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THE INK STAIN BY RENE BAZIN
(Tache d'Encre)

By RENE BAZIN

BOOK 3.

CHAPTER XV

BACK TO PARIS

MILAN, June 27th. Before daybreak.

He asked me whether there was anything he could do for me at Florence. There is something, but he would refuse to do it; for I wish him to inform his charming daughter that my thoughts are all of her; that I have spent the night recalling yesterday's trip—now the roads of Desio and the galleries of the villa, now the drive back to Milan. M. Charnot only figured in my dreams as sleeping. I seemed to have found my tongue, and to be pouring forth a string of well-turned speeches which I never should have ready at real need. If I could only see her again now that all my plans are weighed and thought out and combined! Really, it is hard that one can not live one's life over twice—at least certain passages in it—this episode, for instance

What is her opinion of me? When her eyes fixed themselves on mine I thought I could read in their depths a look of inquiry, a touch of surprise, a grain of disquiet. But her answer? She is going to Florence bearing with her the answer on which my life depends. They are leaving by the early express.

Shall I take it, too? Florence, Rome, Naples—why not? Italy is free to all, and particularly to lovers. I will toss my cap over the mill for the second time. I will get money from somewhere. If I am not allowed to show myself, I will look on from a distance, hidden in the crowd. At a pinch I will disguise myself—as a guide at Pompeii, a lazzarone at Naples. She shall find a sonnet in the bunch of fresh flowers offered her by a peasant at the door of her hotel. And at least I shall bask in her smile, the sound of her voice, the glints of gold about her temples, and the pleasure of knowing that she is near even when I do not see her.

On second thoughts; no; I will not go to Florence. As I always distrust first impulses, which so often run reason to a standstill, I had recourse to a favorite device of mine. I asked myself: What would Lampron advise? And at once I conjured up his melancholy, noble face, and heard his answer: "Come back, my dear boy."

PARIS, July 2d.

When you arrive by night, and from the windows of the flying train, as it whirls past the streets at full speed, you see Paris enveloped in red steam, pierced by starry lines of gas-lamps crisscrossing in every direction, the sight is weird, and almost beautiful. You might fancy it the closing scene of some gigantic gala, where strings upon strings of colored lanterns brighten the night above a moving throng, passing, repassing, and raising a cloud of dust that reddens in the glow of expiring Bengal lights.

Moreover, the illusion is in part a reality, for the great city is in truth lighted for its nightly revel. Till one o'clock in the morning it is alight and riotous with the stir and swing of life.

But the dawn is bleak enough.

That, delicious hour which puts a spirit of joy into green field and hedgerow is awful to look upon in Paris. You leave the train half-frozen, to find the porters red-eyed from their watch. The customs officials, in a kind of stupor, scrawl cabalistic signs upon your trunk. You get outside the station, to find a few scattered cabs, their drivers asleep inside, their lamps blinking in the mist.

"Cabby, are you disengaged?"

"Depends where you want to go."

"No. 91 Rue de Rennes."

"Jump in!"

The blank streets stretch out interminably, gray and silent; the shops on either hand are shuttered; in the squares you will find only a dog or a scavenger; theatre bills hang in rags around the kiosks, the wind sweeps their tattered fragments along the asphalt in yesterday's dust, with here and there a bunch of faded flowers. The Seine washes around its motionless boats; two great-coated policemen patrol the bank and wake the echoes with their tramp. The fountains have ceased to play, and their basins are dry. The air is chilly, and sick with evil odors. The whole drive is like a bad dream. Such was my drive from the Gare de Lyon to my rooms. When I was once at home, installed in my own domains, this unpleasant impression gradually wore off. There was friendliness in my sticks of furniture. I examined those silent witnesses, my chair, my table, and my books. What had happened while I was away? Apparently nothing important. The furniture had a light coating of dust, which showed that no one had touched it, not even Madame Menin. It was funny, but I wished to see Madame Menin. A sound, and I heard my opposite neighbor getting to work. He is a hydrographer, and engraves maps for a neighboring publisher. I never could get up as early as he. The willow seemed to have made great progress during the summer. I flung up the window and said "Good-morning!" to the wallflowers, to the old wall of the Carmelites, and the old black tower. Then the sparrows began. What o'clock could it be? They came all together with a rush, chirping, the hungry thieves, wheeling about, skirting the walls in their flight, quick as lightning, borne on their pointed wings. They had seen the sun—day had broken!

And almost immediately I heard a cart pass, and a hawker crying:

"Ground-SEL! Groundsel for your dickey-birds!"

To think that there are people who get up at that unearthly hour to buy groundsel for their canaries! I looked to see whether any one had called in my absence; their cards should be on my table. Two were there: "Monsieur Lorinet, retired solicitor, town councillor, of Bourbonnoux-les-Bourges, deputy-magistrate"; "Madame Lorinet, nee Poupard."

I was surprised not to find a third card: "Berthe Lorinet, of no occupation, anxious to change her name." Berthe will be difficult to get rid of. I presume she didn't dare to leave a card on a young man, it

wouldn't have been proper. But I have no doubt she was here. I scented a trick of my uncle's, one of those Atlantic cables he takes for spider's threads and makes his snares of. The Lorinet family have been here, with the twofold intention of taking news of me to my "dear good uncle," and discreetly recalling to my forgetful heart the charms of Berthe of the big feet.

"Good-morning, Monsieur Mouillard!"

"Hallo! Madame Menin! Good-morning, Madame Menin!"

"So you are back at last, sir! How brown you have got—quite sunburnt. You are quite well, I hope, sir?"

"Very well, thank you; has any one been here in my absence?"

"I was going to tell you, sir; the plumber has been here, because the tap of your cistern came off in my hand. It wasn't my fault; there had been a heavy rain that morning. So—"

"Never mind, it's only a tap to pay for. We won't say any more about it. But did any one come to see me?"

"Ah, let me see—yes. A big gentleman, rather red-faced, with his wife, a fat lady, with a small voice; a fine woman, rather in my style, and their daughter—but perhaps you know her, sir?"

"Yes, Madame Menin, you need not describe her. You told them that I was away, and they said they were very sorry."

"Especially the lady. She puffed and panted and sighed: 'Dear Monsieur Mouillard! How unlucky we are, Madame Menin; we have just come to Paris as he has gone to Italy. My husband and I would have liked so much to see him! You may think it fanciful, but I should like above all things to look round his rooms. A student's rooms must be so interesting. Stay there, Berthe, my child.' I told them there was nothing very interesting, and that their daughter might just as well come in too, and then I showed them everything."

"They didn't stay long, I suppose?"

"Quite long enough. They were an age looking at your photograph album. I suppose they haven't got such things where they come from. Madame Lorinet couldn't tear herself away from it. 'Nothing but men,' she said, 'have you noticed that, Jules?'—'Well, Madame,' I said, 'that's just how it is here; except for me, and I don't count, only gentlemen come here. I've kept house for bachelors where—well, there are not many—'

"That will do, Madame Menin; that will do. I know you always think too highly of me. Hasn't Lampron been here?"

"Yes, sir; the day before yesterday. He was going off for a fortnight or three weeks into the country to paint a portrait of some priest—a bishop, I think."

July 15th.

"Midi, roi des etes." I know by heart that poem by "Monsieur le Comte de l'Isle," as my Uncle Mouillard calls him. Its lines chime in my ears every day when I return from luncheon to the office I have left an hour before. Merciful heaven, how hot it is! I am just back from a hot climate, but it was nothing compared to Paris in July. The asphalt melts underfoot; the wood pavement is simmering in a viscous mess of tar; the ideal is forced to descend again and again to iced lager beer; the walls beat back the heat in your face; the dust in the public gardens, ground to atoms beneath the tread of many feet, rises in clouds from under the water-cart to fall, a little farther on, in white showers upon the passers-by. I wonder that, as a finishing stroke, the cannon in the Palais Royal does not detonate all day long.

To complete my misery, all my acquaintances are out of town: the Boule family is bathing at Trouville; the second clerk has not returned from his holiday; the fourth only waited for my arrival to get away himself; Lampron, detained by my Lord Bishop and the forest shades, gives no sign of his existence; even Monsieur and Madame Plumet have locked up their flat and taken the train for Barbizon.

Thus it happens that the old clerk Jupille and I have been thrown together. I enjoy his talk. He is a simplehearted, honorable man, with a philosophy that I am sure can not be in the least German, because I can understand it. I have gradually told him all my secrets. I felt the need of a confidant, for I was stifling, metaphorically as well as literally. Now, when he hands me a deed, instead of saying "All

right," as I used to, I say, "Take a chair, Monsieur Jupille"; I shut the door, and we talk. The clerks think we're talking law, but the clerks are mistaken.

Yesterday, for instance, he whispered to me:

"I have come down the Rue de l'Universite. They will soon be back."

"How did you learn that?"

"I saw a man carrying coals into the house, and asked for whom they were, that's all."

Again, we had a talk, just now, which shows what progress I have made in the old clerk's heart. He had just submitted a draft to me. I had read it through and grunted my approval, yet M. Jupille did not go.

"Anything further, Monsieur Jupille?"

"Something to ask of you—to do me a kindness, or, rather, an honor."

"Let's hear what it is."

"This weather, Monsieur Mouillard, is very good for fishing, though rather warm."

"Rather warm, Monsieur Jupille!"

"It is not too warm. It was much hotter than this in 1844, yet the fish bit, I can tell you! Will you join us next Sunday in a fishing expedition? I say 'us,' because one of your friends is coming, a great amateur of the rod who honors me with his friendship, too."

"Who is he?"

"A secret, Monsieur Mouillard, a little secret. You will be surprised. It is settled then—next Sunday?"

"Where shall I meet you?"

"Hush, the office-boy is listening. That boy is too sharp; I'll tell you some other time."

"As you please, Monsieur Jupille; I accept the invitation unconditionally."

"I am so glad you will come, Monsieur Mouillard. I only wish we could have a little storm between this and then."

He spoke the truth; his satisfaction was manifest, for I never have seen him rub the tip of his nose with the feathers of his quill pen so often as he did that afternoon, which was with him the sign of exuberant joy, all his gestures having subdued themselves long since to the limits of his desk.

July 20th.

I have seen Lampron once more. He bears his sorrow bravely. We spoke for a few moments of his mother. I spoke some praise of that humble soul for the good she had done me, which led him to enlarge upon her virtues.

"Ah," he said, "if you had only seen more of her! My dear fellow, if I am an honest man; if I have passed without failing through the trials of my life and my profession; if I have placed my ideal beyond worldly success; in a word, if I am worth anything in heart or brain, it is to her I owe it. We never had been parted before; this is our first separation, and it is the final one. I was not prepared for it."

Then he changed the subject brusquely:

"What about your love-affair?"

"Fresher than ever."

"Did it survive half an hour's conversation?"

"It grew the stronger for it."

"Does she still detest you?"

I told him the story of our trip to Desio, and our conversation in the carriage, without omitting a

detail.

He listened in silence. At the end he said:

"My dear Fabien, there must be no delay. She must hear your proposal within a week."

"Within a week! Who is to make it for me?"

"Whoever you like. That's your business. I have been making inquiries while you were away; she seems a suitable match for you. Besides, your present position is ridiculous; you are without a profession; you have quarrelled, for no reason, with your only relative; you must get out of the situation with credit, and marriage will compel you to do so."

