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## **FROMONT AND RISLER**

By ALPHONSE DAUDET

With a Preface by LECONTE DE LISLE, of the French Academy

BOOK 1.

### **ALPHONSE DAUDET**

Nominally Daudet, with the Goncourts and Zola, formed a trio representing Naturalism in fiction. He adopted the watchwords of that school, and by private friendship, no less than by a common profession of faith, was one of them. But the students of the future, while recognizing an obvious affinity between the other two, may be puzzled to find Daudet's name conjoined with theirs.

Decidedly, Daudet belonged to the Realistic School. But, above all, he was an impressionist. All that can be observed—the individual picture, scene, character—Daudet will render with wonderful accuracy, and all his novels, especially those written after 1870, show an increasing firmness of touch, limpidity of style, and wise simplicity in the use of the sources of pathetic emotion, such as befit the

cautious Naturalist. Daudet wrote stories, but he had to be listened to. Feverish as his method of writing was—true to his Southern character he took endless pains to write well, revising every manuscript three times over from beginning to end. He wrote from the very midst of the human comedy; and it is from this that he seems at times to have caught the bodily warmth and the taste of the tears and the very ring of the laughter of men and women. In the earlier novels, perhaps, the transitions from episode to episode or from scene to scene are often abrupt, suggesting the manner of the Goncourts. But to Zola he forms an instructive contrast, of the same school, but not of the same family. Zola is methodical, Daudet spontaneous. Zola works with documents, Daudet from the living fact. Zola is objective, Daudet with equal scope and fearlessness shows more personal feeling and hence more delicacy. And in style also Zola is vast, architectural; Daudet slight, rapid, subtle, lively, suggestive. And finally, in their philosophy of life, Zola may inspire a hate of vice and wrong, but Daudet wins a love for what is good and true.

Alphonse Daudet was born in Nimes, Provence, May 13, 1840. His father had been a well-to-do silk manufacturer, but, while Alphonse was still a child, lost his property. Poverty compelled the son to seek the wretched post of usher (pion) in a school at Alais. In November, 1857, he settled in Paris and joined his almost equally penniless brother Ernest. The autobiography, 'Le Petit Chose' (1868), gives graphic details about this period. His first years of literary life were those of an industrious Bohemian, with poetry for consolation and newspaper work for bread. He had secured a secretaryship with the Duc de Morny, President of the Corps Legislatif, and had won recognition for his short stories in the 'Figaro', when failing health compelled him to go to Algiers. Returning, he married toward that period a lady (Julia Allard, born 1847), whose literary talent comprehended, supplemented, and aided his own. After the death of the Duc de Morny (1865) he consecrated himself entirely to literature and published 'Lettres de mon Moulin' (1868), which also made his name favorably known. He now turned from fiction to the drama, and it was not until after 1870 that he became fully conscious of his vocation as a novelist, perhaps through the trials of the siege of Paris and the humiliation of his country, which deepened his nature without souring it. Daudet's genial satire, 'Tartarin de Tarascon', appeared in 1872; but with the Parisian romance 'Fromont jeune et Risler aine', crowned by the Academy (1874), he suddenly advanced into the foremost rank of French novelists; it was his first great success, or, as he puts it, "the dawn of his popularity."

How numberless editions of this book were printed, and rights of translations sought from other countries, Daudet has told us with natural pride. The book must be read to be appreciated. "Risler, a self-made, honest man, raises himself socially into a society against the corruptness of which he has no defence and from which he escapes only by suicide. Sidonie Chebe is a peculiarly French type, a vain and heartless woman; Delobelle, the actor, a delectable figure; the domestic simplicity of Desiree Delobelle and her mother quite refreshing."

Success followed now after success. 'Jack (1876); Le Nabab (1877); Les Rois en exil (1879); Numa Roumestan (1882); L'Evangeliste (1883); Sapho (1884); Tartarin sur des Alces (1886); L'Immortel (1888); Port Tarascon (1890); Rose et Ninette (1892); La petite Parvise (1895); and Soutien de Famille (1899)'; such is the long list of the great life-artist. In Le Nabab we find obvious traces of Daudet's visits to Algiers and Corsica—Mora is the Duc de Morny. Sapho is the most concentrated of his novels, with never a divergence, never a break, in its development. And of the theme—legitimate marriage contra common-law—what need be said except that he handled it in a manner most acceptable to the aesthetic and least offensive to the moral sense?

L'Immortel is a satire springing from personal reasons; L'Evangeliste and Rose et Ninette—the latter on the divorce problem—may be classed as clever novels; but had Daudet never written more than 'Fromont et Risler', 'Tartarin sur les Alces', and 'Port Tarascon', these would keep him in lasting remembrance.

We must not omit to mention also many 'contes' and his 'Trente ans de Paris (A travers ma vie et mes livres), Souvenirs d'un Homme de lettres (1888), and Notes sur la Vie (1899)'.

Alphonse Daudet died in Paris, December 16, 1897

LECONTE  
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l'Academie  
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# FROMONT AND RISLER

## CHAPTER I

### A WEDDING-PARTY AT THE CAFE VEFOUR

"Madame Chebe!"

"My boy—"

"I am so happy!"

This was the twentieth time that day that the good Risler had said that he was happy, and always with the same emotional and contented manner, in the same low, deep voice—the voice that is held in check by emotion and does not speak too loud for fear of suddenly breaking into violent tears.

Not for the world would Risler have wept at that moment—imagine a newly-made husband giving way to tears in the midst of the wedding-festival! And yet he had a strong inclination to do so. His happiness stifled him, held him by the throat, prevented the words from coming forth. All that he could do was to murmur from time to time, with a slight trembling of the lips, "I am happy; I am happy!"

Indeed, he had reason to be happy.

Since early morning the poor man had fancied that he was being whirled along in one of those magnificent dreams from which one fears lest he may awake suddenly with blinded eyes; but it seemed to him as if this dream would never end. It had begun at five o'clock in the morning, and at ten o'clock at night, exactly ten o'clock by Vefour's clock, he was still dreaming.

How many things had happened during that day, and how vividly he remembered the most trivial details.

He saw himself, at daybreak, striding up and down his bachelor quarters, delight mingled with impatience, clean-shaven, his coat on, and two pairs of white gloves in his pocket. Then there were the wedding-coaches, and in the foremost one—the one with white horses, white reins, and a yellow damask lining—the bride, in her finery, floated by like a cloud. Then the procession into the church, two by two, the white veil in advance, ethereal, and dazzling to behold. The organ, the verger, the cure's sermon, the tapers casting their light upon jewels and spring gowns, and the throng of people in the sacristy, the tiny white cloud swallowed up, surrounded, embraced, while the bridegroom distributed hand-shakes among all the leading tradesmen of Paris, who had assembled to do him honor. And the grand crash from the organ at the close, made more solemn by the fact that the church door was thrown wide open, so that the whole street took part in the family ceremony—the music passing through the vestibule at the same time with the procession—the exclamations of the crowd, and a burnisher in an ample lute-string apron remarking in a loud voice, "The groom isn't handsome, but the bride's as pretty as a picture." That is the kind of thing that makes you proud when you happen to be the bridegroom.

And then the breakfast at the factory, in a workroom adorned with hangings and flowers; the drive in the Bois—a concession to the wishes of his mother-in-law, Madame Chebe, who, being the petty Parisian bourgeoisie that she was, would not have deemed her daughter legally married without a drive around the lake and a visit to the Cascade. Then the return for dinner, as the lamps were being lighted along the boulevard, where people turned to look after the wedding-party, a typical well-to-do bourgeois wedding-party, as it drove up to the grand entrance at Vefour's with all the style the livery horses could command.

Risler had reached that point in his dream.

And now the worthy man, dazed with fatigue and well-being, glanced vaguely about that huge table of twenty-four covers, curved in the shape of a horseshoe at the ends, and surrounded by smiling, familiar faces, wherein he seemed to see his happiness reflected in every eye. The dinner was drawing near its close. The wave of private conversation flowed around the table. Faces were turned toward one another, black sleeves stole behind waists adorned with bunches of asclepias, a childish face laughed over a fruit ice, and the dessert at the level of the guests' lips encompassed the cloth with animation, bright colors, and light.

Ah, yes! Risler was very happy.

Except his brother Frantz, everybody he loved was there. First of all, sitting opposite him, was Sidonie—yesterday little Sidonie, to-day his wife. For the ceremony of dinner she had laid aside her veil; she had emerged from her cloud. Now, above the smooth, white silk gown, appeared a pretty face of a less lustrous and softer white, and the crown of hair—beneath that other crown so carefully bestowed—would have told you of a tendency to rebel against life, of little feathers fluttering for an opportunity to fly away. But husbands do not see such things as those.

Next to Sidonie and Frantz, the person whom Risler loved best in the world was Madame Georges Fromont, whom he called "Madame Chorche," the wife of his partner and the daughter of the late Fromont, his former employer and his god. He had placed her beside him, and in his manner of speaking to her one could read affection and deference. She was a very young woman, of about the same age as Sidonie, but of a more regular, quiet and placid type of beauty. She talked little, being out of her element in that conglomerate assemblage; but she tried to appear affable.

On Risler's other side sat Madame Chebe, the bride's mother, radiant and gorgeous in her green satin gown, which gleamed like a shield. Ever since the morning the good woman's every thought had been as brilliant as that robe of emblematic hue. At every moment she said to herself: "My daughter is marrying Fromont Jeune and Risler Aine, of Rue des Vieilles Haudriettes!" For, in her mind, it was not Risler alone whom her daughter took for her husband, but the whole sign of the establishment, illustrious in the commercial annals of Paris; and whenever she mentally announced that glorious event, Madame Chebe sat more erect than ever, stretching the silk of the bodice until it almost cracked.

What a contrast to the attitude of Monsieur Chebe, who was seated at a short distance. In different households, as a general rule, the same causes produce altogether different results. That little man, with the high forehead of a visionary, as inflated and hollow as a ball, was as fierce in appearance as his wife was radiant. That was nothing unusual, by the way, for Monsieur Chebe was in a frenzy the whole year long. On this particular evening, however, he did not wear his customary woe-begone, lack-lustre expression, nor the full-skirted coat, with the pockets sticking out behind, filled to repletion with samples of oil, wine, truffles, or vinegar, according as he happened to be dealing in one or the other of those articles. His black coat, new and magnificent, made a fitting pendant to the green gown; but unfortunately his thoughts were of the color of his coat. Why had they not seated him beside the bride, as was his right? Why had they given his seat to young Fromont? And there was old Gardinois, the Fromonts' grandfather, what business had he by Sidonie's side? Ah! that was how it was to be! Everything for the Fromonts and nothing for the Chebes! And yet people are amazed that there are such things as revolutions!

Luckily the little man had by his side, to vent his anger upon, his friend Delobelle, an old, retired actor, who listened to him with his serene and majestic holiday countenance.

Strangely enough, the bride herself had something of that same expression. On that pretty and youthful face, which happiness enlivened without making glad, appeared indications of some secret preoccupation; and, at times, the corners of her lips quivered with a smile, as if she were talking to herself.

With that same little smile she replied to the somewhat pronounced pleasantries of Grandfather Gardinois, who sat by her side.

"This Sidonie, on my word!" said the good man, with a laugh. "When I think that not two months ago she was talking about going into a convent. We all know what sort of convents such minxes as she go to! As the saying is in our province: The Convent of Saint Joseph, four shoes under the bed!"

And everybody at the table laughed heartily at the rustic jests of the old Berrichon peasant, whose colossal fortune filled the place of manliness, of education, of kindness of heart, but not of wit; for he had plenty of that, the rascal—more than all his bourgeois fellow-guests together. Among the very rare persons who inspired a sympathetic feeling in his breast, little Chebe, whom he had known as an urchin, appealed particularly to him; and she, for her part, having become rich too recently not to venerate wealth, talked to her right-hand neighbor with a very perceptible air of respect and coquetry.

