embroidered in silver, before an imposing line of horned creatures; be honest and admit, that, at the time when you opposed the official candidates in your democratic journal, you had your pipe in the rack of the Cafe de Seville, with your name in white enamel upon the blackened bowl! Remember, Monsieur le Depute, you who voted against all the exemption cases of the military law, remember who, in this very place, at your daily game of dominoes for sixty points, more than a hundred times ranted against the permanent army—you, accustomed to the uproar of assemblies and the noise of the tavern—contributed to the

parliamentary victories by crying, "Six all! count that!" And you too, Monsieur le Ministre, to whom an office-boy, dating from the tyrants, still says, "Your excellency," without offending you; you also have been a constant frequenter of the Cafe de Seville, and such a faithful customer that the cashier calls you by your Christian name. And do you recall, Monsieur the future president of the Council, that you did not acquit yourself very well when the sedentary dame, who never has been seen to rise from her stool, and who, as a joker pretended, was afflicted with two wooden legs, called you by a little sign to the desk, and said to you, not without a shade of severity in her tone: "Monsieur Eugene, we must be thinking of this little bill."

Notwithstanding his title of poet, Amedee had not the gift of prophecy. While seeing all these negligently dressed men seated outside at the Cafe de Seville's tables, taking appetizers, the young man never suspected that he had before him the greater part of the legislators destined to assure, some years later, France's happiness. Otherwise he would have respectfully taken note of each drinker and the color of his drink, since at a later period this would have been very useful to him as a mnemonical method for the understanding of our parliamentary combinations, which are a little complicated, we must admit. For example, would it not have been handy and agreeable to note down that the recent law on sugars had been voted by the solid majority of absinthe and bitters, or to know that the Cabinet's fall, day before yesterday, might be attributed simply to the disloyal and perfidious abandonment of the bitter mints or blackcurrant wine?

Jocquelet, who professed the most advanced opinions in politics, distributed several riotous and patronizing handshakes among these future statesmen as he entered the establishment, followed by Amedee.

Here, there were still more of politics, and also poets and literary men. They lived a sort of hurly-burly life, on good terms, but one could not get them confounded, for the politicians were all beard, the litterateurs, all hair.

Jocquelet directed his steps without hesitation toward the magnificent red head of the whimsical poet, Paul Sillery, a handsome young fellow with a wide-awake face, who was nonchalantly stretched upon the red velvet cushion of the window-seat, before a table, around which were three other heads of thick hair worthy of our early kings.

"My dear Paul," said Jocquelet, in his most thrilling voice, handing Sillery Amedee's manuscript, "here are some verses that I think are superb, and I am going to recite them as soon as I can, at some entertainment or benefit. Read them and give us your opinion of them. I present their author to you, Monsieur Amedee Violette. Amedee, I present you to Monsieur Paul Sillery."

All the heads of hair, framing young and amiable faces, turned curiously toward the newcomer, whom Paul Sillery courteously invited to be seated, with the established formula, "What will you take?" Then he began to read the lines that the comedian had given him.

Amedee, seated on the edge of his chair, was distracted with timidity, for Paul Sillery already enjoyed a certain reputation as a rising poet, and had established a small literary sheet called *La Guepe*, which published upon its first page caricatures of celebrated men with large heads and little bodies, and Amedee had read in it some of Paul's poems, full of impertinence and charm. An author whose work had been published! The editor of a journal! The idea was stunning to poor innocent Violette, who was not aware then that *La Guepe* could not claim forty subscribers. He considered Sillery something wonderful, and waited with a beating heart for the verdict of so formidable a judge. At the end of a few moments Sillery said, without raising his eyes from the manuscript:

"Here are some fine verses!"

A flood of delight filled the heart of the poet from the Faubourg St.-Jacques.

As soon as he had finished his reading, Paul arose from his seat, and, extending both hands over the carafes and glasses to Amedee, said, enthusiastically:

"Let me shake hands with you! Your description of the battle-scene is astonishing! It is admirable! It is as clear and precise as Merimee, and it has all the color and imagination that he lacks to make him a poet. It is something absolutely new. My dear Monsieur Violette, I congratulate you with all my heart! I can not ask you for this beautiful poem for *La Guepe* that Jocquelet is so fortunate as to have to recite, and of which I hope he will make a success. But I beg of you, as a great favor, to let me have some verses for my paper; they will be, I am sure, as good as these, if not better. To be sure, I forgot to tell you that we shall not be able to pay you for the copy, as *La Guepe* does not prosper; I will even admit that it only stands on one leg. In order to make it appear for a few months longer, I have recently been

obliged I must go to a money-lender, who has left me, instead of the classical stuffed crocodile, a trained horse which he had just taken from an insolvent circus. I mounted the noble animal to go to the Bois, but at the Place de la Concorde he began to waltz around it, and I was obliged to get rid of this dancing quadruped at a considerable loss. So your contribution to La Guepe would have to be gratuitous, like those of all the rest. You will give me the credit of having saluted you first of all, my dear Violette, by the rare and glorious title of true poet. You will let me reserve the pleasure of intoxicating you with the odor that a printer's first proofs give, will you not? Is it agreed?"