CHAPTER XVI

A FISHING-TRIP AND AN OLD FRIEND

July 21st.

M. Jupille had written to tell me where I was to meet him on the Sunday, giving me the most minute directions. I might take the train to Massy, or to Bievres. However, I preferred to take the train to Sceaux and walk from there, leaving Chatenay on my left, striking across the woods of Verrieres toward the line of forts, coming out between Igny and Amblainvilliers, and finally reaching a spot where the Bievre broadens out between two wooded banks into a pool as clear as a spring and as full of fish as a nursery-pond.

"Above all things, tell nobody where it is!" begged Jupille. "It is our secret; I discovered it myself."

When I left Sceaux to meet Jupille, who had started before daybreak, the sun was already high. There was not a cloud nor a breath of wind; the sway of summer lay over all things. But, though the heat was broiling, the walk was lovely. All about me was alive with voice or perfume. Clouds of linnets fluttered among the branches, golden beetles crawled upon the grass, thousands of tiny whirring wings beat the air—flies, gnats, gadflies, bees—all chorusing the life—giving warmth of the day and the sunshine that bathed and penetrated all nature. I halted from time to time in the parched glades to seek my way, and again pushed onward through the forest paths overarched with heavy-scented leafage, onward over the slippery moss up toward the heights, below which the Bievre stole into view.

There it lay, at my feet, gliding between banks of verdure which seemed a season younger than the grass I stood on. I began to descend the slope, knowing that M. Jupille was awaiting me somewhere in the valley. I broke into a run. I heard the murmur of water in the hollows, and caught glimpses of forget-me-not tufts in low-lying grassy corners. Suddenly a rod outlined itself against the sky, between two trees. It was he, the old clerk; he nodded to me and laid down his line.

"I thought you never were coming."

"That shows you don't know me. Any sport?"

"Not so loud! Yes, capital sport. I'll bait a line for you."

"And where is your friend, Monsieur Jupille?"

"There he is."

"Where?"

"Staring you in the face; can't you see him?"

Upon my word, I could see nobody, until he directed my gaze with his fishing-rod, when I perceived, ten yards away, a large back view of white trousers and brown, unbuckled waistcoat, a straw hat which seemed to conceal a head, and a pair of shirt-sleeves hanging over the water.

This mass was motionless.

"He must have got a bite," said Jupille, "else he would have been here before now. Go and see him."

Not knowing whom I was about to address, I gave a warning cough as I came near him.

The unknown drew a loud breath, like a man who wakes with a start.

"That you, Jupille?" he said, turning a little way; "are you out of bait?"

"No, my dear tutor, it is I."

"Monsieur Mouillard, at last!"

"Monsieur Flamaran! Jupille told the truth when he said I should be surprised. Are you fond of fishing?"

"It's a passion with me. One must keep one or two for one's old age, young man."

"You've been having sport, I hear."

"Well, this morning, between eight and nine, there were a few nibbles; but since then the sport has been very poor. However, I'm very glad to see you again, Mouillard. That essay of yours was extremely good."

The eminent professor had risen, displaying a face still red from his having slept with his head on his chest, but beaming with good-will. He grasped my hand with heartiness and vigor.

"Here's rod and line for you, Monsieur Mouillard, all ready baited," broke in Jupille. "If you'll come with me I'll show you a good place."

"No, no, Jupille, I'm going to keep him," answered M. Flamaran; "I haven't uttered a syllable for three hours. I must let myself out a little. We will fish side by side, and chat."

"As you please, Monsieur Flamaran; but I don't call that fishing."

He handed me the implement, and sadly went his way.

M. Flamaran and I sat down together on the bank, our feet resting on the soft sand strewn with dead branches. Before us spread the little pool I have mentioned, a slight widening of the stream of the Bievre, once a watering-place for cattle. The sun, now at high noon, massed the trees' shadow close around their trunks. The unbroken surface of the water reflected its rays back in our eyes. The current was barely indicated by the gentle oscillation of a few water-lily leaves. Two big blue dragonflies poised and quivered upon our floats, and not a fish seemed to care to disturb them.

"Well," said M. Flamaran, "so you are still managing clerk to Counsellor Boule?"

"For the time."

"Do you like it?"

"Not particularly."

"What are you waiting for?"

"For something to turn up."

"And carry you back to Italy, I suppose?"

"Then you know I have just been there?"

"I know all about it. Charnot told me of your meeting, and your romantic drive by moonlight. By the way, he's come back with a bad cold; did you know that?"

I assumed an air of sympathy:

"Poor man! When did he get back?"

"The day before yesterday. Of course I was the first to hear of it, and we spent yesterday evening together. It may surprise you, Mouillard, and you may think I exaggerate, but I think Jeanne has come back prettier than she went."

"Do you really think so?"

"I really do. That southern sun—look out, my dear Mouillard, your line is half out of water—has

brought back her roses (they're brighter than ever, I declare), and the good spirits she had lost, too, poor girl. She is cheerful again now, as she used to be. I was very anxious about her at one time. You know her sad story?"

"Yes."

"The fellow was a scoundrel, my dear Mouillard, a regular scoundrel! I never was in favor of the match, myself. Charnot let himself be drawn into it by an old college friend. I told him over and over again, 'It's Jeanne's dowry he's after, Charnot—I'm convinced of it. He'll treat Jeanne badly and make her miserable, mark my words.' But I wasted my breath; he wouldn't listen to a word. Anyhow, it's quite off now. But it was no slight shock, I can tell you; and it gave me great pain to witness the poor child's sufferings."

"You are so kind-hearted, Monsieur Flamaran!"

"It's not that, Mouillard; but I have known Jeanne ever since she was born. I watched her grow up, and I loved her when she was still a little mite; she's as good as my adoptive daughter. You understand me when I say adoptive. I do not mean that there exists between us that legal bond in imitation of nature which is permitted by our codes—'adoptio imitatur naturam'; not that, but that I love her like a daughter—Sidonie never having presented me with a daughter, nor with a son either, for that matter."

A cry from Jupille interrupted M. Flamaran:

"Can't you hear it rattle?"

The good man was tearing to us, waving his arms like a madman, the folds of his trousers flapping about his thin legs like banners in the wind.

We leaped to our feet, and my first idea, an absurd one enough, was that a rattlesnake was hurrying through the grass to our attack.

I was very far from the truth. The matter really was a new line, invented by M. Jupille, cast a little further than an ordinary one, and rigged up with a float like a raft, carrying a little clapper. The fish rang their own knell as they took the hook.

"It's rattling like mad!" cried Jupille, "and you don't stir! I couldn't have thought it of you, Monsieur Flamaran."

He ran past us, brandishing a landing-net as a warrior his lance; he might have been a youth of twenty-five. We followed, less keen and also less confident than he. He was right, though; when he drew up his line, the float of which was disappearing in jerks, carrying the bell along with it beneath the water, he brought out a fair-sized jack, which he declared to be a giant.

He let it run for some time, to tire it, and to prolong the pleasure of playing it.

"Gentlemen," he cried, "it is cutting my finger off!"

A stroke from the landing-net laid the monster at our feet, its strength all spent. It weighed rather under four pounds. Jupille swore to six.

My learned tutor and I sat down again side by side, but the thread of our conversation had been broken past mending. I tried to talk of her, but M. Flamaran insisted on talking of me, of Bourges, of his election as professor, and of the radically distinct characteristics by which you can tell the bite of a gudgeon from that of a stickleback.

The latter part of this lecture was, however, purely theoretical, for he got up two hours before sunset without having hooked a fish.

"A good day, all the same," he said. "It's a good place, and the fish were biting this morning. We'll come here again some day, Jupille; with an east wind you ought to catch any quantity of gudgeons." He kept pace beside me on our way home, but wearied, no doubt, with long sitting, with the heat, and the glare from the water, fell into a reverie, from which the incidents of the walk were unable to rouse him.

Jupille trotted before us, carrying his rod in one hand, a luncheon-basket and a fish-bag in the other. He turned round and gave us a look at each cross-road, smiled beneath his heavy moustache, and went on faster than before. I felt sure that something out of the way was about to happen, and that the silent quill-driver was tasting a quiet joke.

I had not guessed the whole truth.

At a turn of the road M. Flamaran suddenly pulled up, looked all around him, and drew a deep breath.

"Hallo, Jupille! My good sir, where are you taking us? If I can believe my eyes, this is the Chestnut Knoll, down yonder is Plessis Piquet, and we are two miles from the station and the seven o'clock train!"

There was no denying it. A donkey emerged from the wood, hung with tassels and bells, carrying in its panniers two little girls, whose parents toiled behind, goad in hand. The woods had become shrubberies, through which peeped the thatched roofs of rustic summerhouses, mazes, artificial waterfalls, grottoes, and ruins; all the dread handiwork of the rustic decorator burst, superabundant, upon our sight, with shy odors of beer and cooking. Broken bottles strewed the paths; the bushes all looked weary, harassed, and overworked; a confused murmur of voices and crackers floated toward us upon the breeze. I knew full well from these signs that we were nearing "ROBINSON CRUSOE," the land of rustic inns. And, sure enough, here they all were: "THE OLD ROBINSON," "THE NEW ROBINSON," "THE REAL ORIGINAL ROBINSON," "THE ONLY GENUINE ROBINSON," "ROBINSON'S CHESTNUT GROVE," "ROBINSON'S PARADISE," each unique and each authentic. All alike have thatched porches, sanded paths, transparencies lighted with petroleum lamps, tinsel stars, summerhouses, arrangements for open-air illumination and highly colored advertisements, in which are set forth all the component elements of a "ROBINSON," such as shooting-galleries, bowling-alleys, swings, private arbors, Munich beer, and dinner in a tree.

"Jupille!" exclaimed M. Flamaran, "you have shipwrecked us! This is Crusoe's land; and what the dickens do you mean by it?"

The old clerk, utterly discomfited, and wearing that hangdog look which he always assumed at the slightest rebuke from Counsellor Boule, pulled a face as long as his arm, went up to M. Flamaran and whispered a word in his ear.

"Upon my word! Really, Jupille, what are you thinking of? And I a professor, too! Thirty years ago it would have been excusable, but to-day! Besides, Sidonie expects me home to dinner—"

He stopped for a moment, undecided, looking at his watch.

Jupille, who was eying him intently, saw his distinguished friend gradually relax his frown and burst into a hearty laugh.

"By Jove! it's madness at my age, but I don't care. We'll renew our youth for an hour or so. My dear Mouillard, Jupille has ordered dinner for us here. Had I been consulted I should have chosen any other place. Yet what's to be done? Hunger, friendship, and the fact that I can't catch the train, combine to silence my scruples. What do you say?"

"That we are in for it now."

"So be it, then." And led by Jupille, still carrying his catch, we entered THE ONLY GENUINE ROBINSON.

M. Flamaran, somewhat ill at ease, cast inquiring glances on the clearings in the sgrubberies. I thought I heard stifled laughter behind the trees.

"You have engaged Chestnut Number Three, gentlemen," said the proprietor. "Up these stairs, please."

We ascended a staircase winding around the trunk. Chestnut Number 3 is a fine old tree, a little bent, its sturdy lower branches supporting a platform surrounded by a balustrade, six rotten wooden pillars, and a thatched roof, shaped like a cocked hat, to shelter the whole. All the neighboring trees contain similar constructions, which look from a little distance like enormous nests. They are greatly in demand at the dinner hour; you dine thirty feet up in the air, and your food is brought up by a rope and pulley.