With her left-hand-neighbor, on the contrary, Georges Fromont, her husband's partner, she exhibited the utmost reserve. Their conversation was restricted to the ordinary courtesies of the table; indeed there was a sort of affectation of indifference between them.

Suddenly there was that little commotion among the guests which indicates that they are about to rise: the rustling of silk, the moving of chairs, the last words of conversations, the completion of a laugh, and in that half-silence Madame Chebe, who had become communicative, observed in a very loud tone to a provincial cousin, who was gazing in an ecstasy of admiration at the newly made bride's

reserved and tranquil demeanor, as she stood with her arm in Monsieur Gardinois's:

"You see that child, cousin—well, no one has ever been able to find out what her thoughts were."

Thereupon the whole party rose and repaired to the grand salon.

While the guests invited for the ball were arriving and mingling with the dinner-guests, while the orchestra was tuning up, while the cavaliers, eyeglass in position, strutted before the impatient, white-gowned damsels, the bridegroom, awed by so great a throng, had taken refuge with his friend Planus—Sigismond Planus, cashier of the house of Fromont for thirty years—in that little gallery decorated with flowers and hung with a paper representing shrubbery and clambering vines, which forms a sort of background of artificial verdure to Vefour's gilded salons.

"Sigismond, old friend—I am very happy."

And Sigismond too was happy; but Risler did not give him time to say so. Now that he was no longer in dread of weeping before his guests, all the joy in his heart overflowed.

"Just think of it, my friend!—It's so extraordinary that a young girl like Sidonie would consent to marry me. For you know I'm not handsome. I didn't need to have that impudent creature tell me so this morning to know it. And then I'm forty-two—and she such a dear little thing! There were so many others she might have chosen, among the youngest and the richest, to say nothing of my poor Frantz, who loved her so. But, no, she preferred her old Risler. And it came about so strangely. For a long time I noticed that she was sad, greatly changed. I felt sure there was some disappointment in love at the bottom of it. Her mother and I looked about, and we cudgelled our brains to find out what it could be. One morning Madame Chebe came into my room weeping, and said, 'You are the man she loves, my dear friend!'—And I was the man—I was the man! Bless my soul! Whoever would have suspected such a thing? And to think that in the same year I had those two great pieces of good fortune— a partnership in the house of Fromont and married to Sidonie—Oh!"

At that moment, to the strains of a giddy, languishing waltz, a couple whirled into the small salon. They were Risler's bride and his partner, Georges Fromont. Equally young and attractive, they were talking in undertones, confining their words within the narrow circle of the waltz.

"You lie!" said Sidonie, slightly pale, but with the same little smile.

And the other, paler than she, replied:

"I do not lie. It was my uncle who insisted upon this marriage. He was dying—you had gone away. I dared not say no."

Risler, at a distance, gazed at them in admiration.

"How pretty she is! How well they dance!"

But, when they spied him, the dancers separated, and Sidonie walked quickly to him.

"What! You here? What are you doing? They are looking everywhere for you. Why aren't you in there?"

As she spoke she retied his cravat with a pretty, impatient gesture. That enchanted Risler, who smiled at Sigismond from the corner of his eye, too overjoyed at feeling the touch of that little gloved hand on his neck, to notice that she was trembling to the ends of her slender fingers.

"Give me your arm," she said to him, and they returned together to the salons. The white bridal gown with its long train made the badly cut, awkwardly worn black coat appear even more uncouth; but a coat can not be retied like a cravat; she must needs take it as it was. As they passed along, returning the salutations of all the guests who were so eager to smile upon them, Sidonie had a momentary thrill of pride, of satisfied vanity. Unhappily it did not last. In a corner of the room sat a young and attractive woman whom nobody invited to dance, but who looked on at the dances with a placid eye, illumined by all the joy of a first maternity. As soon as he saw her, Risler walked straight to the corner where she sat and compelled Sidonie to sit beside her. Needless to say that it was Madame "Chorche." To whom else would he have spoken with such affectionate respect? In what other hand than hers could he have placed his little Sidonie's, saying: "You will love her dearly, won't you? You are so good. She needs your advice, your knowledge of the world."

"Why, my dear Risler," Madame Georges replied, "Sidonie and I are old friends. We have reason to be fond of each other still."

And her calm, straightforward glance strove unsuccessfully to meet that of her old friend.

With his ignorance of women, and his habit of treating Sidonie as a child, Risler continued in the same tone:

"Take her for your model, little one. There are not two people in the world like Madame Chorche. She has her poor father's heart. A true Fromont!"

Sidonie, with her eyes cast down, bowed without replying, while an imperceptible shudder ran from the tip of her satin shoe to the topmost bit of orange-blossom in her crown. But honest Risler saw nothing. The excitement, the dancing, the music, the flowers, the lights made him drunk, made him mad. He believed that every one breathed the same atmosphere of bliss beyond compare which enveloped him. He had no perception of the rivalries, the petty hatreds that met and passed one another above all those bejewelled foreheads.

He did not notice Delobelle, standing with his elbow on the mantel, one hand in the armhole of his waistcoat and his hat upon his hip, weary of his eternal attitudinizing, while the hours slipped by and no one thought of utilizing his talents. He did not notice M. Chebe, who was prowling darkly between the two doors, more incensed than ever against the Fromonts. Oh! those Fromonts!—How large a place they filled at that wedding! They were all there with their wives, their children, their friends, their friends' friends. One would have said that one of themselves was being married. Who had a word to say of the Rislers or the Chebes? Why, he—he, the father, had not even been presented!— And the little man's rage was redoubled by the attitude of Madame Chebe, smiling maternally upon one and all in her scarab-hued dress.

Furthermore, there were at this, as at almost all wedding-parties, two distinct currents which came together but without mingling. One of the two soon gave place to the other. The Fromonts, who irritated Monsieur Chebe so much and who formed the aristocracy of the ball, the president of the Chamber of Commerce, the syndic of the solicitors, a famous chocolate-manufacturer and member of the Corps Legislatif, and the old millionaire Gardinois, all retired shortly after midnight. Georges Fromont and his wife entered their carriage behind them. Only the Risler and Chebe party remained, and the festivity at once changed its aspect, becoming more uproarious.

The illustrious Delobelle, disgusted to see that no one called upon him for anything, decided to call upon himself for something, and began in a voice as resonant as a gong the monologue from Ruy Blas: "Good appetite, Messieurs!" while the guests thronged to the buffet, spread with chocolate and glasses of punch. Inexpensive little costumes were displayed upon the benches, overjoyed to produce their due effect at last; and here and there divers young shop-clerks, consumed with conceit, amused themselves by venturing upon a quadrille.

The bride had long wished to take her leave. At last she disappeared with Risler and Madame Chebe. As for Monsieur Chebe, who had recovered all his importance, it was impossible to induce him to go. Some one must be there to do the honors, deuce take it! And I assure you that the little man assumed the responsibility! He was flushed, lively, frolicsome, noisy, almost seditious. On the floor below he could be heard talking politics with Vefour's headwaiter, and making most audacious statements.

Through the deserted streets the wedding-carriage, the tired coachman holding the white reins somewhat loosely, rolled heavily toward the Marais.

Madame Chebe talked continuously, enumerating all the splendors of that memorable day, rhapsodizing especially over the dinner, the commonplace menu of which had been to her the highest display of magnificence. Sidonie mused in the darkness of the carriage, and Risler, sitting opposite her, even though he no longer said, "I am very happy," continued to think it with all his heart. Once he tried to take possession of a little white hand that rested against the closed window, but it was hastily withdrawn, and he sat there without moving, lost in mute admiration.

They drove through the Halles and the Rue de Rambuteau, thronged with kitchen-gardeners' wagons; and, near the end of the Rue des Francs- Bourgeois, they turned the corner of the Archives into the Rue de Braque. There they stopped first, and Madame Chebe alighted at her door, which was too narrow for the magnificent green silk frock, so that it vanished in the hall with rustlings of revolt and with all its folds muttering. A few minutes later, a tall, massive portal on the Rue des Vieilles- Haudriettes, bearing on the escutcheon that betrayed the former family mansion, beneath half-effaced armorial bearings, a sign in blue letters, Wall Papers, was thrown wide open to allow the wedding-carriage to pass through.

Thereupon the bride, hitherto motionless and like one asleep, seemed to wake suddenly, and if all the lights in the vast buildings, workshops or storehouses, which surrounded the courtyard, had not been extinguished, Risler might have seen that pretty, enigmatical face suddenly lighted by a smile of

triumph. The wheels revolved less noisily on the fine gravel of a garden, and soon stopped before the stoop of a small house of two floors. It was there that the young Fromonts lived, and Risler and his wife were to take up their abode on the floor above. The house had an aristocratic air. Flourishing commerce avenged itself therein for the dismal street and the out-of-the-way quarter. There was a carpet on the stairway leading to their apartment, and on all sides shone the gleaming whiteness of marble, the reflection of mirrors and of polished copper.

While Risler was parading his delight through all the rooms of the new apartment, Sidonie remained alone in her bedroom. By the light of the little blue lamp hanging from the ceiling, she glanced first of all at the mirror, which gave back her reflection from head to foot, at all her luxurious surroundings, so unfamiliar to her; then, instead of going to bed, she opened the window and stood leaning against the sill, motionless as a statue.

The night was clear and warm. She could see distinctly the whole factory, its innumerable unshaded windows, its glistening panes, its tall chimney losing itself in the depths of the sky, and nearer at hand the lovely little garden against the ancient wall of the former mansion. All about were gloomy, miserable roofs and squalid streets. Suddenly she started. Yonder, in the darkest, the ugliest of all those attics crowding so closely together, leaning against one another, as if overweighted with misery, a fifth-floor window stood wide open, showing only darkness within. She recognized it at once. It was the window of the landing on which her parents lived.

The window on the landing!

How many things the mere name recalled! How many hours, how many days she had passed there, leaning on that damp sill, without rail or balcony, looking toward the factory. At that moment she fancied that she could see up yonder little Chebe's ragged person, and in the frame made by that poor window, her whole child life, her deplorable youth as a Parisian street arab, passed before her eyes.

## CHAPTER II

### LITTLE CHEBE'S STORY

In Paris the common landing is like an additional room, an enlargement of their abodes, to poor families confined in their too small apartments. They go there to get a breath of air in summer, and there the women talk and the children play.

When little Chebe made too much noise in the house, her mother would say to her: "There there! you bother me, go and play on the landing." And the child would go quickly enough.

This landing, on the upper floor of an old house in which space had not been spared, formed a sort of large lobby, with a high ceiling, guarded on the staircase side by a wrought-iron rail, lighted by a large window which looked out upon roofs, courtyards, and other windows, and, farther away, upon the garden of the Fromont factory, which was like a green oasis among the huge old walls.

There was nothing very cheerful about it, but the child liked it much better than her own home. Their rooms were dismal, especially when it rained and Ferdinand did not go out.

With his brain always smoking with new ideas, which unfortunately never came to anything, Ferdinand Chebe was one of those slothful, project-devising bourgeois of when there are so many in Paris. His wife, whom he had dazzled at first, had soon detected his utter insignificance, and had ended by enduring patiently and with unchanged demeanor his continual dreams of wealth and the disasters that immediately followed them.

Of the dot of eighty thousand francs which she had brought him, and which he had squandered in his absurd schemes, only a small annuity remained, which still gave them a position of some importance in the eyes of their neighbors, as did Madame Chebe's cashmere, which had been rescued from every wreck, her wedding laces and two diamond studs, very tiny and very modest, which Sidonie sometimes begged her mother to show her, as they lay in the drawer of the bureau, in an old-fashioned white velvet case, on which the jeweller's name, in gilt letters, thirty years old, was gradually fading. That was the only bit of luxury in that poor annuitant's abode.

For a very long time M. Chebe had sought a place which would enable him to eke out their slender

income. But he sought it only in what he called standing business, his health forbidding any occupation that required him to be seated.

It seemed that, soon after his marriage, when he was in a flourishing business and had a horse and tilbury of his own, the little man had had one day a serious fall. That fall, to which he referred upon every occasion, served as an excuse for his indolence.