Yes, it was agreed! That is to say, Amedee, touched to the depths of his heart by so much good grace and fraternal cordiality, was so troubled in trying to find words to express his gratitude, that he made a terrible botch of it.

"Do not thank me," said Paul Sillery, with his pleasant but rather sceptical smile, "and do not think me better than I am. If all your verses are as strong as these that I have just read, you will soon publish a volume that will make a sensation, and—who knows? —perhaps will inspire me first of all with an ugly attack of jealousy. Poets are no better than other people; they are like the majority of Adam's sons, vain and envious, only they still keep the ability to admire, and the gift of enthusiasm, and that proves their superiority and is to their credit. I am delighted to have found a mare's nest to-day, an original and sincere poet, and with your permission we will celebrate this happy meeting. The price of the waltzing horse having hardly sufficed to pay off the debt to the publisher of La Guepe, I am not in funds this evening; but I have credit at Pere Lebuffle's, and I invite you all to dinner at his pot-house; after which we will go to my rooms, where I expect a few friends, and there you will read us your verses, Violette; we will all read some of them, and have a fine orgy of rich rhymes."

This proposition was received with favor by the three young men with the long hair, a la Clodion and Chilperic. As for Violette, he would have followed Paul Sillery at that moment, had it been into the infernal regions.

Jocquelet could not go with them, he had promised his evening to a lady, he said, and he gave this excuse with such a conceited smile that all were convinced he was going to crown himself with the most flattering of laurels at the mansion of some princess of the royal blood. In reality, he was going to see one of his Conservatoire friends, a large, lanky dowdy, as swarthy as a mole and full of pretensions, who was destined for the tragic line of character, and inflicted upon her lover Athalie's dream, Camille's imprecations, and Phedre's monologue.

After paying for the refreshments, Sillery gave his arm to Amedee, and, followed by the three Merovingians, they left the cafe. Forcing a way through the crowd which obstructed the sidewalk of the Faubourg Montmartre he conducted his guests to Pere Lebuffle's table d'hote, which was situated on the third floor of a dingy old house in the Rue Lamartine, where a sickening odor of burnt meat greeted them as soon as they reached the top of the stairs. They found there, seated before a tablecloth remarkable for the number of its wine-stains, two or three wild-looking heads of hair, and four or five shaggy beards, to whom Pere Lebuffle was serving soup, aided by a tired-looking servant. The name under which Sillery had designated the proprietor of the table d'hote might have been a nickname, for this stout person in his shirt-sleeves recommended himself to one's attentions by his bovine face and his gloomy, wandering eyes. To Amedee's amazement, Pere Lebuffle called the greater part of his clients "thou," and as soon as the newcomers were seated at table, Amedee asked Sillery, in a low voice, the cause of this familiarity.

"It is caused by the hard times, my dear Violette," responded the editor of 'La Guepe' as he unfolded his napkin. "There is no longer a 'Maecenas' or 'Lawrence the Magnificent.' The last patron of literature and art is Pere Lebuffle. This wretched cook, who has perhaps never read a book or seen a picture, has a fancy for painters and poets, and allows them to cultivate that plant, Debt, which, contrary to other vegetables, grows all the more, the less it is watered with instalments. We must pardon the good man," said he, lowering his voice, "his little sin— a sort of vanity. He wishes to be treated like a comrade and friend by the artists. Those who have several accounts brought forward upon his ledger, arrive at the point of calling him 'thou,' and I, alas! am of that number. Thanks to that, I am going to make you drink something a little less purgative than the so-called wine which is turning blue in that carafe, and of which I advise you to be suspicious. I say, Lebuffle, my friend here, Monsieur Amedee Violette, will be, sooner or later, a celebrated poet. Treat him accordingly, my good fellow, and go and get us a bottle of Moulins-Vent."

The conversation meanwhile became general between the bearded and long-haired men. Is it necessary to say that they were all animated, both politicians and 'litterateurs', with the most revolutionary sentiments? At the very beginning, with the sardines, which evidently had been pickled in lamp-oil, a terribly hairy man, the darkest of them all, with a beard that grew up into its owner's eyes and then sprung out again in tufts from his nose and ears, presented some elegiac regrets to the

memory of Jean-Paul Marat, and declared that at the next revolution it would be necessary to realize the programme of that delightful friend of the people, and make one hundred thousand heads fall.

"By thunder, Flambard, you have a heavy hand!" exclaimed one of the least important of beards, one of those that degenerate into side-whiskers as they become conservative. "One hundred thousand heads!"

"It is the minimum," replied the sanguinary beard.

Now, it had just been revealed to Amedee that under this ferocious beard was concealed a photographer, well known for his failures, and the young man could not help thinking that if the one hundred thousand heads in question had posed before the said Flambard's camera, he would not show such impatience to see them fall under the guillotine.