When M. Flamaran appeared on the platform he took off his hat, and leaned with both hands on the railing to give a look around. The attitude suggested a public speaker. His big gray head was conspicuous in the light of the setting sun.

"He's going to make a speech!" cried a voice. "Bet you he isn't," replied another.

This was the signal. A rustling was heard among the leaves, and numbers of inquisitive faces peeped out from all corners of the garden. A general rattling of glasses announced that whole parties were leaving the tables to see what was up. The waiters stopped to stare at Chestnut Number 3. The whole population of Juan Fernandez was staring up at Flamaran without in the least knowing the reason why.

"Gentlemen," said a voice from an arbor, "Professor Flamaran will now begin his lecture."

A chorus of shouts and laughter rose around our tree.

"Hi, old boy, wait till we're gone!"

"Ladies, he will discourse to you on the law of husband and wife!"

"No, on the foreclosure of mortgages!"

"No, on the payment of debts!"

"Oh, you naughty old man! You ought to be shut up!"

M. Flamaran, though somewhat put out of countenance for the moment, was seized with a happy inspiration. He stretched out an arm to show that he was about to speak. He opened his broad mouth with a smile of fatherly humor, and the groves, attentive, heard him thunder forth these words:

"Boys, I promise to give you all white marks if you let me dine in peace!"

The last words were lost in a roar of applause.

"Three cheers for old Flamaran!"

Three cheers were given, followed by clapping of hands from various quarters, then all was silence, and no one took any further notice of our tree.

M. Flamaran left the railing and unfolded his napkin.

"You may be sure of my white marks, young men," he said, as he sat down.

He was delighted at his success as an orator, and laughed gayly. Jupille, on the other hand, was as pale as if he had been in a street riot, and seemed rooted to the spot where he stood.

"It's all right, Jupille; it's all right, man! A little ready wit is all you need, dash my wig!"

The old clerk gradually regained his composure, and the dinner grew very merry. Flamaran's spirits, raised by this little incident, never flagged. He had a story for every glass of wine, and told them all with a quiet humor of his own.

Toward the end of dinner, by the time the waiter came to offer us "almonds and raisins, pears, peaches, preserves, meringues, brandy cherries," we had got upon the subject of Sidonie, the pearl of Forez. M. Flamaran narrated to us, with dates, how a friend of his one day depicted to him a young girl at Montbrison, of fresh and pleasing appearance, a good housekeeper, and of excellent family; and how he—M. Flamaran—had forthwith started off to find her, had recognized her before she was pointed out to him, fell in love with her at first sight, and was not long in obtaining her affection in return. The marriage had taken place at St. Galmier.

"Yes, my dear Mouillard," he added, as if pointing a moral, "thirty years ago last May I became a happy man; when do you think of following my example?"

At this point, Jupille suddenly found himself one too many, and vanished down the corkscrew stair.

"We once spoke of an heiress at Bourges," M. Flamaran went on.

"Apparently that's all off?"

"Quite off."

"You were within your rights; but now, why not a Parisienne?"

"Yes, indeed; why not?"

"Perhaps you are prejudiced in some way against Parisiennes?"

"I? Not the least."

"I used to be, but I've got over it now. They have a charm of their own, a certain style of dressing, walking, and laughing which you don't find outside the fortifications. For a long time I used to think that these qualities stood them in lieu of virtues. That was a slander; there are plenty of Parisiennes endowed with every virtue; I even know a few who are angels."

At this point, M. Flamaran looked me straight in the eyes, and, as I made no reply, he added:

"I know one, at least: Jeanne Charnot. Are you listening?"

"Yes, Monsieur Flamaran."

"Isn't she a paragon?"

"She is."

"As sensible as she is tender-hearted?"

"So I believe."

"And as clever as she is sensible?"

"That is my opinion."

"Well, then, young man, if that's your opinion—excuse my burning my boats, all my boats—if that's your opinion, I don't understand why— Do you suppose she has no money?"

"I know nothing about her means."

"Don't make any mistake; she's a rich woman. Do you think you're too young to marry?"

"No."

"Do you fancy, perhaps, that she is still bound by that unfortunate engagement?"

"I trust she is not."

"I'm quite sure she is not. She is free, I tell you, as free as you. Well, why don't you love her?"

"But I do love her, Monsieur Flamaran!"

"Why, then, I congratulate you, my boy!"

He leaned across the table and gave me a hearty grasp of the hand. He was so agitated that he could not speak—choking with joyful emotion, as if he had been Jeanne's father, or mine.

After a minute or so, he drew himself up in his chair, reached out, put a hand on each of my shoulders and kept it there as if he feared I might fly away.

"So you love her, you love her! Good gracious, what a business I've had to get you to say so! You are quite right to love her, of course, of course—I could not have understood your doing otherwise; but I must say this, my boy, that if you tarry too long, with her attractions, you know what will happen."

"Yes, I ought to ask for her at once."

"To be sure you ought."

"Alas! Monsieur Flamaran, who is there that I can send on such a mission for me? You know that I am an orphan."

"But you have an uncle."

"We have quarrelled."

"You might make it up again, on an occasion like this."

"Out of the question; we quarrelled on her account; my uncle hates Parisiennes."

"Damn it all, then! send a friend—a friend will do under the circumstances."

"There's Lampron."

"The painter?"

"Yes, but he doesn't know Monsieur Charnot. It would only be one stranger pleading for another. My chances would be small. What I want—"

"Is a friend of both parties, isn't it? Well, what am I?"

"The very man!"

"Very well. I undertake to ask for her hand! I shall ask for the hand of the charming Jeanne for both of us; for you, who will make her happy; and for myself, who will not entirely lose her if she marries one of my pupils, one of my favorite graduates—my friend, Fabien Mouillard. And I won't be refused—no, damme, I won't!"

He brought down his fist upon the table with a tremendous blow which made the glasses ring and the decanters stagger.

"Coming!" cried a waiter from below, thinking he was summoned.

"All right, my good fellow!" shouted M. Flamaran, leaning over the railings. "Don't trouble. I don't want anything."

He turned again toward me, still filled with emotion, but somewhat calmer than he had been.

"Now," said he, "let us talk, and do you tell me all."

And we began a long and altogether delightful talk.

A more genuine, a finer fellow never breathed than this professor let loose from school and giving his heart a holiday—a simple, tender heart, preserved beneath the science of the law like a grape in sawdust. Now he would smile as I sang Jeanne's praises; now he would sit and listen to my objections with a truculent air, tightening his lips till they broke forth in vehement denial. "What! You dare to say! Young man, what are you afraid of?" His overflowing kindness discharged itself in the sincerest and most solemn asseverations.

We had left Juan Fernandez far behind us; we were both far away in that Utopia where mind penetrates mind, heart understands heart. We heard neither the squeaking of a swing beneath us, nor the shouts of laughter along the promenades, nor the sound of a band tuning up in a neighboring pavilion. Our eyes, raised to heaven, failed to see the night descending upon us, vast and silent, piercing the foliage with its first stars. Now and again a warm breath passed over us, blown from the woods; I tasted its strangely sweet perfume; I saw in glimpses the flying vision of a huge dark tulip, striped with gold, unfolding its petals on the moist bank of a dyke, and I asked myself whether a mysterious flower had really opened in the night, or whether it was but a new feeling, slowly budding, unfolding, blossoming within my heart.

CHAPTER XVII

PLEASURES OF EAVESDROPPING

July 22d.

At two o'clock to-day I went to see Sylvestre, to tell him all the great events of yesterday. We sat down on the old covered sofa in the shadow of the movable curtain which divides the studio, as it were, into two rooms, among the lay figures, busts, varnish-bottles, and paint-boxes. Lampron likes this chiaroscuro. It rests his eyes.

Some one knocked at the door.

"Stay where you are," said Sylvestre; "it's a customer come for the background of an engraving. I'll be with you in two minutes. Come in!" As he was speaking he drew the curtain in front of me, and through the thin stuff I could see him going toward the door, which had just opened.

"Monsieur Lampron?"

"I am he, Monsieur."

"You don't recognize me, Monsieur?"

"No, Monsieur."

"I'm surprised at that."

"Why so? I have never seen you."

"You have taken my portrait!"

"Really!"

I was watching Lampron, who was plainly angered at this brusque introduction. He left the chair which he had begun to push forward, let it stand in the middle of the studio, and went and sat down on his engraving-stool in the corner, with a somewhat haughty look, and a defiant smile lurking behind his beard. He rested his elbow on the table and began to drum with his fingers.

"What I have had the honor to inform you is the simple truth, Monsieur. I am Monsieur Charnot of the Institute."

Lampron gave a glance in my direction, and his frown melted away.

"Excuse me, Monsieur; I only know you by your back. Had you shown me that side of you I might perhaps have recognized—"

"I have not come here to listen to jokes, Monsieur; and I should have come sooner to demand an explanation, but that it was only this morning I heard of what I consider a deplorable abuse of your talents. But picture-shows are not in my line. I did not see myself there. My friend Flamaran had to tell me that I was to be seen at the last Salon, together with my daughter, sitting on a tree-trunk in the forest of Saint-Germain. Is it true, Monsieur, that you drew me sitting on a trunk?"

"Quite true."

"That's a trifle too rustic for a man who does not go outside of Paris three times a year. And my daughter you drew in profile—a good likeness, I believe."

"It was as like as I could make it."

"Then you confess that you drew both my daughter and myself?"

"Yes, I do, Monsieur."

"It may not be so easy for you to explain by what right you did so; I await your explanation, Monsieur."

"I might very well give you no explanation whatever," replied Lampron, who was beginning to lose patience. "I might also reply that I no more needed to ask your permission to sketch you than to ask that of the beeches, oaks, elms, and willows. I might tell you that you formed part of the landscape, that every artist who sketches a bit of underwood has the right to stick a figure in—"

"A figure, Monsieur! do you call me a figure?"

"A gentleman, I mean. Artists call it figure. Well, I might give you this reason, which is quite good enough for you, but it is not the real one. I prefer to tell you frankly what passed. You have a very beautiful daughter, Monsieur."

M. Charnot made his customary bow.

"One of my friends is in love with her. He is shy, and dares not tell his love. We met you by chance in the wood, and I was seized with the idea of making a sketch of Mademoiselle Jeanne, so like that she could not mistake it, and then exhibiting it with the certainty of her seeing it and guessing its meaning. I trusted she would recall to her mind, not myself, for my youth is past, but a young friend of mine who is of the age and build of a lover. If this was a crime, Monsieur, I am ready to take the blame for it upon myself, for I alone committed it."

"It certainly was criminal, Monsieur; criminal in you, at any rate—you who are a man of weight, respected for your talent and your character— to aid and abet in a frivolous love-affair."

"It was the deepest and most honorable sentiment, Monsieur."

"A blaze of straw!"

"Nothing of the sort!"

"Don't tell me! Your friend's a mere boy."

"So much the better for him, and for her, too! If you want a man of middle age for your son-in-law, just try one and see what they are worth. You may be sorry that you ever refused this boy, who, it is true, is only twenty-four, has little money, no decided calling, nor yet that gift of self-confidence which does instead of merit for so many people; but who is a brave and noble soul, whom I can answer for as for myself. Go, Monsieur, you will find your daughter great names, fat purses, gold lace, long beards, swelling waistbands, reputations, pretensions, justified or not, everything, in short, in which he is poor; but him you will never find again! That is all I have to tell you."