One could not be with M. Chebe five minutes before he would say in a confidential tone:

"You know of the accident that happened to the Duc d'Orleans?"

And then he would add, tapping his little bald pate "The same thing happened to me in my youth."

Since that famous fall any sort of office work made him dizzy, and he had found himself inexorably confined to standing business. Thus, he had been in turn a broker in wines, in books, in truffles, in clocks, and in many other things beside. Unluckily, he tired of everything, never considered his position sufficiently exalted for a former business man with a tilbury, and, by gradual degrees, by dint of deeming every sort of occupation beneath him, he had grown old and incapable, a genuine idler with low tastes, a good-for-nothing.

Artists are often rebuked for their oddities, for the liberties they take with nature, for that horror of the conventional which impels them to follow by-paths; but who can ever describe all the absurd fancies, all the idiotic eccentricities with which a bourgeois without occupation can succeed in filling the emptiness of his life? M. Chebe imposed upon himself certain rules concerning his goings and comings, and his walks abroad. While the Boulevard Sebastopol was being built, he went twice a day "to see how it was getting on."

No one knew better than he the fashionable shops and the bargains; and very often Madame Chebe, annoyed to see her husband's idiotic face at the window while she was energetically mending the family linen, would rid herself of him by giving him an errand to do. "You know that place, on the corner of such a street, where they sell such nice cakes. They would be nice for our dessert."

And the husband would go out, saunter along the boulevard by the shops, wait for the omnibus, and pass half the day in procuring two cakes, worth three sous, which he would bring home in triumph, wiping his forehead.

M. Chebe adored the summer, the Sundays, the great footraces in the dust at Clamart or Romainville, the excitement of holidays and the crowd. He was one of those who went about for a whole week before the fifteenth of August, gazing at the black lamps and their frames, and the scaffoldings. Nor did his wife complain. At all events, she no longer had that chronic grumbler prowling around her chair for whole days, with schemes for gigantic enterprises, combinations that missed fire in advance, lamentations concerning the past, and a fixed determination not to work at anything to earn money.

She no longer earned anything herself, poor woman; but she knew so well how to save, her wonderful economy made up so completely for everything else, that absolute want, although a near neighbor of such impecuniosity as theirs, never succeeded in making its way into those three rooms, which were always neat and clean, or in destroying the carefully mended garments or the old furniture so well concealed beneath its coverings.

Opposite the Chebes' door, whose copper knob gleamed in bourgeois fashion upon the landing, were two other and smaller ones.

On the first, a visiting-card, held in place by four nails, according to the custom in vogue among industrial artists, bore the name of

**RISLER DESIGNER OF PATTERNS.**

On the other was a small square of leather, with these words in gilt letters:

**MESDAMES DELOBELLE BIRDS AND INSECTS FOR ORNAMENT.**

The Delobelles' door was often open, disclosing a large room with a brick floor, where two women, mother and daughter, the latter almost a child, each as weary and as pale as the other, worked at one of the thousand fanciful little trades which go to make up what is called the 'Articles de Paris'.

It was then the fashion to ornament hats and ballgowns with the lovely little insects from South America that have the brilliant coloring of jewels and reflect the light like diamonds. The Delobelles had adopted that specialty.

A wholesale house, to which consignments were made directly from the Antilles, sent to them, unopened, long, light boxes from which, when the lid was removed, arose a faint odor, a dust of arsenic through which gleamed the piles of insects, impaled before being shipped, the birds packed closely together, their wings held in place by a strip of thin paper. They must all be mounted—the insects quivering upon brass wire, the humming-birds with their feathers ruffled; they must be cleansed and polished, the beak in a bright red, claw repaired with a silk thread, dead eyes replaced with sparkling pearls, and the insect or the bird restored to an appearance of life and grace. The mother prepared the work under her daughter's direction; for Desiree, though she was still a mere girl, was endowed with exquisite taste, with a fairy-like power of invention, and no one could, insert two pearl eyes in those tiny heads or spread their lifeless wings so deftly as she. Happy or unhappy, Desiree always worked with the same energy. From dawn until well into the night the table was covered with work. At the last ray of daylight, when the factory bells were ringing in all the neighboring yards, Madame Delobelle lighted the lamp, and after a more than frugal repast they returned to their work. Those two indefatigable women had one object, one fixed idea, which prevented them from feeling the burden of enforced vigils. That idea was the dramatic renown of the illustrious Delobelle. After he had left the provincial theatres to pursue his profession in Paris, Delobelle waited for an intelligent manager, the ideal and providential manager who discovers geniuses, to seek him out and offer him a role suited to his talents. He might, perhaps, especially at the beginning, have obtained a passably good engagement at a theatre of the third order, but Delobelle did not choose to lower himself.

He preferred to wait, to struggle, as he said! And this is how he awaited the struggle.

In the morning in his bedroom, often in his bed, he rehearsed roles in his former repertory; and the Delobelle ladies trembled with emotion when they heard behind the partition tirades from 'Antony' or the 'Medecin des Enfants', declaimed in a sonorous voice that blended with the thousand- and-one noises of the great Parisian bee-hive. Then, after breakfast, the actor would sally forth for the day; would go to "do his boulevard," that is to say, to saunter to and fro between the Chateau d'Eau and the Madeline, with a toothpick in the corner of his mouth, his hat a little on one side—always gloved, and brushed, and glossy.

That question of dress was of great importance in his eyes. It was one of the greatest elements of success, a bait for the manager—the famous, intelligent manager—who never would dream of engaging a threadbare, shabbily dressed man.

So the Delobelle ladies took good care that he lacked nothing; and you can imagine how many birds and insects it required to fit out a blade of that temper! The actor thought it the most natural thing in the world.

In his view, the labors, the privations of his wife and daughter were not, strictly speaking, for his benefit, but for the benefit of that mysterious and unknown genius, whose trustee he considered himself to be.

There was a certain analogy between the position of the Chebe family and that of the Delobelles. But the latter household was less depressing. The Chebes felt that their petty annuitant existence was fastened upon them forever, with no prospect of amelioration, always the same; whereas, in the actor's family, hope and illusion often opened magnificent vistas.

The Chebes were like people living in a blind alley; the Delobelles on a foul little street, where there was no light or air, but where a great boulevard might some day be laid out. And then, too, Madame Chebe no longer believed in her husband, whereas, by virtue of that single magic word, "Art!" her neighbor never had doubted hers.

And yet for years and years Monsieur Delobelle had been unavailingly drinking vermouth with dramatic agents, absinthe with leaders of clagues, bitters with vaudevillists, dramatists, and the famous what's-his-name, author of several great dramas. Engagements did not always follow. So that, without once appearing on the boards, the poor man had progressed from jeune premier to grand premier roles, then to the financiers, then to the noble fathers, then to the buffoons—

He stopped there!

On two or three occasions his friends had obtained for him a chance to earn his living as manager of a club or a cafe as an inspector in great warehouses, at the 'Phares de la Bastille' or the 'Colosse de Rhodes.' All that was necessary was to have good manners. Delobelle was not lacking in that respect, God knows! And yet every suggestion that was made to him the great man met with a heroic refusal.

"I have no right to abandon the stage!" he would then assert.

In the mouth of that poor devil, who had not set foot on the boards for years, it was irresistibly

comical. But one lost the inclination to laugh when one saw his wife and his daughter swallowing particles of arsenic day and night, and heard them repeat emphatically as they broke their needles against the brass wire with which the little birds were mounted:

"No! no! Monsieur Delobelle has no right to abandon the stage."

Happy man, whose bulging eyes, always smiling condescendingly, and whose habit of reigning on the stage had procured for him for life that exceptional position of a spoiled and admired child-king! When he left the house, the shopkeepers on the Rue des Francs-Bourgeois, with the predilection of the Parisian for everything and everybody connected with the theatre, saluted him respectfully. He was always so well dressed! And then he was so kind, so obliging! When you think that every Saturday night, he, Ruy Blas, Antony, Raphael in the 'Filles de Maybre,' Andres in the 'Pirates de la Savane,' sallied forth, with a bandbox under his arm, to carry the week's work of his wife and daughter to a flower establishment on the Rue St.-Denis!

Why, even when performing such a commission as that, this devil of a fellow had such nobility of bearing, such native dignity, that the young woman whose duty it was to make up the Delobelle account was sorely embarrassed to hand to such an irreproachable gentleman the paltry stipend so laboriously earned.

On those evenings, by the way, the actor did not return home to dinner. The women were forewarned.

He always met some old comrade on the boulevard, some unlucky devil like himself—there are so many of them in that sacred profession!—whom he entertained at a restaurant or cafe. Then, with scrupulous fidelity—and very grateful they were to him—he would carry the rest of the money home, sometimes with a bouquet for his wife or a little present for Desiree, a nothing, a mere trifle. What would you have? Those are the customs of the stage. It is such a simple matter in a melodrama to toss a handful of louis through the window!

"Ho! varlet, take this purse and hie thee hence to tell thy mistress I await her coming."

And so, notwithstanding their marvellous courage, and although their trade was quite lucrative, the Delobelles often found themselves in straitened circumstances, especially in the dull season of the 'Articles de Paris.'

Luckily the excellent Risler was at hand, always ready to accommodate his friends.

Guillaume Risler, the third tenant on the landing, lived with his brother Frantz, who was fifteen years his junior. The two young Swiss, tall and fair, strong and ruddy, brought into the dismal, hard-working house glimpses of the country and of health. The elder was a draughtsman at the Fromont factory and was paying for the education of his brother, who attended Chaptal's lectures, pending his admission to the Ecole Centrale.

On his arrival at Paris, being sadly perplexed as to the installation of his little household, Guillaume had derived from his neighbors, Mesdames Chebe and Delobelle, advice and information which were an indispensable aid to that ingenuous, timid, somewhat heavy youth, embarrassed by his foreign accent and manner. After a brief period of neighborhood and mutual services, the Risler brothers formed a part of both families.

On holidays places were always made for them at one table or the other, and it was a great satisfaction to the two exiles to find in those poor households, modest and straitened as they were, a taste of affection and family life.

The wages of the designer, who was very clever at his trade, enabled him to be of service to the Delobelles on rent-day, and to make his appearance at the Chebes' in the guise of the rich uncle, always laden with surprises and presents, so that the little girl, as soon as she saw him, would explore his pockets and climb on his knees.

On Sunday he would take them all to the theatre; and almost every evening he would go with Messieurs Chebe and Delobelle to a brewery on the Rue Blondel, where he regaled them with beer and pretzels. Beer and pretzels were his only vice.

For his own part, he knew no greater bliss than to sit before a foaming tankard, between his two friends, listening to their talk, and taking part only by a loud laugh or a shake of the head in their conversation, which was usually a long succession of grievances against society.

A childlike shyness, and the Germanisms of speech which he never had laid aside in his life of

absorbing toil, embarrassed him much in giving expression to his ideas. Moreover, his friends overawed him. They had in respect to him the tremendous superiority of the man who does nothing over the man who works; and M. Chebe, less generous than Delobelle, did not hesitate to make him feel it. He was very lofty with him, was M. Chebe! In his opinion, a man who worked, as Risler did, ten hours a day, was incapable, when he left his work, of expressing an intelligent idea. Sometimes the designer, coming home worried from the factory, would prepare to spend the night over some pressing work. You should have seen M. Chebe's scandalized expression then!

"Nobody could make me follow such a business!" he would say, expanding his chest, and he would add, looking at Risler with the air of a physician making a professional call, "Just wait till you've had one severe attack."

Delobelle was not so fierce, but he adopted a still loftier tone. The cedar does not see a rose at its foot. Delobelle did not see Risler at his feet.

When, by chance, the great man deigned to notice his presence, he had a certain air of stooping down to him to listen, and to smile at his words as at a child's; or else he would amuse himself by dazzling him with stories of actresses, would give him lessons in deportment and the addresses of outfitters, unable to understand why a man who earned so much money should always be dressed like an usher at a primary school. Honest Risler, convinced of his inferiority, would try to earn forgiveness by a multitude of little attentions, obliged to furnish all the delicacy, of course, as he was the constant benefactor.