The conversation of the men with the luxuriant hair was none the less anarchical when the roast appeared, which sprung from the legendary animal called 'vache enragee'. The possessor of the longest and thickest of all the shock heads, which spread over the shoulders of a young story writer—between us, be it said, he made a mistake in not combing it oftener—imparted to his brothers the subject for his new novel, which should have made the hair of the others bristle with terror; for the principal episode in this agreeable fiction was the desecration of a dead body in a cemetery by moonlight. There was a sort of hesitation in the audience, a slight movement of recoil, and Sillery, with a dash of raillery in his glance, asked the novelist:

"Why the devil do you write such a story?"

The novelist replied, in a thundering tone:

"To astonish the bourgeoisie!"

And nobody made the slightest objection.

To "astonish the bourgeoisie" was the dearest hope and most ardent wish of these young men, and this desire betrayed itself in their slightest word; and doubtless Amedee thought it legitimate and even worthy of praise. However, he did not believe—must we admit his lack of confidence?—that so many glorious efforts were ever crowned with success. He went so far as to ask himself whether the character and cleverness of these bourgeoisie would not lead them to ignore not only the works, but even the existence, of the authors who sought to "astonish" them; and he thought, not without sadness, that when La Guepe should have published this young novelist's ghostly composition, the unconquerable bourgeoisie would know nothing about it, and would continue to devote itself to its favorite customs, such as tapping the barometer to know whether there was a change, or to heave a deep sigh after guzzling its soup, saying, "I feel better!" without being the least astonished in the world.

In spite of these mental reservations, which Amedee reproached himself with, being himself an impure and contemptible Philistine, the poet was delighted with his new friends and the unknown world opening before him. In this Bohemian corner, where one got intoxicated with wild excesses and paradoxes, recklessness and gayety reigned. The sovereign charm of youth was there, and Amedee, who had until now lived in a dark hiding-place, blossomed out in this warm atmosphere.

After a horrible dessert of cheese and prunes, Pere Lebuffle's guests dispersed. Sillery escorted Amedee and the three Merovingians to the little, sparsely furnished first floor in the Rue Pigalle, where he lived; and half a dozen other lyric poets, who might have furnished some magnificent trophies for an Apache warrior's scalping-knife, soon came to reenforce the club which met there every Wednesday evening.

Seats were wanting at the beginning, but Sillery drew from a closet an old black trunk which would hold two, and contented himself, as master of the house, with sitting from time to time, with legs dangling, upon the marble mantel. The company thus found themselves very comfortable; still more so when an old woman with a dirty cap had placed upon the table, in the middle of the room, six bottles of beer, some odd glasses, and a large flowered plate upon which was a package of cut tobacco with cigarette paper. They began to recite their verses in a cloud of smoke. Each recited his own, called upon by Sillery; each would rise without being urged, place his chair in front of him, and leaning one hand upon its back, would recite his poem or elegy. Certainly some of them were wanting in genius, some were even ludicrous. Among the number was a little fellow with a cadaverous face, about as large as two farthings' worth of butter, who declared, in a long speech with flat rhymes, that an Asiatic harem was not capable of quenching his ardent love of pleasure. A fat-faced fellow with a good, healthy, country complexion, announced, in a long story, his formal intention of dying of a decline, on account of the treason of a courtesan with a face as cold as marble; while, if the facts were known, this peaceable boy lived with an artless child of the people, brightening her lot by reducing her to a state of

slavery; she blacked his boots for him every morning before he left the house.

In spite of these ridiculous things, there were present some genuine poets who knew their business and had real talent. These filled Amedee with respect and fear, and when Sillery called his name, he arose with a dry mouth and heavy heart.

"It is your turn now, you newcomer! Recite us your 'Before Sebastopol.'"

And so, thoroughbred that he was, Amedee overcame his emotion and recited, in a thrilling voice, his military rhymes, that rang out like the report of a veteran's gun.

The last stanza, was greeted with loud applause, and all the auditors arose and surrounded Amedee to offer him their congratulations.

"Why, it is superb!"

"Entirely new!"

"It will make an enormous success!"

"It is just what is needed to arouse the public!"

"Recite us something else!—something else!"

Reassured and encouraged, master of himself, he recited a popular scene in which he had freely poured out his love for the poor people. He next recited some of his Parisian suburban scenes, and then a series of sonnets, entitled "Love's Hopes," inspired by his dear Maria; and he astonished all these poets by the versatility and variety of his inspirations.

At each new poem bravos were thundered out, and the young man's heart expanded with joy under this warm sunshine of success. His audience vied with each other to approach Amedee first, and to shake his hand. Alas! some of those who were there would, later, annoy him by their low envy and treason; but now, in the generous frankness of their youth, they welcomed him as a master.

What an intoxicating evening! Amedee reached his home about two o'clock in the morning, his hands burning with the last grasps, his brain and heart intoxicated with the strong wine of praise. He walked with long and joyful strides through the fairy scene of a beautiful moonlight, in the fresh morning wind which made his clothes flutter and caressed his face. He thought he even felt the breath of fame.

ETEXT EDITOR'S BOOKMARKS:

Dreams, instead of living
Fortunate enough to keep those one loves
Learned that one leaves college almost ignorant
Paint from nature
The sincere age when one thinks aloud
Upon my word, there are no ugly ones (women)
Very young, and was in love with love

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK A ROMANCE OF YOUTH — VOLUME 2 ***

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