Lampron had become animated and spoke with heat. There was the slightest flash of anger in his eyes.

I saw M. Charnot get up, approach him, and hold out his hand.

"I did not wish you to say anything else, Monsieur; that is enough for me. Flamaran asked my daughter's hand for your friend only this morning. Flamaran loses no time when charged with a commission. He, too, told me much that was good of your friend. I also questioned Counsellor Boule. But however flattering characters they might give him, I still needed another, that of a man who had lived in complete intimacy with Monsieur Mouillard, and I could find no one but you."

Lampron stared astonished at this little thin-lipped man who had just changed his tone and manner so unexpectedly.

"Well, Monsieur," he answered, "you might have got his character from me with less trouble; there was no need to make a scene."

"Excuse me. You say I should have got his character; that is exactly what I did not want; characters are always good. What I wanted was a cry from the heart of a friend outraged and brought to bay. That is what I got, and it satisfies me. I am much obliged to you, Monsieur, and beg you will excuse my conduct."

"But, since we are talking sense at present, allow me to put you a question in my turn. I am not in the habit of going around the point. Is my friend's proposal likely to be accepted or not?"

"Monsieur Lampron, in these delicate matters I have decided for the future to leave my daughter entirely free. Although my happiness is at stake almost as entirely as hers, I shall not say a word save to advise. In accordance with this resolve I communicated Flamaran's proposal to her."

"Well?"

"I expected she would refuse it."

"But she said 'Yes'?"

"She did not say 'No;' if she had, you can guess that I should not be here."

At this reply I quite lost my head, and was very near tearing aside the curtain, and bursting forth into the studio with a shout of gratitude.

But M. Charnot added:

"Don't be too sure, though. There are certain serious, and, perhaps, insurmountable obstacles. I must speak to my daughter again. I will let your friend know of our final decision as soon as I can. Good-by, Monsieur."

Lampron saw him to the street, and I heard their steps grow distant in the passage. A moment later Sylvestre returned and held out both hands to me, saying:

"Well, are you happy now?"

"Of course I am, to a certain extent."

"To a certain extent! Why, she loves you."

"But the obstacles, Sylvestre!"

"Nonsense!"

"Perhaps insurmountable—those were his words."

"Why, obstacles are the salt of all our joys. What a deal you young men want before you can be called happy! You ask Life for certainties, as if she had any to give you!"

And he began to discuss my fears, but could not quite disperse them, for neither of us could guess what the obstacles could be.

August 2d.

After ten days of waiting, during which I have employed Lampron and M. Flamaran to intercede for me, turn and turn about; ten days passed in hovering between mortal anguish and extravagant hopes, during which I have formed, destroyed, taken up again and abandoned more plans than I ever made in all my life before, yesterday, at five o'clock, I got a note from M. Charnot, begging me to call upon him the same evening.

I went there in a state of nervous collapse. He received me in his study, as he had done seven months before, at our first interview, but with a more solemn politeness; and I noticed that the paper-knife, which he had taken up from the table as he resumed his seat, shook between his fingers. I sat in the same chair in which I had felt so ill at ease. To tell the truth, I felt very much the same, yesterday. M. Charnot doubtless noticed it, and wished to reassure me.

"Monsieur," said he, "I receive you as a friend. Whatever may be the result of our interview, you may be assured of my esteem. Therefore do not fear to answer me frankly."

He put several questions to me concerning my family, my tastes, and my acquaintance in Paris. Then he requested me to tell the simple story of my boyhood and my youth, the recollections of my home, of the college at La Chatre, of my holidays at Bourges, and of my student life.

He listened without interruption, playing with the ivory paperknife. When I reached the date—it was only last December—when I saw Jeanne for the first time

"That's enough," said he, "I know or guess the rest. Young man, I promised you an answer; this is it —"

For the moment, I ceased to breathe; my very heart seemed to stop beating.

"My daughter," went on M. Charnot, "has at this moment several proposals of marriage to choose from. You see I hide nothing from you. I have left her time to reflect; she has weighed and compared them all, and communicated to me yesterday the result of her reflections. To richer and more brilliant matches she prefers an honest man who loves her for herself, and you, Monsieur, are that honest man."

"Oh, thank you, thank you, Monsieur!" I cried.

"Wait a moment, there are two conditions."

"Were there ten, I would accept them without question!"

"Don't hurry. You will see; one is my daughter's, the other comes from both of us."

"You wish me to have some profession, perhaps?"

"No, that's not it. Clearly my son-in-law will never sit idle. Besides, I have some views on that subject, which I will tell you later if I have the chance. No, the first condition exacted by my daughter, and dictated by a feeling which is very pleasant to me, is that you promise never to leave Paris."

"That I swear to, with all the pleasure in life!"

"Really? I feared you had some ties."

"Not one."

"Or dislike for Paris."

"No, Monsieur; only a preference for Paris, with freedom to indulge it. Your second condition?"

"The second, to which my daughter and I both attach importance, is that you should make your peace with your uncle. Flamaran tells me you have quarrelled."

"That is true."

"I hope it is not a serious difference. A mere cloud, isn't it?"

"Unfortunately not. My uncle is very positive—"

"But at the same time his heart is in the right place, so far as I could judge from what I saw of him—in June, I think it was."

"Yes."

"You don't mind taking the first step?"

"I will take as many as may be needed."

"I was sure you would. You can not remain on bad terms with your father's brother, the only relative you have left. In our eyes this reconciliation is a duty, a necessity. You should desire it as much as, and even more than, we."

"I shall use every effort, Monsieur, I promise you."

"And in that case you will succeed, I feel sure."

M. Charnot, who had grown very pale, held out his hand to me, and tried hard to smile.

"I think, Monsieur Fabien, that we are quite at one, and that the hour has come—"

He did not finish the sentence, but rose and went to open a door between two bookcases at the end of the room.

"Jeanne," he said, "Monsieur Fabien accepts the two conditions, my dear."

And I saw Jeanne come smiling toward me.

And I, who had risen trembling, I, who until then had lost my head at the mere thought of seeing her, I, who had many a time asked myself in terror what I should say on meeting her, if ever she were mine, I felt myself suddenly bold, and the words rushed to my lips to thank her, to express my joy.

My happiness, however, was evident, and I might have spared my words.

For the first half-hour all three of us talked together.

Then M. Charnot pushed back his armchair, and we two were left to ourselves.

He had taken up a newspaper, but I am pretty sure he held it upside down. In any case he must have been reading between the lines, for he did not turn the page the whole evening.

He often cast a glance over the top of the paper, folded in four, to the corner where we were sitting, and from us his eyes travelled to a pretty miniature of Jeanne as a child, which hung over the mantelpiece.

What comparisons, what memories, what regrets, what hopes were struggling in his mind? I know not, but I know he sighed, and had not we been there I believe he would have wept.

To me Jeanne showed herself simple as a child, wise and thoughtful as a woman. A new feeling was growing every instant within me, of perfect rest of heart; the certainty of happiness for all my life to come.

Yes, my happiness travelled beyond the present, as I looked into the future and saw along series of days passed by her side; and while she spoke to me, tranquil, confident, and happy too, I thought I saw the great wings of my dream closing over and enfolding us.

We spoke in murmurs. The open window let in the warm evening air and the confused roar of the city.

"I am to be your friend and counsellor?" said she.

"Always."

"You promise that you will ask my advice in all things, and that we shall act in concert?"

"I do."

"If this very first evening I ask you for a proof of this, you won't be angry?"

"On the contrary."

"Well, from what you have told me of your uncle, you seem to have accepted the second condition, of

making up your quarrel, rather lightly."

"I have only promised to do my best."

"Yes, but my father counts upon your success. How do you intend to act?"

"I haven't yet considered."

"That's just what I foresaw, and I thought it would perhaps be a good thing if we considered it together."

"Mademoiselle, I am listening; compose the plan of campaign, and I will criticise it."

Jeanne clasped her hands over her knees and assumed a thoughtful look.

"Suppose you wrote to him."

"There is every chance that he would not answer."

"Reply paid?"

"Mademoiselle, you are laughing; you are no counsellor any longer."

"Yes, I am. Let us be serious. Suppose you go to see him."

"That's a better idea. He may perhaps receive me."

"In that case you will capture him. If you can only get a man to listen—"

"Not my uncle, Mademoiselle. He will listen, and do you know what his answer will be?"

"What?"

"This, or something like it: 'My worthy nephew, you have come to tell me two things, have you not? First, that you are about to marry a Parisienne; secondly, that you renounce forever the family practice. You merely confirm and aggravate our difference. You have taken a step further backward. It was not worth while your coming out of your way to tell me this, and you may return as soon as you please.'"

"You surprise me. There must be some way of getting at him, if he is really good-hearted, as you say. If I could see your uncle I should soon find out a way."

"If you could see him! Yes, that would be the best way of all; it couldn't help succeeding. He imagines you as a flighty Parisienne; he is afraid of you; he is more angry with me for loving you than for refusing to carry on his practice. If he could only see you, he would soon forgive me."

"You think so?"

"I'm sure of it."

"Do you think that if I were to look him in the face, as I now look at you, and to say to him: 'Monsieur Mouillard, will you not consent to my becoming your niece?' do you think that then he would give in?"

"Alas! Mademoiselle, why can not it be tried?"

"It certainly is difficult, but I won't say it can not."

We explained, or rather Jeanne explained, the case to M. Charnot, who is assuredly her earliest and most complete conquest. At first he cried out against the idea. He said it was entirely my business, a family matter in which he had no right to interfere. She insisted. She carried his scruples by storm. She boldly proposed a trip to Bourges, and a visit to M. Mouillard. She overflowed with reasons, some of them rather weak, but all so prettily urged! A trip to Bourges would be delightful—something so novel and refreshing! Had M. Charnot complained on the previous evening, or had he not, of having to stop in Paris in the heat of August? Yes, he had complained, and quite right too, for his colleagues did not hesitate to leave their work and rush off to the country. Then she cited examples: one off to the Vosges, another at Arcachon, yet another at Deauville. And she reminded him, too, that a certain old lady, one of his old friends of the Faubourg St. Germain, lived only a few miles out of Bourges, and had invited him to come and see her, she didn't know how many times, and that he had promised and promised and never kept his word. Now he could take the opportunity of going on from Bourges to her chateau. Finally, as M. Charnot continued to urge the singularity of such behavior, she replied:

"My dear father! not at all; in visiting Monsieur Mouillard you will be only fulfilling a social duty."

"How so, I should like to know?"

"He paid you a visit, and you will be returning it!"

M. Charnot tossed his head, like a father who, though he may not be convinced, yet admits that he is beaten.

As for me, Jeanne, I'm beginning to believe in the fairies again.

CHAPTER XVIII

A COOL RECEPTION

August 3d.

I have made another visit to the Rue de l'Universite. They have decided to make the trip. I leave for Bourges tomorrow, a day in advance of M. and Mademoiselle Charnot, who will arrive on the following morning.

I am sent on first to fulfil two duties: to engage comfortable rooms at the hotel—first floor with southern aspect—and then to see my uncle and prepare him for his visitors.