Among these three households living on the same floor, little Chebe, with her goings and comings, formed the bond of union.

At all times of day she would slip into the workroom of the Delobelles, amuse herself by watching their work and looking at all the insects, and, being already more coquettish than playful, if an insect had lost a wing in its travels, or a humming-bird its necklace of down, she would try to make herself a headdress of the remains, to fix that brilliant shaft of color among the ripples of her silky hair. It made Desiree and her mother smile to see her stand on tiptoe in front of the old tarnished mirror, with affected little shrugs and grimaces. Then, when she had had enough of admiring herself, the child would open the door with all the strength of her little fingers, and would go demurely, holding her head perfectly straight for fear of disarranging her headdress, and knock at the Rislers' door.

No one was there in the daytime but Frantz the student, leaning over his books, doing his duty faithfully. But when Sidonie enters, farewell to study! Everything must be put aside to receive that lovely creature with the humming-bird in her hair, pretending to be a princess who had come to Chaptal's school to ask his hand in marriage from the director.

It was really a strange sight to see that tall, overgrown boy playing with that little girl of eight, humoring her caprices, adoring her as he yielded to her, so that later, when he fell genuinely in love with her, no one could have said at what time the change began.

Petted as she was in those two homes, little Chebe was very fond of running to the window on the landing. There it was that she found her greatest source of entertainment, a horizon always open, a sort of vision of the future toward which she leaned with eager curiosity and without fear, for children are not subject to vertigo.

Between the slated roofs sloping toward one another, the high wall of the factory, the tops of the plane-trees in the garden, the many-windowed workshops appeared to her like a promised land, the country of her dreams.

That Fromont establishment was to her mind the highest ideal of wealth.

The place it occupied in that part of the Marais, which was at certain hours enveloped by its smoke and its din, Risler's enthusiasm, his fabulous tales concerning his employer's wealth and goodness and cleverness, had aroused that childish curiosity; and such portions as she could see of the dwelling-houses, the carved wooden blinds, the circular front steps, with the garden-seats before them, a great white bird-house with gilt stripes glistening in the sun, the blue-lined coupe standing in the courtyard, were to her objects of continual admiration.

She knew all the habits of the family: At what hour the bell was rung, when the workmen went away, the Saturday payday which kept the cashier's little lamp lighted late in the evening, and the long Sunday afternoon, the closed workshops, the smokeless chimney, the profound silence which enabled her to hear Mademoiselle Claire at play in the garden, running about with her cousin Georges. From Risler she obtained details.

"Show me the salon windows," she would say to him, "and Claire's room."

Risler, delighted by this extraordinary interest in his beloved factory, would explain to the child from their lofty position the arrangement of the buildings, point out the print-shop, the gilding-shop, the designing-room where he worked, the engine-room, above which towered that enormous chimney blackening all the neighboring walls with its corrosive smoke, and which never suspected that a young life, concealed beneath a neighboring roof, mingled its inmost thoughts with its loud, indefatigable panting.

At last one day Sidonie entered that paradise of which she had heretofore caught only a glimpse.

Madame Fromont, to whom Risler often spoke of her little neighbor's beauty and intelligence, asked him to bring her to the children's ball she intended to give at Christmas. At first Monsieur Chebe replied by a curt refusal. Even in those days, the Fromonts, whose name was always on Rider's lips, irritated and humiliated him by their wealth. Moreover, it was to be a fancy ball, and M. Chebe—who did not sell wallpapers, not he!—could not afford to dress his daughter as a circus-dancer. But Risler insisted, declared that he would get everything himself, and at once set about designing a costume.

It was a memorable evening.

In Madame Chebe's bedroom, littered with pieces of cloth and pins and small toilet articles, Desiree Delobelle superintended Sidonie's toilet. The child, appearing taller because of her short skirt of red flannel with black stripes, stood before the mirror, erect and motionless, in the glittering splendor of her costume. She was charming. The waist, with bands of velvet laced over the white stomacher, the lovely, long tresses of chestnut hair escaping from a hat of plaited straw, all the trivial details of her Savoyard's costume were heightened by the intelligent features of the child, who was quite at her ease in the brilliant colors of that theatrical garb.

The whole assembled neighborhood uttered cries of admiration. While some one went in search of Delobelle, the lame girl arranged the folds of the skirt, the bows on the shoes, and cast a final glance over her work, without laying aside her needle; she, too, was excited, poor child! by the intoxication of that festivity to which she was not invited. The great man arrived. He made Sidonie rehearse two or three stately curtseys which he had taught her, the proper way to walk, to stand, to smile with her mouth slightly open, and the exact position of the little finger. It was truly amusing to see the precision with which the child went through the drill.

"She has dramatic blood in her veins!" exclaimed the old actor enthusiastically, unable to understand why that stupid Frantz was strongly inclined to weep.

A year after that happy evening Sidonie could have told you what flowers there were in the reception rooms, the color of the furniture, and the music they were playing as she entered the ballroom, so deep an impression did her enjoyment make upon her. She forgot nothing, neither the costumes that made an eddying whirl about her, nor the childish laughter, nor all the tiny steps that glided over the polished floors. For a moment, as she sat on the edge of a great red-silk couch, taking from the plate presented to her the first sherbet of her life, she suddenly thought of the dark stairway, of her parents' stuffy little rooms, and it produced upon her mind the effect of a distant country which she had left forever.

However, she was considered a fascinating little creature, and was much admired and petted. Claire Fromont, a miniature Cauchoise dressed in lace, presented her to her cousin Georges, a magnificent hussar who turned at every step to observe the effect of his sabre.

"You understand, Georges, she is my friend. She is coming to play with us Sundays. Mamma says she may."

And, with the artless impulsiveness of a happy child, she kissed little Chebe with all her heart.

But the time came to go. For a long time, in the filthy street where the snow was melting, in the dark hall, in the silent room where her mother awaited her, the brilliant light of the salons continued to shine before her dazzled eyes.

"Was it very fine? Did you have a charming time?" queried Madame Chebe in a low tone, unfastening the buckles of the gorgeous costume, one by one.

And Sidonie, overcome with fatigue, made no reply, but fell asleep standing, beginning a lovely dream which was to last throughout her youth and cost her many tears.

Claire Fromont kept her word. Sidonie often went to play in the beautiful gravelled garden, and was able to see at close range the carved blinds and the dovecot with its threads of gold. She came to know all the corners and hiding-places in the great factory, and took part in many glorious games of hide-and-peek behind the printing-tables in the solitude of Sunday afternoon. On holidays a plate was laid for her at the children's table.

Everybody loved her, although she never exhibited much affection for any one. So long as she was in the midst of that luxury, she was conscious of softer impulses, she was happy and felt that she was embellished by her surroundings; but when she returned to her parents, when she saw the factory through the dirty panes of the window on the landing, she had an inexplicable feeling of regret and anger.

And yet Claire Fromont treated her as a friend.

Sometimes they took her to the Bois, to the Tuileries, in the famous blue-lined carriage, or into the country, to pass a whole week at Grandfather Gardinois's chateau, at Savigny-sur-Orge. Thanks to the munificence of Risler, who was very proud of his little one's success, she was always presentable and well dressed. Madame Chebe made it a point of honor, and the pretty, lame girl was always at hand to place her treasures of unused coquetry at her little friend's service.

But M. Chebe, who was always hostile to the Fromonts, looked frowningly upon this growing intimacy. The true reason was that he himself never was invited; but he gave other reasons, and would say to his wife:

"Don't you see that your daughter's heart is sad when she returns from that house, and that she passes whole hours dreaming at the window?"

But poor Madame Chebe, who had been so unhappy ever since her marriage, had become reckless. She declared that one should make the most of the present for fear of the future, should seize happiness as it passes, as one often has no other support and consolation in life than the memory of a happy childhood.

For once it happened that M. Chebe was right.

## CHAPTER III

### THE FALSE PEARLS

After two or three years of intimacy with Claire, of sharing her amusements, years during which Sidonie acquired the familiarity with luxury and the graceful manners of the children of the wealthy, the friendship was suddenly broken.

Cousin Georges, whose guardian M. Fromont was, had entered college some time before. Claire in her turn took her departure for the convent with the outfit of a little queen; and at that very time the Chebes were discussing the question of apprenticing Sidonie to some trade. They promised to love each other as before and to meet twice a month, on the Sundays that Claire was permitted to go home.

Indeed, little Chebe did still go down sometimes to play with her friends; but as she grew older she realized more fully the distance that separated them, and her clothes began to seem to her very simple for Madame Fromont's salon.

When the three were alone, the childish friendship which made them equals prevented any feeling of embarrassment; but visitors came, girl friends from the convent, among others a tall girl, always richly dressed, whom her mother's maid used to bring to play with the little Fromonts on Sunday.

As soon as she saw her coming up the steps, resplendent and disdainful, Sidonie longed to go away at once. The other embarrassed her with awkward questions. Where did she live? What did her parents do? Had she a carriage?

As she listened to their talk of the convent and their friends, Sidonie felt that they lived in a different world, a thousand miles from her own; and a deathly sadness seized her, especially when, on her return home, her mother spoke of sending her as an apprentice to Mademoiselle Le Mire, a friend of the Delobelles, who conducted a large false-pearl establishment on the Rue du Roi-Dore.

Risler insisted upon the plan of having the little one serve an apprenticeship. "Let her learn a trade," said the honest fellow. "Later I will undertake to set her up in business."

Indeed, this same Mademoiselle Le Mire spoke of retiring in a few years. It was an excellent opportunity.

One morning, a dull day in November, her father took her to the Rue du Rio-Dore, to the fourth floor of an old house, even older and blacker than her own home.

On the ground floor, at the entrance to the hall, hung a number of signs with gilt letters: Depot for Travelling-Bags, Plated Chains, Children's Toys, Mathematical Instruments in Glass, Bouquets for Brides and Maids of Honor, Wild Flowers a Specialty; and above was a little dusty show-case, wherein pearls, yellow with age, glass grapes and cherries surrounded the pretentious name of Angelina Le Mire.

What a horrible house!

It had not even a broad landing like that of the Chebes, grimy with old age, but brightened by its window and the beautiful prospect presented by the factory. A narrow staircase, a narrow door, a succession of rooms with brick floors, all small and cold, and in the last an old maid with a false front and black thread mitts, reading a soiled copy of the 'Journal pour Tous,' and apparently very much annoyed to be disturbed in her reading.

Mademoiselle Le Mire (written in two words) received the father and daughter without rising, discoursed at great length of the rank she had lost, of her father, an old nobleman of Le Rouergue—it is most extraordinary how many old noblemen Le Rouergue has produced!—and of an unfaithful steward who had carried off their whole fortune. She instantly aroused the sympathies of M. Chebe, for whom decayed gentlefolk had an irresistible charm, and he went away overjoyed, promising his daughter to call for her at seven o'clock at night in accordance with the terms agreed upon.

The apprentice was at once ushered into the still empty workroom. Mademoiselle Le Mire seated her in front of a great drawer filled with pearls, needles, and bodkins, with instalments of four-sou novels thrown in at random among them.

It was Sidonie's business to sort the pearls and string them in necklaces of equal length, which were tied together to be sold to the small dealers. Then the young women would soon be there and they would show her exactly what she would have to do, for Mademoiselle Le Mire (always written in two words!) did not interfere at all, but overlooked her business from a considerable distance, from that dark room where she passed her life reading newspaper novels.

At nine o'clock the work-women arrived, five tall, pale-faced, faded girls, wretchedly dressed, but with their hair becomingly arranged, after the fashion of poor working-girls who go about bare-headed through the streets of Paris.

Two or three were yawning and rubbing their eyes, saying that they were dead with sleep.

At last they went to work beside a long table where each had her own drawer and her own tools. An order had been received for mourning jewels, and haste was essential. Sidonie, whom the forewoman instructed in her task in a tone of infinite superiority, began dismally to sort a multitude of black pearls, bits of glass, and wisps of crape.

The others, paying no attention to the little girl, chatted together as they worked. They talked of a wedding that was to take place that very day at St. Gervais.

"Suppose we go," said a stout, red-haired girl, whose name was Malvina. "It's to be at noon. We shall have time to go and get back again if we hurry."

And, at the lunch hour, the whole party rushed downstairs four steps at a time.

Sidonie had brought her luncheon in a little basket, like a school-girl; with a heavy heart she sat at a corner of the table and ate alone for the first time in her life. Great God! what a sad and wretched thing life seemed to be; what a terrible revenge she would take hereafter for her sufferings there!

At one o'clock the girls trooped noisily back, highly excited.

"Did you see the white satin gown? And the veil of point d'Angleterre? There's a lucky girl!"

Thereupon they repeated in the workroom the remarks they had made in undertones in the church,

leaning against the rail, throughout the ceremony. That question of a wealthy marriage, of beautiful clothes, lasted all day long; nor did it interfere with their work—far from it.

These small Parisian industries, which have to do with the most trivial details of the toilet, keep the work-girls informed as to the fashions and fill their minds with thoughts of luxury and elegance. To the poor girls who worked on Mademoiselle Le Mire's fourth floor, the blackened walls, the narrow street did not exist. They were always thinking of something else and passed their lives asking one another:

"Malvina, if you were rich what would you do? For my part, I'd live on the Champs-Élysées." And the great trees in the square, the carriages that wheeled about there, coquettishly slackening their pace, appeared momentarily before their minds, a delicious, refreshing vision.

Little Chebe, in her corner, listened without speaking, industriously stringing her black grapes with the precocious dexterity and taste she had acquired in Desirée's neighborhood. So that in the evening, when M. Chebe came to fetch his daughter, they praised her in the highest terms.

Thereafter all her days were alike. The next day, instead of black pearls, she strung white pearls and bits of false coral; for at Mademoiselle Le Mire's they worked only in what was false, in tinsel, and that was where little Chebe was to serve her apprenticeship to life.

For some time the new apprentice-being younger and better bred than the others—found that they held aloof from her. Later, as she grew older, she was admitted to their friendship and their confidence, but without ever sharing their pleasures. She was too proud to go to see weddings at midday; and when she heard them talking of a ball at Vauxhall or the 'Delices du Marais,' or of a nice little supper at Bonvalet's or at the 'Quatre Sergents de la Rochelle,' she was always very disdainful.

We looked higher than that, did we not, little Chebe?

Moreover, her father called for her every evening. Sometimes, however, about the New Year, she was obliged to work late with the others, in order to complete pressing orders. In the gaslight those pale-faced Parisians, sorting pearls as white as themselves, of a dead, unwholesome whiteness, were a painful spectacle. There was the same fictitious glitter, the same fragility of spurious jewels. They talked of nothing but masked balls and theatres.

"Have you seen Adele Page, in 'Les Trois Mousquetaires?' And Melingue? And Marie Laurent? Oh! Marie Laurent!"

The actors' doublets, the embroidered costumes of the queens of melodrama, appeared before them in the white light of the necklaces forming beneath their fingers.

In summer the work was less pressing. It was the dull season. In the intense heat, when through the drawn blinds fruit-sellers could be heard in the street, crying their mirabelles and Queen Claudes, the workgirls slept heavily, their heads on the table. Or perhaps Malvina would go and ask Mademoiselle Le Mire for a copy of the 'Journal pour Tous,' and read aloud to the others.

But little Chebe did not care for the novels. She carried one in her head much more interesting than all that trash.

The fact is, nothing could make her forget the factory. When she set forth in the morning on her father's arm, she always cast a glance in that direction. At that hour the works were just stirring, the chimney emitted its first puff of black smoke. Sidonie, as she passed, could hear the shouts of the workmen, the dull, heavy blows of the bars of the printing-press, the mighty, rhythmical hum of the machinery; and all those sounds of toil, blended in her memory with recollections of fetes and blue-lined carriages, haunted her persistently.

They spoke louder than the rattle of the omnibuses, the street cries, the cascades in the gutters; and even in the workroom, when she was sorting the false pearls even at night, in her own home, when she went, after dinner, to breathe the fresh air at the window on the landing and to gaze at the dark, deserted factory, that murmur still buzzed in her ears, forming, as it were, a continual accompaniment to her thoughts.

"The little one is tired, Madame Chebe. She needs diversion. Next Sunday I will take you all into the country."

These Sunday excursions, which honest Risler organized to amuse Sidonie, served only to sadden her still more.

On those days she must rise at four o'clock in the morning; for the poor must pay for all their enjoyments, and there was always a ribbon to be ironed at the last moment, or a bit of trimming to be

sewn on in an attempt to rejuvenate the everlasting little lilac frock with white stripes which Madame Chebe conscientiously lengthened every year.

They would all set off together, the Chebes, the Rislers, and the illustrious Delobelle. Only Desiree and her mother never were of the party. The poor, crippled child, ashamed of her deformity, never would stir from her chair, and Mamma Delobelle stayed behind to keep her company. Moreover, neither possessed a suitable gown in which to show herself out-of-doors in their great man's company; it would have destroyed the whole effect of his appearance.

When they left the house, Sidonie would brighten up a little. Paris in the pink haze of a July morning, the railway stations filled with light dresses, the country flying past the car windows, and the healthful exercise, the bath in the pure air saturated with the water of the Seine, vivified by a bit of forest, perfumed by flowering meadows, by ripening grain, all combined to make her giddy for a moment. But that sensation was soon succeeded by disgust at such a commonplace way of passing her Sunday.

It was always the same thing.

They stopped at a refreshment booth, in close proximity to a very noisy and numerous attended rustic festival, for there must be an audience for Delobelle, who would saunter along, absorbed by his chimera, dressed in gray, with gray gaiters, a little hat over his ear, a light top coat on his arm, imagining that the stage represented a country scene in the suburbs of Paris, and that he was playing the part of a Parisian sojourning in the country.

As for M. Chebe, who prided himself on being as fond of nature as the late Jean Jacques Rousseau, he did not appreciate it without the accompaniments of shooting-matches, wooden horses, sack races, and a profusion of dust and penny-whistles, which constituted also Madame Chebe's ideal of a country life.

But Sidonie had a different ideal; and those Parisian Sundays passed in strolling through noisy village streets depressed her beyond measure. Her only pleasure in those throngs was the consciousness of being stared at. The veriest boor's admiration, frankly expressed aloud at her side, made her smile all day; for she was of those who disdain no compliment.

Sometimes, leaving the Chebes and Delobelle in the midst of the fete, Risler would go into the fields with his brother and the "little one" in search of flowers for patterns for his wall-papers. Frantz, with his long arms, would pull down the highest branches of a hawthorn, or would climb a park wall to pick a leaf of graceful shape he had spied on the other side. But they reaped their richest harvests on the banks of the stream.

There they found those flexible plants, with long swaying stalks, which made such a lovely effect on hangings, tall, straight reeds, and the volubilis, whose flower, opening suddenly as if in obedience to a caprice, resembles a living face, some one looking at you amid the lovely, quivering foliage. Risler arranged his bouquets artistically, drawing his inspiration from the very nature of the plants, trying to understand thoroughly their manner of life, which can not be divined after the withering of one day.

Then, when the bouquet was completed, tied with a broad blade of grass as with a ribbon, and slung over Frantz's back, away they went. Risler, always engrossed in his art, looked about for subjects, for possible combinations, as they walked along.

"Look there, little one—see that bunch of lily of the valley, with its white bells, among those eglantines. What do you think? Wouldn't that be pretty against a sea-green or pearl-gray background?"

But Sidonie cared no more for lilies of the valley than for eglantine. Wild flowers always seemed to her like the flowers of the poor, something like her lilac dress.

She remembered that she had seen flowers of a different sort at the house of M. Gardinois, at the Chateau de Savigny, in the hothouses, on the balconies, and all about the gravelled courtyard bordered with tall urns. Those were the flowers she loved; that was her idea of the country!

The little stations in the outskirts of Paris are so terribly crowded and stuffy on those Sunday evenings in summer! Such artificial enjoyment, such idiotic laughter, such doleful ballads, sung in whispers by voices that no longer have the strength to roar! That was the time when M. Chebe was in his element.

He would elbow his way to the gate, scold about the delay of the train, declaim against the station-agent, the company, the government; say to Delobelle in a loud voice, so as to be overheard by his neighbors:

"I say—suppose such a thing as this should happen in America!" Which remark, thanks to the

expressive by-play of the illustrious actor, and to the superior air with which he replied, "I believe you!" gave those who stood near to understand that these gentlemen knew exactly what would happen in America in such a case. Now, they were equally and entirely ignorant on that subject; but upon the crowd their words made an impression.

Sitting beside Frantz, with half of his bundle of flowers on her knees, Sidonie would seem to be blotted out, as it were, amid the uproar, during the long wait for the evening trains. From the station, lighted by a single lamp, she could see the black clumps of trees outside, lighted here and there by the last illuminations of the fete, a dark village street, people continually coming in, and a lantern hanging on a deserted pier.

From time to time, on the other side of the glass doors, a train would rush by without stopping, with a shower of hot cinders and the roar of escaping steam. Thereupon a tempest of shouts and stamping would arise in the station, and, soaring above all the rest, the shrill treble of M. Chebe, shrieking in his sea-gull's voice: "Break down the doors! break down the doors!"—a thing that the little man would have taken good care not to do himself, as he had an abject fear of gendarmes. In a moment the storm would abate. The tired women, their hair disarranged by the wind, would fall asleep on the benches. There were torn and ragged dresses, low-necked white gowns, covered with dust.

The air they breathed consisted mainly of dust. It lay upon their clothes, rose at every step, obscured the light of the lamp, vexed one's eyes, and raised a sort of cloud before the tired faces. The cars which they entered at last, after hours of waiting, were saturated with it also. Sidonie would open the window, and look out at the dark fields, an endless line of shadow. Then, like innumerable stars, the first lanterns of the outer boulevards appeared near the fortifications.

So ended the ghastly day of rest of all those poor creatures. The sight of Paris brought back to each one's mind the thought of the morrow's toil. Dismal as her Sunday had been, Sidonie began to regret that it had passed. She thought of the rich, to whom all the days of their lives were days of rest; and vaguely, as in a dream, the long park avenues of which she had caught glimpses during the day appeared to her thronged with those happy ones of earth, strolling on the fine gravel, while outside the gate, in the dust of the highroad, the poor man's Sunday hurried swiftly by, having hardly time to pause a moment to look and envy.

Such was little Chebe's life from thirteen to seventeen.

The years passed, but did not bring with them the slightest change. Madame Chebe's cashmere was a little more threadbare, the little lilac frock had undergone a few additional repairs, and that was all. But, as Sidonie grew older, Frantz, now become a young man, acquired a habit of gazing at her silently with a melting expression, of paying her loving attentions that were visible to everybody, and were unnoticed by none save the girl herself.

Indeed, nothing aroused the interest of little Chebe. In the work-room she performed her task regularly, silently, without the slightest thought of the future or of saving. All that she did seemed to be done as if she were waiting for something.

Frantz, on the other hand, had been working for some time with extraordinary energy, the ardor of those who see something at the end of their efforts; so that, at the age of twenty-four, he graduated second in his class from the Ecole Centrale, as an engineer.

On that evening Risler had taken the Chebe family to the Gymnase, and throughout the evening he and Madame Chebe had been making signs and winking at each other behind the children's backs. And when they left the theatre Madame Chebe solemnly placed Sidonie's arm in Frantz's, as if she would say to the lovelorn youth, "Now settle matters—here is your chance."

Thereupon the poor lover tried to settle matters.