I am to prepare him without ruffling him. Jeanne has sketched my plan of campaign. I am to be the most affectionate of nephews, though he show himself the crustiest of uncles; to prevent him from recurring to the past, to speak soberly of the present, to confess that Mademoiselle Charnot is aware of my feelings for her, and shows herself not entirely insensible to them; but I am to avoid giving details, and must put off a full explanation until later, when we can study the situation together. M. Mouillard can not fail to be appeased by such deference, and to observe a truce while I hint at the possibility of a family council. Then, if these first advances are well received, I am to tell him that M. Charnot is actually travelling in the neighborhood, and, without giving it as certain, I may add that if he stops at Bourges he may like to return my uncle's visit.

There my role ends. Jeanne and M. Charnot will do the rest. It is with Jeanne, by the light of her eyes and her smile, that M. Mouillard is "to study the situation;" he will have to struggle against the redoubtable arguments of her youth and beauty. Poor man!

Jeanne is full of confidence. Her father, who has learned his lesson from her, feels sure that my uncle will give in. Even I, who can not entirely share this optimism, feel that I incline to the side of hope.

When I reached home, the porter handed me two cards from Larive. On the first I read:

CH. LARIVE,
Managing Clerk.
P. P. C.

The second, on glazed cardboard, announced, likewise in initials, another piece of news:

CH. LARIVE,
Formerly Managing Clerk.
P. F. P. M.

So the Parisian who swore he could not exist two days in the country is leaving Paris. That was fated. He is about to be married; I'm sure I don't object. The only consequence to me is that we never shall meet again, and I shall not weep over that.

BOURGES, August 4th.

If you have ever been in Bourges, you may have seen the little Rue Sous- les-Ceps, the Cours du Bat d'Argent and de la Fleur-de-lys, the Rues de la Merede-Dieu, des Verts-Galants, Mausecret, du Moulin-le-Roi, the Quai Messire-Jacques, and other streets whose ancient names, preserved by a praiseworthy sentiment or instinctive conservatism, betoken an ancient city still inhabited by old-fashioned people, by which I mean people attached to the soil, strongly marked with the stamp of the provincial in manners as in language; people who understand all that a name is to a street—its honor, its spouse if

you will, from which it must not be divorced.

My Uncle Mouillard, most devoted and faithful citizen of Bourges, naturally lives in one of these old streets, the Rue du Four, within the shadow of the cathedral, beneath the swing of its chimes.

Within fifteen minutes after my arrival at Bourges I was pulling the deer's foot which hangs, depilated with long use, beside his door. It was five o'clock, and I knew for certain that he would not be at home. When the courts rise, one of the clerks carries back his papers to the office, while he moves slowly off, his coat-tails flapping in the breeze, either to visit a few friends and clients, respectable dames who were his partners in the dance in the year 1840, or more often to take a "constitutional" along the banks of the Berry Canal, where, in the poplar shade, files of little gray donkeys are towing string after string of big barges.

So I was sure not to meet him.

Madeleine opened the door to me, and started as if shot.

"Monsieur Fabien!"

"Myself, Madeleine. My uncle is not at home?"

"No, Monsieur. Do you really mean to come in, Monsieur?"

"Why not?"

"The master's so changed since his visit to Paris, Monsieur Fabien!"

Madeleine stood still, with one hand holding up her apron, the other hanging, and gazed at me with reproachful anxiety.

"I must come in, Madeleine. I have a secret to tell you."

She made no answer, but turned and walked before me into the house.

It was not thus that I used to be welcomed in days gone by! Then Madeleine used to meet me at the station. She used to kiss me, and tell me how well I looked, promising the while a myriad sweet dishes which she had invented for me. Hardly did I set foot in the hall before my uncle, who had given up his evening walk for my sake, would run out of his study, heart and cravat alike out of their usual order at seeing me— me, a poor, awkward, gaping schoolboy: Today that is ancient history. To-day I am afraid to meet my uncle, and Madeleine is afraid to let me in.

She told me not a word of it, but I easily guessed that floods of tears had streamed from her black eyes down her thin cheeks, now pale as wax. Her face is quite transparent, and looks as if a tiny lamp were lighting it from within. There are strong feelings, too, beneath that impassive mask. Madeleine comes from Bayonne, and has Spanish blood in her. I have heard that she was lovely as a girl of twenty. With age her features have grown austere. She looks like a widow who is a widow indeed, and her heart is that of a grandmother.

She glided before me in her slippers to that realm of peace and silence, her kitchen. I followed her in. Two things that never found entrance there are dust and noise. A lonely goldfinch hangs in a wicker cage from the rafters, and utters from time to time a little shrill call. His note and the metallic tick-tick of Madeleine's clock alone enliven the silent flight of time. She sat down in the low chair where she knits after dinner.

"Madeleine, I am about to be married; did you know it?"

She slowly shook her head.

"Yes, in Paris, Monsieur Fabien; that's what makes the master so unhappy."

"You will soon see her whom I have chosen, Madeleine."

"I do not think so, Monsieur Fabien."

"Yes, yes, you will; and you will see that it is my uncle who is in the wrong."

"I have not often known him in the wrong."

"That has nothing to do with it. My marriage is fully decided upon, and all I want is to get my uncle's consent to it. Do you understand? I want to make friends with him."

Madeleine shook her head again.

"You won't succeed."

"My dear Madeleine!"

"No, Monsieur Fabien, you won't succeed."

"He must be very much changed, then!"

"So much that you could hardly believe it; so much that I can hardly keep myself from changing too. He, who had such a good appetite, now has nothing but fads. It's no good my cooking him dainties, or buying him early vegetables; he never notices them, but looks out of the window as I come in at the door with a surprise for him. In the evening he often forgets to go out in the garden, and sits at table, his elbows on his rumpled napkin, his head between his hands, and what he thinks of he keeps to himself. If I try to talk of you—and I have tried, Monsieur Fabien—he gets up in a rage, and forbids me to open my mouth on the subject. The house is not cheerful, Monsieur Fabien. Every one notices how he has changed; Monsieur Lorinet and his lady never enter the doors; Monsieur Hublette and Monsieur Horlet come and play dummy, looking all the time as if they had come for a funeral, thinking it will please the master. Even the clients say that the master treats them like dogs, and that he ought to sell his practice."

"Then it isn't sold?"

"Not yet, but I think it will be before long."

"Listen to me, Madeleine; you have always been good and devoted to me; I am sure you still are fond of me; do me one last service. You must manage to put me up here without my uncle knowing it."

"Without his knowing it, Monsieur Fabien!"

"Yes, say in the library; he never goes in there. From there I can study him, and watch him, without his seeing me, since he is so irritable and so easily upset, and as soon as you see an opportunity I shall make use of it. A sign from you, and down I come."

"Really, Monsieur Fabien—"

"It must be done, Madeleine; I must manage to speak to him before ten o'clock to-morrow morning, for my bride is coming."

"The Parisienne? She coming here!"

"Yes, with her father, by the train which gets in at six minutes past nine to-morrow."

"Good God! is it possible?"

"To see you, Madeleine; to see my uncle, to make my peace with him. Isn't it kind of her?"

"Kind? Monsieur Fabien! I tremble to think of what will happen. All the same, I shall be glad to have a sight of your young lady, of course."

And so we settled that Madeleine was not to say a word to my uncle about my being in Bourges, within a few feet of him. If she perceived any break in the gloom which enveloped M. Mouillard, she was to let me know; if I were obliged to put off my interview to the morrow, and to pass the night on the sofa-bed in the library, she was to bring me something to eat, a rug, and "the pillow you used in your holidays when you were a boy."

I was installed then in the big library on the first-floor, adjoining the drawing-room, its other door opening on the passage opposite M. Mouillard's door, and its two large windows on the garden. What a look of good antique middle-class comfort there was about it, from the floor of bees'-waxed oak, with its inequalities of level, to the four bookcases with glass doors, surmounted by four bronzed busts of Herodotus, Homer, Socrates, and Marmontel! Nothing had been moved; the books were still in the places where I had known them for twenty years; Voltaire beside Rousseau, the Dictionary of Useful Knowledge, and Rollin's Ancient History, the slim, well bound octavos of the Meditations of St. Ignatius, side by side with an enormous quarto on veterinary surgery.

The savage arrows, said to be poisoned, which always used to frighten me so much, were still arranged like a peacock's tail over the mantel-shelf, each end of which was adorned by the same familiar lumps of white coral. The musical-box, which I was not allowed to touch till I was eighteen, still

stood in the left-hand corner, and on the writing-table, near the little blotting-book that held the note-paper, rose, still majestic, still turning obedient to the touch within its graduated belts, the terrestrial globe "on which are marked the three voyages of Captain Cook, both outward and homeward." Ah, captain, how often have we sailed those voyages together! What grand headway we made as we scoured the tropics in the heel of the trade-wind, our ship threading archipelagoes whose virgin forests stared at us in wonder, all their strange flowers opening toward us, seeking to allure us and put us to sleep with their dangerous perfumes. But we always guessed the snare, we saw the points of the assegais gleaming amid the tall grasses; you gave the word in your full, deep voice, and our way lay infinite before us; we followed it, always on the track of new lands, new discoveries, until we reached the fatal isle of Owhyhee, the spot where this terrestrial globe is spotted with a tear—for I wept over you, my captain, at the age when tears unlock themselves and flow easily from a heart filled with enchantment!

Seven o'clock sounded from the cathedral; the garden door slammed to; my uncle was returning.

I saw him coming down the winding path, hat in hand, with bowed head. He did not stop before his graftings; he passed the clump of petunias without giving them that all-embracing glance I know so well, the glance of the rewarded gardener. He gave no word of encouragement to the Chinese duck which waddled down the path in front of him.

Madeleine was right. The time was not ripe for reconciliation; and more, it would need a great deal of sun to ripen it. O Jeanne, if only you were here!

"Any one called while I've been out?"

This, by the way, is the old formula to which my uncle has always been faithful. I heard Madeleine answer, with a quaver in her voice:

"No, nobody for you, sir."

"Someone for you, then? A lover, perhaps, my faithful Madeleine? The world is so foolish nowadays that even you might take it into your head to marry and leave me. Come, serve my dinner quickly, and if the gentleman with the decoration calls—you know whom I mean?"

"The tall, thin gentleman?"

"Yes. Show him into the drawing-room."

"A gentleman by himself into the drawing-room?"

"No, sir, no. The floor was waxed only yesterday, and the furniture's not yet in order."

"Very well! I'll see him in here."

My uncle went into the dining-room underneath me, and for twenty minutes I heard nothing more of him, save the ring of his wineglass as he struck on it to summon Madeleine.

He had hardly finished dinner when there came a ring at the street door. Some one asked for M. Mouillard, the gentleman with the decoration, I suppose, for Madeleine showed him in, and I could tell by the noise of his chair that my uncle had risen to receive his visitor.

They sat down and entered into conversation. An indistinct murmur reached me through the ceiling. Occasionally a clearer sound struck my ear, and I thought I knew that high, resonant voice. It was no doubt delusion, still it beset me there in the silence of the library, haunting my thoughts as they wandered restlessly in search of occupation. I tried to recollect all the men with fluty voices that I had ever met in Bourges: a corn-factor from the Place St. Jean; Rollet, the sacristan; a fat manufacturer, who used to get my uncle to draw up petitions for him claiming relief from taxation. I hunted feverishly in my memory as the light died away from the windows, and the towers of St. Stephen's gradually lost the glowing aureole conferred on them by the setting sun.