It is a long walk from the Gymnase to the Marais. After a very few steps the brilliancy of the boulevard is left behind, the streets become darker and darker, the passers more and more rare. Frantz began by talking of the play. He was very fond of comedies of that sort, in which there was plenty of sentiment.

"And you, Sidonie?"

"Oh! as for me, Frantz, you know that so long as there are fine costumes—"

In truth she thought of nothing else at the theatre. She was not one of those sentimental creatures; a la Madame Bovary, who return from the play with love-phrases ready-made, a conventional ideal. No! the theatre simply made her long madly for luxury and fine raiment; she brought away from it nothing

but new methods of arranging the hair, and patterns of gowns. The new, exaggerated toilettes of the actresses, their gait, even the spurious elegance of their speech, which seemed to her of the highest distinction, and with it all the tawdry magnificence of the gilding and the lights, the gaudy placard at the door, the long line of carriages, and all the somewhat unwholesome excitement that springs up about a popular play; that was what she loved, that was what absorbed her thoughts.

"How well they acted their love-scene!" continued the lover.

And, as he uttered that suggestive phrase, he bent fondly toward a little face surrounded by a white woollen hood, from which the hair escaped in rebellious curls.

Sidonie sighed:

"Oh! yes, the love-scene. The actress wore beautiful diamonds."

There was a moment's silence. Poor Frantz had much difficulty in explaining himself. The words he sought would not come, and then, too, he was afraid. He fixed the time mentally when he would speak:

"When we have passed the Porte Saint-Denis—when we have left the boulevard."

But when the time arrived, Sidonie began to talk of such indifferent matters that his declaration froze on his lips, or else it was stopped by a passing carriage, which enabled their elders to overtake them.

At last, in the Marais, he suddenly took courage:

"Listen to me, Sidonie—I love you!"

That night the Delobelles had sat up very late.

It was the habit of those brave-hearted women to make their working-day as long as possible, to prolong it so far into the night that their lamp was among the last to be extinguished on the quiet Rue de Braque. They always sat up until the great man returned home, and kept a dainty little supper warm for him in the ashes on the hearth.

In the days when he was an actor there was some reason for that custom; actors, being obliged to dine early and very sparingly, have a terrible gnawing at their vitals when they leave the theatre, and usually eat when they go home. Delobelle had not acted for a long time; but having, as he said, no right to abandon the stage, he kept his mania alive by clinging to a number of the strolling player's habits, and the supper on returning home was one of them, as was his habit of delaying his return until the last footlight in the boulevard theatres was extinguished. To retire without supping, at the hour when all other artists supped, would have been to abdicate, to abandon the struggle, and he would not abandon it, *sacre bleu!*

On the evening in question the actor had not yet come in and the women were waiting for him, talking as they worked, and with great animation, notwithstanding the lateness of the hour. During the whole evening they had done nothing but talk of Frantz, of his success, of the future that lay before him.

"Now," said Mamma Delobelle, "the only thing he needs is to find a good little wife."

That was Desiree's opinion, too. That was all that was lacking now to Frantz's happiness, a good little wife, active and brave and accustomed to work, who would forget everything for him. And if Desiree spoke with great confidence, it was because she was intimately acquainted with the woman who was so well adapted to Frantz Risler's needs. She was only a year younger than he, just enough to make her younger than her husband and a mother to him at the same time.

Pretty?

No, not exactly, but attractive rather than ugly, notwithstanding her infirmity, for she was lame, poor child! And then she was clever and bright, and so loving! No one but Desiree knew how fondly that little woman loved Frantz, and how she had thought of him night and day for years. He had not noticed it himself, but seemed to have eyes for nobody but Sidonie, a gamine. But no matter! Silent love is so eloquent, such a mighty power lies hid in restrained feelings. Who knows? Perhaps some day or other:

And the little cripple, leaning over her work, started upon one of those long journeys to the land of chimeras of which she had made so many in her invalid's easychair, with her feet resting on the stool; one of those wonderful journeys from which she always returned happy and smiling, leaning on Frantz's arm with all the confidence of a beloved wife. As her fingers followed her thought, the little bird she had in her hand at the moment, smoothing his ruffled wings, looked as if he too were of the

party and were about to fly far, far away, as joyous and light of heart as she.

Suddenly the door flew open.

"I do not disturb you?" said a triumphant voice.

The mother, who was slightly drowsy, suddenly raised her head.

"Ah! it's Monsieur Frantz. Pray come in, Monsieur Frantz. We're waiting for father, as you see. These brigands of artists always stay out so late! Take a seat—you shall have supper with him."

"Oh! no, thank you," replied Frantz, whose lips were still pale from the emotion he had undergone, "I can't stop. I saw a light and I just stepped in to tell you—to tell you some great news that will make you very happy, because I know that you love me—"

"Great heavens, what is it?"

"Monsieur Frantz Risler and Mademoiselle Sidonie are engaged to be married."

"There! didn't I say that all he needed was a good little wife," exclaimed Mamma Delobelle, rising and throwing her arms about his neck.

Desiree had not the strength to utter a word. She bent still lower over her work, and as Frantz's eyes were fixed exclusively upon his happiness, as Mamma Delobelle did nothing but look at the clock to see whether her great man would return soon, no one noticed the lame girl's emotion, nor her pallor, nor the convulsive trembling of the little bird that lay in her hands with its head thrown back, like a bird with its death-wound.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE GLOW-WORMS OF SAVIGNY

#### "SAVIGNY-SUR-ORGE.

"DEAR SMONIE:—We were sitting at table yesterday in the great dining-room which you remember, with the door wide open leading to the terrace, where the flowers are all in bloom. I was a little bored. Dear grandpapa had been cross all the morning, and poor mamma dared not say a word, being afraid of those frowning eyebrows which have always laid down the law for her. I was thinking what a pity it was to be so entirely alone, in the middle of the summer, in such a lovely spot, and that I should be very glad, now that I have left the convent, and am destined to pass whole seasons in the country, to have as in the old day, some one to run about the woods and paths with me.

"To be sure, Georges comes occasionally, but he always arrives very late, just in time for dinner, and is off again with my father in the morning before I am awake. And then he is a serious-minded man now, is Monsieur Georges. He works at the factory, and business cares often bring frowns to his brow.

"I had reached that point in my reflections when suddenly dear grandpapa turned abruptly to me:

"What has become of your little friend Sidonie? I should be glad to have her here for a time.'

"You can imagine my delight. What happiness to meet again, to renew the pleasant friendship that was broken off by the fault of the events of life rather than by our own! How many things we shall have to tell each other! You, who alone had the knack of driving the frowns from my terrible grandpapa's brow, will bring us gayety, and I assure you we need it.

"This lovely Savigny is so lonely! For instance, sometimes in the morning I choose to be a little coquettish. I dress myself, I make myself beautiful with my hair in curls and put on a pretty gown; I walk through all the paths, and suddenly I realize that I have taken all this trouble for the swans and ducks, my dog Kiss, and the cows, who do not even turn to look at me when I pass. Thereupon, in my wrath, I hurry home, put on a thick gown and busy myself on the farm, in the servants' quarters, everywhere. And really, I am beginning to believe that ennui has perfected me, and that I shall make an excellent housekeeper.

"Luckily the hunting season will soon be here, and I rely upon that for a little amusement. In the first place, Georges and father, both enthusiastic sportsmen, will come oftener. And then you will be here, you know. For you will reply at once that you will come, won't you? Monsieur Risler said not long ago that you were not well. The air of Savigny will do you worlds of good.

"Everybody here expects you. And I am dying with impatience.

**CLAIRE."**

Her letter written, Claire Fromont donned a large straw hat for the first days of August were warm and glorious—and went herself to drop it in the little box from which the postman collected the mail from the chateau every morning.

It was on the edge of the park, at a turn in the road. She paused a moment to look at the trees by the roadside, at the neighboring meadows sleeping in the bright sunlight. Over yonder the reapers were gathering the last sheaves. Farther on they were ploughing. But all the melancholy of the silent toil had vanished, so far as the girl was concerned, so delighted was she at the thought of seeing her friend once more.

No breeze came from the hills in the distance, no voice from the trees, to warn her by a presentiment, to prevent her from sending that fatal letter. And immediately upon her return she gave her attention to the preparation of a pretty bedroom for Sidonie adjoining her own.

The letter did its errand faithfully. From the little green, vine-embowered gate of the chateau it found its way to Paris, and arrived that same evening, with its Savigny postmark and impregnated with the odor of the country, at the fifth-floor apartment on the Rue de Braque.

What an event that was! They read it again and again; and for a whole week, until Sidonie's departure, it lay on the mantel-shelf beside Madame Chebe's treasures, the clock under a glass globe and the Empire cups. To Sidonie it was like a wonderful romance filled with tales of enchantment and promises, which she read without opening it, merely by gazing at the white envelope whereon Claire Fromont's monogram was engraved in relief.

Little she thought of marriage now. The important question was, What clothes should she wear at the chateau? She must give her whole mind to that, to cutting and planning, trying on dresses, devising new ways of arranging her hair. Poor Frantz! How heavy his heart was made by these preparations! That visit to Savigny, which he had tried vainly to oppose, would cause a still further postponement of their wedding, which Sidonie—why, he did not know—persisted in putting off from day to day. He could not go to see her; and when she was once there, in the midst of festivities and pleasures, who could say how long she would remain?

The lover in his despair always went to the Delobelles to confide his sorrows, but he never noticed how quickly Desiree rose as soon as he entered, to make room for him by her side at the work-table, and how she at once sat down again, with cheeks as red as fire and shining eyes.

For some days past they had ceased to work at birds and insects for ornament. The mother and daughter were hemming pink flounces destined for Sidonie's frock, and the little cripple never had plied her needle with such good heart.

In truth little Desiree was not Delobelle's daughter to no purpose.

She inherited her father's faculty of retaining his illusions, of hoping on to the end and even beyond.

While Frantz was dilating upon his woe, Desiree was thinking that, when Sidonie was gone, he would come every day, if it were only to talk about the absent one; that she would have him there by her side, that they would sit up together waiting for "father," and that, perhaps, some evening, as he sat looking at her, he would discover the difference between the woman who loves you and the one who simply allows herself to be loved.

Thereupon the thought that every stitch taken in the frock tended to hasten the departure which she anticipated with such impatience imparted extraordinary activity to her needle, and the unhappy lover ruefully watched the flounces and ruffles piling up about her, like little pink, white-capped waves.

When the pink frock was finished, Mademoiselle Chebe started for Savigny.

The chateau of M. Gardinois was built in the valley of the Orge, on the bank of that capriciously lovely stream, with its windmills, its little islands, its dams, and its broad lawns that end at its shores.

The chateau, an old Louis-Quinze structure, low in reality, although made to appear high by a pointed roof, had a most depressing aspect, suggestive of aristocratic antiquity; broad steps, balconies with rusty balustrades, old urns marred by time, wherein the flowers stood out vividly against the reddish stone. As far as the eye could see, the walls stretched away, decayed and crumbling, descending gradually toward the stream. The chateau overlooked them, with its high, slated roofs, the farmhouse, with its red tiles, and the superb park, with its lindens, ash-trees, poplars and chestnuts growing confusedly together in a dense black mass, cut here and there by the arched openings of the paths.

But the charm of the old place was the water, which enlivened its silence and gave character to its beautiful views. There were at Savigny, to say nothing of the river, many springs, fountains, and ponds, in which the sun sank to rest in all his glory; and they formed a suitable setting for that venerable mansion, green and mossy as it was, and slightly worn away, like a stone on the edge of a brook.

Unluckily, at Savigny, as in most of those gorgeous Parisian summer palaces, which the parvenus in commerce and speculation have made their prey, the chatelains were not in harmony with the chateau.

Since he had purchased his chateau, old Gardinois had done nothing but injure the beauty of the beautiful property chance had placed in his hands; cut down trees "for the view," filled his park with rough obstructions to keep out trespassers, and reserved all his solicitude for a magnificent kitchen-garden, which, as it produced fruit and vegetables in abundance, seemed to him more like his own part of the country—the land of the peasant.

As for the great salons, where the panels with paintings of famous subjects were fading in the autumn fogs, as for the ponds overrun with water-lilies, the grottoes, the stone bridges, he cared for them only because of the admiration of visitors, and because of such elements was composed that thing which so flattered his vanity as an ex-dealer in cattle—a chateau!

Being already old, unable to hunt or fish, he passed his time superintending the most trivial details of that large property. The grain for the hens, the price of the last load of the second crop of hay, the number of bales of straw stored in a magnificent circular granary, furnished him with matter for scolding for a whole day; and certain it is that, when one gazed from a distance at that lovely estate of Savigny, the chateau on the hillside, the river, like a mirror, flowing at its feet, the high terraces shaded by ivy, the supporting wall of the park following the majestic slope of the ground, one never would have suspected the proprietor's niggardliness and meanness of spirit.

In the idleness consequent upon his wealth, M. Gardinois, being greatly bored in Paris, lived at Savigny throughout the year, and the Fromonts lived with him during the summer.

Madame Fromont was a mild, dull woman, whom her father's brutal despotism had early molded to passive obedience for life. She maintained the same attitude with her husband, whose constant kindness and indulgence never had succeeded in triumphing over that humiliated, taciturn nature, indifferent to everything, and, in some sense, irresponsible. Having passed her life with no knowledge of business, she had become rich without knowing it and without the slightest desire to take advantage of it. Her fine apartments in Paris, her father's magnificent chateau, made her uncomfortable. She occupied as small a place as possible in both, filling her life with a single passion, order—a fantastic, abnormal sort of order, which consisted in brushing, wiping, dusting, and polishing the mirrors, the gilding and the door-knobs, with her own hands, from morning till night.

When she had nothing else to clean, the strange woman would attack her rings, her watch-chain, her brooches, scrubbing the cameos and pearls, and, by dint of polishing the combination of her own name and her husband's, she had effaced all the letters of both. Her fixed idea followed her to Savigny. She picked up dead branches in the paths, scratched the moss from the benches with the end of her umbrella, and would have liked to dust the leaves and sweep down the old trees; and often, when in the train, she looked with envy at the little villas standing in a line along the track, white and clean, with their gleaming utensils, the pewter ball, and the little oblong gardens, which resemble drawers in a bureau. Those were her ideal of a country-house.

M. Fromont, who came only occasionally and was always absorbed by his business affairs, enjoyed Savigny little more than she. Claire alone felt really at home in that lovely park. She was familiar with its smallest shrub. Being obliged to provide her own amusements, like all only children, she had become attached to certain walks, watched the flowers bloom, had her favorite path, her favorite tree, her favorite bench for reading. The dinner-bell always surprised her far away in the park. She would come to the table, out of breath but happy, flushed with the fresh air. The shadow of the hornbeams, stealing over that youthful brow, had imprinted a sort of gentle melancholy there, and the deep, dark green of the ponds, crossed by vague rays, was reflected in her eyes.

Those lovely surroundings had in very truth shielded her from the vulgarity and the abjectness of the

persons about her. M. Gardinois might deplore in her presence, for hours at a time, the perversity of tradesmen and servants, or make an estimate of what was being stolen from him each month, each week, every day, every minute; Madame Fromont might enumerate her grievances against the mice, the maggots, dust and dampness, all desperately bent upon destroying her property, and engaged in a conspiracy against her wardrobes; not a word of their foolish talk remained in Claire's mind. A run around the lawn, an hour's reading on the river-bank, restored the tranquillity of that noble and intensely active mind.

Her grandfather looked upon her as a strange being, altogether out of place in his family. As a child she annoyed him with her great, honest eyes, her straightforwardness on all occasions, and also because he did not find in her a second edition of his own passive and submissive daughter.

"That child will be a proud chit and an original, like her father," he would say in his ugly moods.

How much better he liked that little Chebe girl who used to come now and then and play in the avenues at Savigny! In her, at least, he detected the strain of the common people like himself, with a sprinkling of ambition and envy, suggested even in those early days by a certain little smile at the corner of the mouth. Moreover, the child exhibited an ingenuous amazement and admiration in presence of his wealth, which flattered his parvenu pride; and sometimes, when he teased her, she would break out with the droll phrases of a Paris gamin, slang redolent of the faubourgs, seasoned by her pretty, piquant face, inclined to pallor, which not even superficiality could deprive of its distinction. So he never had forgotten her.

On this occasion above all, when Sidonie arrived at Savigny after her long absence, with her fluffy hair, her graceful figure, her bright, mobile face, the whole effect emphasized by mannerisms suggestive of the shop-girl, she produced a decided sensation. Old Gardinois, wondering greatly to see a tall young woman in place of the child he was expecting to see, considered her prettier and, above all, better dressed than Claire.

It was a fact that, when Mademoiselle Chebe had left the train and was seated in the great wagonette from the chateau, her appearance was not bad; but she lacked those details that constituted her friend's chief beauty and charm—a distinguished carriage, a contempt for poses, and, more than all else, mental tranquillity. Her prettiness was not unlike her gowns, of inexpensive materials, but cut according to the style of the day-rags, if you will, but rags of which fashion, that ridiculous but charming fairy, had regulated the color, the trimming, and the shape. Paris has pretty faces made expressly for costumes of that sort, very easy to dress becomingly, for the very reason that they belong to no type, and Mademoiselle Sidonie's face was one of these.

What bliss was hers when the carriage entered the long avenue, bordered with velvety grass and primeval elms, and at the end Savigny awaiting her with its great gate wide open!

And how thoroughly at ease she felt amid all those refinements of wealth! How perfectly that sort of life suited her! It seemed to her that she never had known any other.

Suddenly, in the midst of her intoxication, arrived a letter from Frantz, which brought her back to the realities of her life, to her wretched fate as the future wife of a government clerk, which transported her, whether she would or no, to the mean little apartment they would occupy some day at the top of some dismal house, whose heavy atmosphere, dense with privation, she seemed already to breathe.

Should she break her betrothal promise?

She certainly could do it, as she had given no other pledge than her word. But when he had left her, who could say that she would not wish him back?

In that little brain, turned by ambition, the strangest ideas chased one another. Sometimes, while Grandfather Gardinois, who had laid aside in her honor his old-fashioned hunting-jackets and swanskin waistcoats, was jesting with her, amusing himself by contradicting her in order to draw out a sharp reply, she would gaze steadily, coldly into his eyes, without replying. Ah! if only he were ten years younger! But the thought of becoming Madame Gardinois did not long occupy her. A new personage, a new hope came into her life.

After Sidonie's arrival, Georges Fromont, who was seldom seen at Savigny except on Sundays, adopted the habit of coming to dinner almost every day.

He was a tall, slender, pale youth, of refined appearance. Having no father or mother, he had been brought up by his uncle, M. Fromont, and was looked upon by him to succeed him in business, and probably to become Claire's husband. That ready-made future did not arouse any enthusiasm in Georges. In the first place business bored him. As for his cousin, the intimate good-fellowship of an

education in common and mutual confidence existed between them, but nothing more, at least on his side.

With Sidonie, on the contrary, he was exceedingly embarrassed and shy, and at the same time desirous of producing an effect—a totally different man, in short. She had just the spurious charm, a little free, which was calculated to attract a superficial nature, and it was not long before she discovered the impression that she produced upon him.

When the two girls were walking together in the park, it was always Sidonie who remembered that it was time for the train from Paris to arrive. They would go together to the gate to meet the travellers, and Georges's first glance was always for Mademoiselle Chebe, who remained a little behind her friend, but with the poses and airs that go halfway to meet the eyes. That manoeuvring between them lasted some time. They did not mention love, but all the words, all the smiles they exchanged were full of silent avowals.

One cloudy and threatening summer evening, when the two friends had left the table as soon as dinner was at an end and were walking in the long, shady avenue, Georges joined them. They were talking upon indifferent subjects, crunching the gravel beneath their idling footsteps, when Madame Fromont's voice, from the chateau, called Claire away. Georges and Sidonie were left alone. They continued to walk along the avenue, guided by the uncertain whiteness of the path, without speaking of drawing nearer to each other.

A warm wind rustled among the leaves. The ruffled surface of the pond lapped softly against the arches of the little bridge; and the blossoms of the acacias and lindens, detached by the breeze, whirled about in circles, perfuming the electricity-laden air. They felt themselves surrounded by an atmosphere of storm, vibrant and penetrating. Dazzling flashes of heat passed before their troubled eyes, like those that played along the horizon.

"Oh! what lovely glow-worms!" exclaimed Sidonie, embarrassed by the oppressive silence broken by so many mysterious sounds.

On the edge of the greensward a blade of grass here and there was illuminated by a tiny, green, flickering light. She stooped to lift one on her glove. Georges knelt close beside her; and as they leaned down, their hair and cheeks touching, they gazed at each other for a moment by the light of the glow-worms. How weird and fascinating she seemed to him in that green light, which shone upon her face and died away in the fine network of her waving hair! He put his arm around her waist, and suddenly, feeling that she abandoned herself to him, he clasped her in a long, passionate embrace.

"What are you looking for?" asked Claire, suddenly coming up in the shadow behind them.

Taken by surprise, and with a choking sensation in his throat, Georges trembled so that he could not reply. Sidonie, on the other hand, rose with the utmost coolness, and said as she shook out her skirt:

"The glow-worms. See how many of them there are tonight. And how they sparkle."

Her eyes also sparkled with extraordinary brilliancy.

"The storm makes them, I suppose," murmured Georges, still trembling.

The storm was indeed near. At brief intervals great clouds of leaves and dust whirled from one end of the avenue to the other. They walked a few steps farther, then all three returned to the house. The young women took their work, Georges tried to read a newspaper, while Madame Fromont polished her rings and M. Gardinois and his son-in-law played billiards in the adjoining room.

How long that evening seemed to Sidonie! She had but one wish, to be alone-alone with her thoughts.

But, in the silence of her little bedroom, when she had put out her light, which interferes with dreams by casting too bright an illumination upon reality, what schemes, what transports of delight! Georges loved her, Georges Fromont, the heir of the factory! They would marry; she would be rich. For in that mercenary little heart the first kiss of love had awakened no ideas save those of ambition and a life of luxury.

To assure herself that her lover was sincere, she tried to recall the scene under the trees to its most trifling details, the expression of his eyes, the warmth of his embrace, the vows uttered brokenly, lips to lips, it that weird light shed by the glow-worms, which one solemn moment had fixed forever in her heart.

Oh! the glow-worms of Savigny!

All night long they twinkled like stars before her closed eyes. The park was full of them, to the farthest limits of its darkest paths. There were clusters of them all along the lawns, on the trees, in the shrubbery. The fine gravel of the avenues, the waves of the river, seemed to emit green sparks, and all those microscopic flashes formed a sort of holiday illumination in which Savigny seemed to be enveloped in her honor, to celebrate the betrothal of Georges and Sidonie.

When she rose the next day, her plan was formed. Georges loved her; that was certain. Did he contemplate marrying her? She had a suspicion that he did not, the clever minx! But that did not frighten her. She felt strong enough to triumph over that childish nature, at once weak and passionate. She had only to resist him, and that is exactly what she did.

For some days she was cold and indifferent, wilfully blind and devoid of memory. He tried to speak to her, to renew the blissful moment, but she avoided him, always placing some one between them.

Then he wrote to her.

He carried his notes himself to a hollow in a rock near a clear spring called "The Phantom," which was in the outskirts of the park, sheltered by a thatched roof. Sidonie thought that a charming episode. In the evening she must invent some story, a pretext of some sort for going to "The Phantom" alone. The shadow of the trees across the path, the mystery of the night, the rapid walk, the excitement, made her heart beat deliciously. She would find the letter saturated with dew, with the intense cold of the spring, and so white in the moonlight that she would hide it quickly for fear of being surprised.

And then, when she was alone, what joy to open it, to decipher those magic characters, those words of love which swam before her eyes, surrounded by dazzling blue and yellow circles, as if she were reading her letter in the bright sunlight.