After about an hour the conversation grew heated.

My uncle coughed, the flute became shrill. I caught these fragments of their dialogue.

"No, Monsieur!"

"Yes, Monsieur!"

"But the law?"

"Is as I tell you."

"But this is tyranny!"

"Then our business is at an end."

Apparently it was not, though; for the conversation gradually sank down the scale to a monotonous murmur. A second hour passed, and yet a third. What could this interminable visit portend?

It was near eleven o'clock. A ray from the rising moon shone between the trees in the garden. A big black cat crept across the lawn, shaking its wet paws. In the darkness it looked like a tiger. In my mind's eye I saw Madeleine sitting with her eyes fixed on her dead hearth, telling her beads, her thoughts running with mine: "It is years since Monsieur Mouillard was up at such an hour." Still she waited, for never had any hand but hers shot the bolt of the street door; the house would not be shut if shut by any other than herself.

At last the dining-room door opened. "Let me show you a light; take care of the stairs."

Then followed the "Good-nights" of two weary voices, the squeaking of the big key turning in the lock, a light footstep dying away in the distance, and my uncle's heavy tread as he went up to his bedroom. The business was over.

How slowly my uncle went upstairs! The burden of sorrow was no metaphor in his case. He, who used to be as active as a boy, could now hardly support his own weight.

He crossed the landing and went into his room. I thought of following, him; only a few feet lay between us. No doubt it was late, but his excited state might have predisposed him in my favor. Suddenly I heard a sigh—then a sob. He was weeping; I determined to risk all and rush to his assistance.

But just as I was about to leave the library a skirt rustled against the wall, though I had heard no sound of footsteps preceding it. At the same instant a little bit of paper was slipped in under the door—a letter from the silent Madeleine. I unfolded the paper and saw the following words written across from one corner to the other, with a contempt for French spelling, which was thoroughly Spanish:

"Ni allais pat ceux soire."

Very well, Madeleine, since that's your advice, I'll refrain.

I lay down to sleep on the sofa. Yet I was very sorry for the delay. I hated to let the night go by without being reconciled to the poor old man, or without having attempted it at least. He was evidently very wretched to be affected to tears, for I had never known him to weep, even on occasions when my own tears had flowed freely. Yet I followed my old and faithful friend's advice, for I knew that she had the peace of the household as much at heart as I; but I felt that I should seek long and vainly before I could discover what this latest trouble was, and what part I had in it.

CHAPTER XIX

JEANNE THE ENCHANTRESS

BOURGES, August 5th.

I woke up at seven; my first thought was for M. Mouillard. Where could he be? I listened, but could hear no sound. I went to the window; the office-boy was lying flat on the lawn, feeding the goldfish in the fountain. This proved beyond a doubt that my uncle was not in.

I went downstairs to the kitchen.

"Well, Madeleine, has he gone out?"

"He went at six o'clock, Monsieur Fabien."

"Why didn't you wake me?"

"How could I guess? Never, never does he go out before breakfast."

I never have seen him like this before, not even when his wife died."

"What can be the matter with him?"

"I think it's the sale of the practice. He said to me last night, at the foot of the staircase: 'I am a brokenhearted man, Madeleine, a broken-hearted man. I might have got over it, but that monster of ingratitude, that cannibal'—saving your presence, Monsieur Fabien—'would not have it so. If I had him here I don't know what I should do to him.'"

"Didn't he tell you what he would do to the cannibal?"

"No. So I slipped a little note under your door when I went upstairs."

"Yes. I am much obliged to you for it. Is he any calmer this morning?"

"He doesn't look angry any longer, only I noticed that he had been weeping."

"Where is he?"

"I don't know at all. Besides, you might as well try to catch up with a deer as with him."

"That's true. I'd better wait for him. When will he be in?"

"Not before ten. I can tell you that it's not once a year that he goes out like this in the morning."

"But, Madeleine, Jeanne will be here by ten!"

"Oh, is Jeanne her name?"

"Yes. Monsieur Charnot will be here, too. And my uncle, whom I was to have prepared for their visit, will know nothing about it, nor even that I slept last night beneath his roof."

"To tell the truth, Monsieur Fabien, I don't think you've managed well. Still, there is Dame Fortune, who often doesn't put in her word till the last moment."

"Entreat her for me, Madeleine, my dear."

But Dame Fortune was deaf to prayers. My uncle did not return, and I could find no fresh expedient. As I made my way, vexed and unhappy, to the station, I kept asking myself the question that I had been turning over in vain for the last hour:

"I have said nothing to Monsieur Mouillard. Had I better say anything now to Monsieur Charnot?"

My fears redoubled when I saw Jeanne and M. Charnot at the windows of the train, as it swept past me into the station.

A minute later she stepped on to the platform, dressed all in gray, with roses in her cheeks, and a pair of gull's wings in her hat.

M. Charnot shook me by the hand, thoroughly delighted at having escaped from the train and being able to shake himself and tread once more the solid earth. He asked after my uncle, and when I replied that he was in excellent health, he went to get his luggage.

"Well!" said Jeanne. "Is all arranged?"

"On the contrary, nothing is."

"Have you seen him?"

"Not even that. I have been watching for a favorable opportunity without finding one. Yesterday evening he was busy with a visitor; this morning he went out at six. He doesn't even know that I am in Bourges."

"And yet you were in his house?"

"I slept on a sofa in his library."

She gave me a look which was as much as to say, "My poor boy, how very unpractical you are!"

"Go on doing nothing," she said; "that's the best you can do. If my father didn't think he was expected he would beat a retreat at once."

At this instant, M. Charnot came back to us, having seen his two trunks and a hatbox placed on top of the omnibus of the Hotel de France.

"That is where you have found rooms for us?"

"Yes, sir."

"It is now twelve minutes past nine; tell Monsieur Mouillard that we shall call upon him at ten o'clock precisely."

I went a few steps with them, and saw them into the omnibus, which was whirled off at a fast trot by its two steeds.

When I had lost them from my sight I cast a look around me, and noticed three people standing in line beneath the awning, and gazing upon me with interest. I recognized Monsieur, Madame, and Mademoiselle Lorinet. They were all smiling with the same look of contemptuous mockery. I bowed. The man alone returned my salute, raising his hat. By some strange freak of fate, Berthe was again wearing a blue dress.

I went back in the direction of the Rue du Four, happy, though at my wits' end, forming projects that were mutually destructive; now expatiating in the seventh heaven, now loading myself with the most appalling curses. I slipped along the streets, concealed beneath my umbrella, for the rain was falling; a great storm-cloud had burst over Bourges, and I blessed the rain which gave me a chance to hide my face.

From the banks of the Voizelle to the old quarter around the cathedral is a rather long walk. When I turned from the Rue Moyenne, the Boulevard des Italiens of Bourges, into the Rue du Four, a blazing sun was drying the rain on the roofs, and the cuckoo clock at M. Festuquet's—a neighbor of my uncle—was striking the hour of meeting.

I had not been three minutes at the garden door, a key to which had been given me by Madeleine, when M. Charnot appeared with Jeanne on his arm.

"To think that I've forgotten my overshoes, which I never fail to take with me to the country!"

"The country, father?" said Jeanne, "why, Bourges is a city!—"

"To be sure—to be sure," answered M. Charnot, who feared he had hurt my feelings.

He put on his spectacles and began to study the old houses around him.

"Yes, a city; really quite a city."

I do not remember what commonplace I stammered.

Little did I care for M. Charnot's overshoes or the honor of Bourges at that moment! On the other side of the wall, a few feet off, I felt the presence of M. Mouillard. I reflected that I should have to open the door and launch the Academician, without preface, into the presence of the lawyer, stake my life's happiness, perhaps, on my uncle's first impressions, play at any rate the decisive move in the game which had been so disastrously opened.

Jeanne, though she did her best to hide it, was extremely nervous. I felt her hand tremble in mine as I took it.

"Trust in God!" she whispered, and aloud: "Open the door."

I turned the key in the lock. I had arranged that Madeleine should go at once to M. Mouillard and tell him that there were some strangers waiting in the garden. But either she was not on the lookout, or she did not at once perceive us, and we had to wait a few minutes at the bottom of the lawn before any one came.

I hid myself behind the trees whose leafage concealed the wall.

M. Charnot was evidently pleased with the view before him, and turned from side to side, gently smacking his lips like an epicure. And, in truth, my uncle's garden was perfection; the leaves, washed by the rain, were glistening in the fulness of their verdure, great drops were falling from the trees with a silvery tinkle, the petunias in the beds were opening all their petals and wrapping us in their scent; the birds, who had been mute while the shower lasted, were now fluttering, twittering, and singing beneath the branches. I was like one bewitched, and thought these very birds were discussing us. The greenfinch said:

"Old Mouillard, look! Here's Princess Goldenlocks at your garden gate."

The tomtit said:

"Look out, old man, or she'll outwit you."

The blackbird said:

"I have heard of her from my grandfather, who lived in the Champs Elysees. She was much admired there."

The swallow said:

"Jeanne will have your heart in the time it takes me to fly round the lawn."

The rook, who was a bit of a lawyer, came swooping down from the cathedral tower, crying:

"Caw, caw, caw! Let her show cause—cause!"

And all took up the chorus:

"If you had our eyes, Monsieur Mouillard, you would see her looking at your study; if you had our ears, you would hear her sigh; if you had our wings, you would fly to Jeanne."

No doubt it was this unwonted concert which attracted Madeleine's attention. We saw her making her way, stiffly and slowly, toward the study, which stood in the corner of the garden.

M. Mouillard's tall figure appeared on the threshold, filling up the entire doorway.

"In the garden, did you say? Whatever is your idea in showing clients into the garden? Why did you let them in?"

"I didn't let them in; they came in of themselves."

"Then the door can't have been shut. Nothing is shut here. I'll have them coming in next by the drawing-room chimney. What sort of people are they?"

"There's a gentleman and a young lady whom I don't know."

"A young lady whom you don't know—a judicial separation, I'll warrant— it's indecent, upon my word it is. To think that there are people who come to me about judicial separations and bring their young ladies with them!"

As Madeleine fled before the storm and found shelter in her kitchen, my uncle smoothed back his white hair with both his hands—a surviving touch of personal vanity—and started down the walk around the grass-plot.

I effaced myself behind the trees. M. Charnot, thinking I was just behind him, stepped forward with airy freedom.

My uncle came down the path with a distracted air, like a man overwhelmed with business, only too pleased to snatch a moment's leisure between the parting and the coming client. He always loved to pass for being overwhelmed with work.

On his way he flipped a rosebud covered with blight, kicked off a snail which was crawling on the path; then, halfway down the path, he suddenly raised his head and gave a look at his disturber.

His bent brows grew smooth, his eyes round with the stress of surprise.

"Is it possible? Monsieur Charnot of the Institute!"

"The same, Monsieur Mouillard."

"And this is Mademoiselle Jeanne?"

"Just so; she has come with me to repay your kind visit."

"Really, that's too good of you, much too good, to come such a way to see me!"

"On the contrary, the most natural thing in the world, considering what the young people are about."

"Oh! is your daughter about to be married?"

"Certainly, that's the idea," said M. Charnot, with a laugh.

"I congratulate you, Mademoiselle!"

"I have brought her here to introduce her to you, Monsieur Mouillard, as is only right."

"Right! Excuse me, no."

"Indeed it is."

"Excuse me, sir. Politeness is all very well in its way, but frankness is better. I went to Paris chiefly to get certain information which you were good enough to give me. But, really, it was not worth your while to come from Paris to Bourges to thank me, and to bring your daughter too."

"Excuse me in my turn! There are limits to modesty, Monsieur Mouillard, and as my daughter is to marry your nephew, and as my daughter was in Bourges, it was only natural that I should introduce her to you."

"Monsieur, I have no longer a nephew."

"He is here."

"And I never asked for your daughter."

"No, but you have received your nephew beneath your roof, and consequently—"

"Never!"

"Monsieur Fabien has been in your house since yesterday; he told you we were coming."

"No, I have not seen him; I never should have received him! I tell you I no longer have a nephew! I am a broken man, a—a—a "

His speech failed him, his face became purple, he staggered and fell heavily, first in a sitting posture, then on his back, and lay motionless on the sanded path.

I rushed to the rescue.

When I got up to him Jeanne had already returned from the little fountain with her handkerchief dripping, and was bathing his temples with fresh water. She was the only one who kept her wits about her. Madeleine had raised her master's head and was wailing aloud.

"Alas!" she said, "it's that dreadful colic he had ten years ago which has got him again. Dear heart! how ill he was! I remember how it came on, just like this, in the garden."

I interrupted her lamentations by saying:

"Monsieur Charnot, I think we had better take Monsieur Mouillard up to bed."

"Then why don't you do it?" shouted the numismatist, who had completely lost his temper. "I didn't come here to act at an ambulance; but, since I must, do you take his head."

I took his head, Madeleine walked in front, Jeanne behind. My uncle's vast proportions swayed between M. Charnot and myself. M. Charnot, who had skilfully gathered up the legs, looked like a hired pallbearer.

As we met with some difficulty in getting upstairs, M. Charnot said, with clenched teeth:

"You've managed this trip nicely, Monsieur Fabien; I congratulate you sincerely!"

I saw that he intended to treat me to several variations on this theme.

But there was no time for talk. A moment later my uncle was laid, still unconscious, upon his bed, and Jeanne and Madeleine were preparing a mustard-plaster together, in perfect harmony. M. Charnot and I waited in silence for the doctor whom we had sent the office-boy to fetch. M. Charnot studied alternately my deceased aunt's wreath of orange-blossoms, preserved under a glass in the centre of the chimney-piece, and a painting of fruit and flowers for which it would have been hard to find a buyer at an auction. Our wait for the doctor lasted ten long minutes. We were very anxious, for M. Mouillard showed no sign of returning consciousness. Gradually, however, the remedies began to act upon him. The eyelids fluttered feebly; and just as the doctor opened the door, my uncle opened his eyes.

We rushed to his bedside.

"My old friend," said the doctor, "you have had plenty of people to look after you. Let me feel your pulse—rather weak; your tongue? Say a word or two."

"A shock—rather sudden—" said my uncle.

The doctor, following the direction of the invalid's eyes, which were fixed on Jeanne, upright at the foot of the bed, bowed to the young girl, whom he had not at first noticed; turned to me, who blushed like an idiot; then looked again at my uncle, only to see two big tears running down his cheeks.

"Yes, I understand; a pretty stiff shock, eh? At our age we should only be stirred by our recollections, emotions of bygone days, something we're used to; but our children take care to provide us with fresh ones, eh?"

M. Mouillard's breast heaved.

"Come, my dear fellow," proceeded the doctor; "I give you leave to give your future niece one kiss, and that in my presence, that I may be quite sure you don't abuse the license. After that you must be left quite alone; no more excitement, perfect rest."

Jeanne came forward and raised the invalid's head.

"Will you give me a kiss, uncle?"

She offered him her rosy cheek.

"With all my heart," said my uncle as he kissed her; "good girl—dear girl."

Then he melted into tears, and hid his face in his pillow.

"And now we must be left alone," said the doctor.

He came down himself in a moment, and gave us an encouraging account of the patient.

Hardly had the street door closed behind him when we heard the lawyer's powerful voice thundering down the stairs.

"Charnot!"

The old numismatist flew up the flight of stairs.

"Did you call me, Monsieur?"

"Yes, to invite you to dinner. I couldn't say the words just now, but it was in my mind."

"It is very kind of you, but we leave at nine o'clock."

"I dine at seven; that's plenty of time."

"It will tire you too much."

"Tire me? Why, don't you think I dine everyday?"

"I promise to come and inquire after you before leaving."

"I can tell you at once that I am all right again. No, no, it shall never be said that you came all the way from Paris to Bourges only to see me faint. I count upon you and Mademoiselle Jeanne."

"On all three of us?"

"That makes three, with me; yes, sir."

"Excuse me, four."

"I hope the fourth will have the sense to go and dine elsewhere."

"Come, come, Monsieur Mouillard; your nephew, your ward—"

"I ceased to be his guardian four years ago, and his uncle three weeks ago."

"He longs to put an end to this ill feeling—"

"Allow me to rest a little," said M. Mouillard, "in order that I may be in a better condition to receive my guests."

He lay down again, and showed clearly his intention of saying not another word on the subject.

During the conversation between M. Charnot and my uncle, to which we had listened from the foot of the staircase, Jeanne, who had a moment before been rejoicing over the completeness of the victory which she thought she had achieved, grew quite downhearted.

"I thought he had forgiven you when he kissed me," she said. "What can we do now? Can't you help us, Madeleine?"

Madeleine, whose heart was beginning to warm to Jeanne, sought vainly for an expedient, and shook her head.

"Ought he to go and see his uncle?" asked Jeanne.

"No," said Madeleine.

"Well, suppose you write to him, Fabien?"

Madeleine nodded approval, and drew from the depths of her cupboard a little glass inkstand, a rusty penholder, and a sheet of paper, at the top of which was a dove with a twig in its beak.

"My cousin at Romorantin died just before last New Year's Day," she explained; "so I had one sheet more than I needed."

I sat down at the kitchen table with Jeanne leaning over me, reading as I wrote. Madeleine stood upright and attentive beside the clock, forgetting all about her kitchen fire as she watched us with her black eyes.

This is what I wrote beneath the dove:

"MY DEAR UNCLE:

"I left Paris with the intention of putting an end to the misunderstanding between us, which has lasted only too long, and which has given me more pain than you can guess. I had no possible opportunity of speaking to you between five o'clock yesterday afternoon, when I arrived here, and ten o'clock this morning. If I had been able to speak with you, you would not have refused to restore me to your affection, which, I confess, I ought to have respected more than I have. You would have given your consent to my union, on which depends your own happiness, my dear uncle, and that of your nephew,

"FABIEN."

"Rather too formal," said Jeanne. "Now, let me try."

And the enchantress added, with ready pen:

"It is I, Monsieur Mouillard, who am chiefly in need of forgiveness. Mine is the greater fault by far. You forbade Monsieur Fabien to love me, and I took no steps to prevent his doing so. Even yesterday, when he came to your house, it was my doing. I had assured him that your kind heart would not be proof against his loving confession.

"Was I really wrong in that?"

"The words that you spoke just now have led me to hope that I was not.

"But if I was wrong, visit your anger on me alone. Forgive your nephew, invite him to dinner instead of us, and let me depart, regretting only that I was not judged worthy of calling you uncle, which would have been so pleasant and easy a name to speak. "JEANNE."

I read the two letters over aloud. Madeleine broke into sobs as she listened.

A smile flickered about the corners of Jeanne's mouth.

We left the house, committing to Madeleine the task of choosing a favorable moment to hand M. Mouillard our joint entreaty.

And here I may as well confess that from the instant we got out of the house, all through breakfast at the hotel, and for a quarter of an hour after it, M. Charnot treated me, in his best style, to the very hottest "talking-to" that I had experienced since my earliest youth. He ended with these words: "If you have not made your peace with your uncle by nine o'clock this evening, Monsieur, I withdraw my consent, and we shall return to Paris."

I strove in vain to shake his decision. Jeanne made a little face at me, which warned me I was on the wrong track.

"Very well," I said to her, "I leave the matter in your hands."

"And I leave it in the hands of God," she answered. "Be a man. If trouble awaits us, hope will at any rate steal us a happy hour or two."

We were just then in front of the gardens of the Archbishop's palace, so M. Charnot walked in. The current of his reflections was soon changed by the freshness of the air, the groups of children playing around their mothers—whom he studied ethnologically and with reference to the racial divisions of ancient Gaul—by the beauty of the landscape—its foreground of flowers, the Place St. Michel beyond, and further yet, above the barrack-roofs, the line of poplars lining the Auron. He ceased to be a father-in-law, and became a tourist again.

Jeanne stepped with airy grace among the groups of strollers, and the murmurs which followed her path, though often envious, sounded none the less sweetly in my ears for that. I hoped to meet Mademoiselle Lorinet.

After we had seen the gardens, we had to visit the Place Seraucourt, the Cours Chanzy, the cathedral, Saint-Pierre-le-Guillard, and the house of Jacques-Coeur. It was six o'clock by the time we got back to the Hotel de France.

A letter was waiting for us in the small and badly furnished entrance—hall. It was addressed to Mademoiselle Jeanne Charnot.

I recognized at once the ornate hand of M. Mouillard, and grew as white as the envelope.

M. Charnot cried, excitedly:

"Read it, Jeanne. Read it, can't you!"

Jeanne alone of us three kept a brave face.

She read:

"MY DEAR CHILD:

"I treated you perhaps with undue familiarity this morning, at a moment when I was not quite myself. Nevertheless, now that I have regained my senses, I do not withdraw the expressions of which I made use—I love you with all my heart; you are a dear girl.

"You will not get an old stager like me to give up his prejudices against the capital. Let it suffice that I have surrendered to a Parisienne. My niece, I forgive him for your sake.

"Come this evening, all three of you.

"I have several things to tell you, and several questions to ask you. My news is not all good. But I trust that all regrets will be overwhelmed in the gladness you will bring to my old heart.

"BRUTUS MOUILLARD."

When we rang at M. Mouillard's door, it was opened to us by Baptiste, the office-boy, who waits at table on grand occasions.

My uncle received us in the large drawing-room, in full dress, with his whitest cravat and his most camphorous frock-coat: "not a moth in ten years," is Madeleine's boast concerning this garment.

He saluted us all solemnly, without his usual effusiveness; bearing himself with simple and touching dignity. Strong emotion, which excites most natures, only served to restrain his. He said not a word of the past, nor of our marriage. This, the decisive engagement, opened with polite formalities.

I have often noticed this phenomenon; people meeting to "have it out" usually begin by saying nothing at all.

M. Mouillard offered his arm to Jeanne, to escort her to the dining-room. Jeanne was in high spirits. She asked him question after question about Bourges, its dances, fashions, manufactures, even about the procedure of its courts.

"I am sure you know that well, uncle," she said.

"Uncle" smiled at each question, his face illumined with a glow like that upon a chimney-piece when someone is blowing the fire. He answered her questions, but presently fell into a state of dejection, which even his desire to do honor to his guests could not entirely conceal. His thoughts betrayed themselves in the looks he kept casting upon me, no longer of anger, but of suffering, almost pleading, affection.

M. Charnot, who was rather tired, and also absorbed in Madeleine's feats of cookery, cast disjointed remarks and ejaculations into the gaps in the conversation.

I knew my uncle well enough to feel sure that the end of the dinner would be quite unlike the beginning.

I was right. During dessert, just as the Academician was singing the praises of a native delicacy, 'la forestine', my uncle, who had been revolving a few drops of some notable growth of Medoc in his glass for the last minute or two, stopped suddenly, and put down his glass on the table.

"My dear Monsieur Charnot," said he, "I have a painful confession to make to you."

"Eh? What? My dear friend, if it's painful to you, don't make it."

"Fabien," my uncle went on, "has behaved badly to me on certain occasions. But I say no more of it. His faults are forgotten. But I have not behaved to him altogether as I should."

"You, uncle?"

"Alas! It is so, my dear child. My practice, the family practice, which I faithfully promised your father to keep for you—"

"You have sold it?"

My uncle buried his face in his hands.

"Last night, my poor child, only last night!"

"I thought so."

"I was weak I listened to the prompting of anger; I have compromised your future. Fabien, forgive me in your turn."

He rose from the table, and came and put a trembling hand on my shoulder.

"No, uncle, you've not compromised anything, and I've nothing to forgive you."

"You wouldn't take the practice if I could still offer it to you?"

"No, uncle."

"Upon your word?"

"Upon my word!"

M. Mouillard drew himself up, beaming:

"Ah! Thank you for that speech, Fabien; you have relieved me of a great weight."

With one corner of his napkin he wiped away two tears, which, having arisen in time of war, continued to flow in time of peace.

"If Mademoiselle Jeanne, in addition to all her other perfections, brings you fortune, Fabien, if your future is assured—"

"My dear Monsieur Mouillard," broke in the Academician with ill-concealed satisfaction. "My colleagues call me rich. They slander me. Works on numismatics do not make a man rich. Monsieur Fabien, who made some investigations into the subject, can prove it to you. No; I possess no more than an honorable competence, which does not give me everything, but lets me lack nothing."

"Aurea mediocritas," exclaimed my uncle, delighted with his quotation. "Oh, that Horace! What a fellow he was!"

"He was indeed. Well, as I was saying, our daily bread is assured; but that's no reason why my son-in-law should vegetate in idleness which I do not consider my due, even at my age."

"Quite right."

"So he must work."

"But what is he to work at?"

"There are other professions besides the law, Monsieur Mouillard. I have studied Fabien. His temperament is somewhat wayward. With special training he might have become an artist. Lacking that early moulding into shape, he never will be anything more than a dreamer."

"I should not have expressed it so well, but I have often thought the same."

"With a temperament like your nephew's," continued M. Charnot, "the best he can do is to enter upon a career in which the ideal has some part; not a predominant, but a sufficient part, something between prose and poetry."

"Let him be a notary, then."

"No, that's wholly prose; he shall be a librarian."

"A librarian?"

"Yes, Monsieur Mouillard; there are a few little libraries in Paris, which are as quiet as groves, and in which places are to be got that are as snug as nests. I have some influence in official circles, and that can do no harm, you know."

"Quite so."

"We will put our Fabien into one of those nests, where he will be protected against idleness by the little he will do, and against revolutions by the little he will be. It's a charming profession; the very smell of books is improving; merely by breathing it you live an intellectual life."

"An intellectual life!" exclaimed my uncle with enthusiasm. "Yes, an intellectual life!"

"And cataloguing books, Monsieur Mouillard, looking through them, preserving them as far as possible from worms and readers. Don't you think that's an enviable lot?"

"Yes, more so than mine has been, or my successor's will be."

"By the way, uncle, you haven't told us who your successor is to be."

"Haven't I, really? Why, you know him; it's your friend Larive."

"Oh! That explains a great deal."

"He is a young man who takes life seriously."

"Very seriously, uncle. Isn't he about to be married?"

"Why, yes; to a rich wife."

"To whom?"

"My dear boy, he is picking up all your leavings; he is going to marry Mademoiselle Lorinet."

"He was always enterprising! But, uncle, it wasn't with him you were engaged yesterday evening?"

"Why not, pray?"

"You told Madeleine to admit a gentleman with a decoration."

"He has one."

"Good heavens! What is it?"

"The Nicham Iftikar, if it please you."

[A Tunisian order, which can be obtained for a very moderate sum.]

"It doesn't displease me, uncle, and surprises me still less. Larive will die with his breast more thickly plastered with decorations than an Odd Fellow's; he will be a member of all the learned societies in the department, respected and respectable, the more thoroughly provincial for having been outrageously Parisian. Mothers will confide their anxieties to him, and fathers their interests; but when his old acquaintances pass this way they will take the liberty of smiling in his face."

"What, jealous? Are you jealous of his bit of ribbon?"

"No, uncle, I regret nothing; not even Larive's good fortune."

M. Mouillard fixed his eyes on the cloth, and began again, after a moment's silence:

"I, Fabien, do regret some things. It will be mournful at times, growing old alone here. Yet, after all, it will be some consolation to me to think that you others are satisfied with life, to welcome you here for your holidays."

"You can do better than that," said M. Charlot. "Come and grow old among us. Your years will be the lighter to bear, Monsieur Mouillard. Doubtless we must always bear them, and they weigh upon us and bend our backs. But youth, which carries its own burden so lightly, can always give us a little help in bearing ours."

I looked to hear my uncle break out with loud objections.

"It is a fine night," he said, simply; "let us go into the garden, and do you decide whether I can leave roses like mine."

M. Mouillard took us into the garden, pleased with himself, with me, with Jeanne, with everybody, and with the weather.

It was too dark to see the roses, but we could smell them as we passed. I had taken Jeanne's arm in mine, and we went on in front, in the cool dusk, choosing all the little winding paths.

The birds were all asleep. But the grasshoppers, crickets, and all manner of creeping things hidden in the grass, or in the moss on the trees, were singing and chattering in their stead.

Behind us, at some distance—in fact, as far off as we could manage—the gravel crackled beneath the equal tread of the two elders, and in a murmur we could catch occasional scraps of sentences:

"A granddaughter like Jeanne, Monsieur Charlot"

"A grandson like Fabien, Monsieur Mouillard"

CHAPTER XX

A HAPPY FAMILY

PARIS, September 18th.

We are married. We are just back from the church. We have said good-by to all our friends, not without a quick touch or two of sadness, as quickly swallowed up in the joy which for the first time in the history of my heart is surging there at full tide, and widening to a limitless horizon. In the two hours I have to spare before starting for Italy, I am writing the last words in this brown diary, which I do not intend to take with me.

Jeanne, my own Jeanne, is leaning upon me and reading over my shoulder, which distracts the flow of my recollections.

There were crowds at the church. The papers had put us down among the fashionable marriages of the week. The Institute, the army, men of letters, public officials, had come out of respect for M. Charnot; lawyers of Bourges and Paris had come out of respect for my uncle. But the happiest, the most radiant, next to ourselves, were the people who came only for Jeanne's sake and mine; Sylvestre Lampron, painter-in-ordinary to Mademoiselle Charnot, bringing his pretty sketch as a wedding-present; M. Flamaran and Sidonie; Jupille, who wept as he used to "thirty years ago;" and M. and Madame Plumet, who took it in turns to carry their white-robed infant.

Jeanne and I certainly shook hands with a good many persons, but not with nearly as many as M. Mouillard. Clean-shaven, his cravat tied with exquisite care, he spun round in the crowd like a top, always dragging with him some one who was to introduce him to some one else. "One should make acquaintances immediately on arrival," he kept saying.

Yes, Uncle Mouillard has just arrived in Paris; he has settled down near us on the Quai Malaquais, in a pretty set of rooms which Jeanne chose for him. He thinks them perfect because she thought they would do. The tastes and interests of old student days have suddenly reawakened within him, and will not be put to sleep again. He already knows the omnibus and tramway lines better than I; he talks of Bourges as if it were twenty years since he left it: "When I used to live in the country, Fabien—"

My father-in-law has found in him a whole-hearted admirer, perhaps even a future pupil in numismatics. Their friendship makes me think of that—

["You don't mind, Jeanne?"

"Of course not, my dear; the brown diary is for our two selves alone." J.]

—of that of the town mouse and the country mouse. Just now, on their way back to the house, they had a conversation, by turns pathetic and jovial, in which their different temperaments met in the same feeling, but at opposite ends of the scale of its shades.

I caught this fragment of their talk:

"My dear Charnot, can you guess what I'm thinking about?"

"No, I haven't the least idea."

"I think it is very queer."

"What is queer?"

"To see a librarian begin his career with a blot of ink. For you can not deny that Fabien's marriage and situation, and my return to the capital, are all due to that. It must have been sympathetic ink—eh?"

"Felix culpa', as you say, Monsieur Mouillard. There are some blunders that are lucky; but you can't tell which they are, and that's never any excuse for committing them."

I could hardly get hold of Lampron for a moment in the crowd he so dislikes. He was more uncouth and more devoted than ever.

"Well, are you happy?" he said.

"Quite."

"When you're less happy, come and see me."

"We shall always be just as happy as we are now," said Jeanne.

And I think she is right.

Lampron smiled.

"Yes, I am quite happy, Sylvestre, and I owe my happiness to you, to her, and to others. I have done nothing myself to deserve happiness beyond letting myself drift on the current of life. Whenever I tried to row a stroke the boat nearly upset. Everything that others tried to do for me succeeded. I can't get over it. Just think of it yourself. I owed my introduction to Jeanne to Monsieur Flamaran, who drove me to call on her father; his friend; you courted her for me by painting her portrait; Madame Plumet told her you had done so, and also removed the obstacle in my path. I met her in Italy, thanks entirely to

you; and you clinched the proposal which had been begun by Flamaran. To crown all, the very situation I desired has been obtained for me by my father-in-law. What have I had to do? I have loved, sorrowed, and suffered, nothing more; and now I tremble at the thought that I owe my happiness to every one I know except myself."

"Cease to tremble, my friend; don't be surprised at it, and don't alter your system in the least. Your happiness is your due; what matter how God chooses to grant it? Suppose it is an income for life paid to you by your relatives, your friends, the world in general, and the natural order of things? Well, draw your dividends, and don't bother about where they come from."

Since Lampron said so, and he is a philosopher, I think I had better follow his advice. If you don't mind, Jeanne, I will cherish no ambition beyond your love, and refrain from running after any increase in wealth or reputation which might prove a decrease in happiness. If you agree, Jeanne, we shall see little of society, and much of our friends; we shall not open our windows wide enough for Love, who is winged, to fly out of them. If such is your pleasure, Jeanne, you shall direct the household of your own sweet will—I should say, of your sweet wisdom; you shall be queen in all matters of domestic economy, you shall rule our goings-out and our comings-in, our visits, our travels. I shall leave you to guide me, as a child, along the joyous path in which I follow your footsteps. I am looking up at Jeanne. She has not said "No."

ETEXT EDITOR'S BOOKMARKS:

All that a name is to a street—its honor, its spouse
Distrust first impulse
Felix culpa
Hard that one can not live one's life over twice
He always loved to pass for being overwhelmed with work
I don't call that fishing
If trouble awaits us, hope will steal us a happy hour or two
Obstacles are the salt of all our joys
People meeting to "have it out" usually say nothing at first
The very smell of books is improving
There are some blunders that are lucky; but you can't tell
You ask Life for certainties, as if she had any to give you

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