"I love you! Love me!" wrote Georges in every conceivable phrase.

At first she did not reply; but when she felt that he was fairly caught, entirely in her power, she declared herself concisely:

"I never will love any one but my husband."

Ah! she was a true woman already, was little Chebe.

## CHAPTER V

### HOW LITTLE CHEBE'S STORY ENDED

Meanwhile September arrived. The hunting season brought together a large, noisy, vulgar party at the chateau. There were long dinners at which the wealthy bourgeois lingered slothfully and wearily, prone to fall asleep like peasants. They went in carriages to meet the returning hunters in the cool air of the autumn evening. The mist arose from the fields, from which the crops had been gathered; and while the frightened game flew along the stubble with plaintive cries, the darkness seemed to emerge from the forests whose dark masses increased in size, spreading out over the fields.

The carriage lamps were lighted, the hoods raised, and they drove quickly homeward with the fresh air blowing in their faces. The dining-hall, brilliantly illuminated, was filled with gayety and laughter.

Claire Fromont, embarrassed by the vulgarity of those about her, hardly spoke at all. Sidonie was at her brightest. The drive had given animation to her pale complexion and Parisian eyes. She knew how to laugh, understood a little too much, perhaps, and seemed to the male guests the only woman in the party. Her success completed Georges's intoxication; but as his advances became more pronounced, she showed more and more reserve. Thereupon he determined that she should be his wife. He swore it to himself, with the exaggerated emphasis of weak characters, who seem always to combat beforehand the difficulties to which they know that they must yield some day.

It was the happiest moment of little Chebe's life. Even aside from any ambitious project, her coquettish, false nature found a strange fascination in this intrigue, carried on mysteriously amid banquets and merry-makings.

No one about them suspected anything. Claire was at that healthy and delightful period of youth

when the mind, only partly open, clings to the things it knows with blind confidence, in complete ignorance of treachery and falsehood. M. Fromont thought of nothing but his business. His wife polished her jewels with frenzied energy. Only old Gardinois and his little, gimlet-like eyes were to be feared; but Sidonie entertained him, and even if he had discovered anything, he was not the man to interfere with her future.

Her hour of triumph was near, when a sudden, unforeseen disaster blasted her hopes.

One Sunday morning M. Fromont was brought back fatally wounded from a hunting expedition. A bullet intended for a deer had pierced his temple. The chateau was turned upside-down.

All the hunters, among them the unknown bungler that had fired the fatal shot, started in haste for Paris. Claire, frantic with grief, entered the room where her father lay on his deathbed, there to remain; and Risler, being advised of the catastrophe, came to take Sidonie home.

On the night before her departure she had a final meeting with Georges at The Phantom,—a farewell meeting, painful and stealthy, and made solemn by the proximity of death. They vowed, however, to love each other always; they agreed upon a method of writing to each other. Then they parted.

It was a sad journey home.

Sidonie returned abruptly to her every-day life, escorted by the despairing grief of Risler, to whom his dear master's death was an irreparable loss. On her arrival, she was compelled to describe her visit to the smallest detail; discuss the inmates of the chateau, the guests, the entertainments, the dinners, and the final catastrophe. What torture for her, when, absorbed as she was by a single, unchanging thought, she had so much need of silence and solitude! But there was something even more terrible than that.

On the first day after her return Frantz resumed his former place; and the glances with which he followed her, the words he addressed to her alone, seemed to her exasperating beyond endurance.

Despite all his shyness and distrust of himself, the poor fellow believed that he had some rights as an accepted and impatient lover, and little Chebe was obliged to emerge from her dreams to reply to that creditor, and to postpone once more the maturity of his claim.

A day came, however, when indecision ceased to be possible. She had promised to marry Frantz when he had obtained a good situation; and now an engineer's berth in the South, at the smelting-furnaces of Grand Combe, was offered to him. That was sufficient for the support of a modest establishment.

There was no way of avoiding the question. She must either keep her promise or invent an excuse for breaking it. But what excuse could she invent?

In that pressing emergency, she thought of Desiree. Although the lame little girl had never confided in her, she knew of her great love for Frantz. Long ago she had detected it, with her coquette's eyes, bright and changing mirrors, which reflected all the thoughts of others without betraying any of her own. It may be that the thought that another woman loved her betrothed had made Frantz's love more endurable to her at first; and, just as we place statues on tombstones to make them appear less sad, Desiree's pretty, little, pale face at the threshold of that uninviting future had made it seem less forbidding to her.

Now it provided—her with a simple and honorable pretext for freeing herself from her promise.

"No! I tell you, mamma," she said to Madame Chebe one day, "I never will consent to make a friend like her unhappy. I should suffer too much from remorse,—poor Desiree! Haven't you noticed how badly she looks since I came home; what a beseeching way she has of looking at me? No, I won't cause her that sorrow; I won't take away her Frantz."

Even while she admired her daughter's generous spirit, Madame Chebe looked upon that as a rather exaggerated sacrifice, and remonstrated with her.

"Take care, my child; we aren't rich. A husband like Frantz doesn't turn up every day."

"Very well! then I won't marry at all," declared Sidonie flatly, and, deeming her pretext an excellent one, she clung persistently to it. Nothing could shake her determination, neither the tears shed by Frantz, who was exasperated by her refusal to fulfil her promise, enveloped as it was in vague reasons which she would not even explain to him, nor the entreaties of Risler, in whose ear Madame Chebe had mysteriously mumbled her daughter's reasons, and who in spite of everything could not but admire such a sacrifice.

"Don't revile her, I tell you! She's an angel!" he said to his brother, striving to soothe him.

"Ah! yes, she is an angel," assented Madame Chebe with a sigh, so that the poor betrayed lover had not even the right to complain. Driven to despair, he determined to leave Paris, and as Grand Combe seemed too near in his frenzied longing for flight, he asked and obtained an appointment as overseer on the Suez Canal at Ismailia. He went away without knowing, or caring to know aught of, Desiree's love; and yet, when he went to bid her farewell, the dear little cripple looked up into his face with her shy, pretty eyes, in which were plainly written the words:

"I love you, if she does not."

But Frantz Risler did not know how to read what was written in those eyes.

Fortunately, hearts that are accustomed to suffer have an infinite store of patience. When her friend had gone, the lame girl, with her charming morsel of illusion, inherited from her father and refined by her feminine nature, returned bravely to her work, saying to herself:

"I will wait for him."

And thereafter she spread the wings of her birds to their fullest extent, as if they were all going, one after another, to Ismailia in Egypt. And that was a long distance!

Before sailing from Marseilles, young Risler wrote Sidonie a farewell letter, at once laughable and touching, wherein, mingling the most technical details with the most heartrending adieux, the unhappy engineer declared that he was about to set sail, with a broken heart, on the transport Sahib, "a sailing-ship and steamship combined, with engines of fifteen-hundred-horse power," as if he hoped that so considerable a capacity would make an impression on his ungrateful betrothed, and cause her ceaseless remorse. But Sidonie had very different matters on her mind.

She was beginning to be disturbed by Georges's silence. Since she left Savigny she had heard from him only once. All her letters were left unanswered. To be sure, she knew through Risler that Georges was very busy, and that his uncle's death had thrown the management of the factory upon him, imposing upon him a responsibility that was beyond his strength. But to abandon her without a word!

From the window on the landing, where she had resumed her silent observations—for she had so arranged matters as not to return to Mademoiselle Le Mire—little Chebe tried to distinguish her lover, watched him as he went to and fro across the yards and among the buildings; and in the afternoon, when it was time for the train to start for Savigny, she saw him enter his carriage to go to his aunt and cousin, who were passing the early months of their period of mourning at the grandfather's chateau in the country.

All this excited and alarmed her; and the proximity of the factory rendered Georges's avoidance of her even more apparent. To think that by raising her voice a little she could make him turn toward the place where she stood! To think that they were separated only by a wall! And yet, at that moment they were very far apart.

Do you remember, little Chebe, that unhappy winter evening when the excellent Risler rushed into your parents' room with an extraordinary expression of countenance, exclaiming, "Great news!"?

Great news, indeed! Georges Fromont had just informed him that, in accordance with his uncle's last wishes, he was to marry his cousin Claire, and that, as he was certainly unequal to the task of carrying on the business alone, he had resolved to take him, Risler, for a partner, under the firm name of FROMONT JEUNE AND RISLER AINE.

How did you succeed, little Chebe, in maintaining your self-possession when you learned that the factory had eluded your grasp and that another woman had taken your place? What a terrible evening!—Madame Chebe sat by the table mending; M. Chebe before the fire drying his clothes, which were wet through by his having walked a long distance in the rain. Oh! that miserable room, overflowing with gloom and ennui! The lamp gave a dim light. The supper, hastily prepared, had left in the room the odor of the poor man's kitchen. And Risler, intoxicated with joy, talking with increasing animation, laid great plans!

All these things tore your heart, and made the treachery still more horrible by the contrast between the riches that eluded your outstretched hand and the ignoble mediocrity in which you were doomed to pass your life.

Sidonie was seriously ill for a long while. As she lay in bed, whenever the window-panes rattled behind the curtains, the unhappy creature fancied that Georges's wedding-coaches were driving

through the street; and she had paroxysms of nervous excitement, without words and inexplicable, as if a fever of wrath were consuming her.

At last, time and youthful strength, her mother's care, and, more than all, the attentions of Desiree, who now knew of the sacrifice her friend had made for her, triumphed over the disease. But for a long while Sidonie was very weak, oppressed by a deadly melancholy, by a constant longing to weep, which played havoc with her nervous system.

Sometimes she talked of travelling, of leaving Paris. At other times she insisted that she must enter a convent. Her friends were sorely perplexed, and strove to discover the cause of that singular state of mind, which was even more alarming than her illness; when she suddenly confessed to her mother the secret of her melancholy.

She loved the elder Risler! She never had dared to whisper it; but it was he whom she had always loved and not Frantz.

This news was a surprise to everybody, to Risler most of all; but little Chebe was so pretty, her eyes were so soft when she glanced at him, that the honest fellow instantly became as fond of her as a fool! Indeed, it may be that love had lain in his heart for a long time without his realizing it.

And that is how it happened that, on the evening of her wedding-day, young Madame Risler, in her white wedding-dress, gazed with a smile of triumph at the window on the landing which had been the narrow setting of ten years of her life. That haughty smile, in which there was a touch of profound pity and of scorn as well, such scorn as a parvenu feels for his poor beginnings, was evidently addressed to the poor sickly child whom she fancied she saw up at that window, in the depths of the past and the darkness. It seemed to say to Claire, pointing at the factory:

"What do you say to this little Chebe? She is here at last, you see!"

## CHAPTER VI

Noon. The Marais is breakfasting.

Sitting near the door, on a stone which once served as a horse-block for equestrians, Risler watches with a smile the exit from the factory. He never loses his enjoyment of the outspoken esteem of all these good people whom he knew when he was insignificant and humble like themselves. The "Good-day, Monsieur Risler," uttered by so many different voices, all in the same affectionate tone, warms his heart. The children accost him without fear, the long-bearded designers, half-workmen, half-artists, shake hands with him as they pass, and address him familiarly as "thou." Perhaps there is a little too much familiarity in all this, for the worthy man has not yet begun to realize the prestige and authority of his new station; and there was some one who considered this free-and-easy manner very humiliating. But that some one can not see him at this moment, and the master takes advantage of the fact to bestow a hearty greeting upon the old bookkeeper, Sigismond, who comes out last of all, erect and red-faced, imprisoned in a high collar and bareheaded—whatever the weather—for fear of apoplexy.

He and Risler are fellow-countrymen. They have for each other a profound esteem, dating from their first employment at the factory, from that time, long, long ago, when they breakfasted together at the little creamery on the corner, to which Sigismond Planus goes alone now and selects his refreshment for the day from the slate hanging on the wall.

But stand aside! The carriage of Fromont Jeune drives through the gateway. He has been out on business all the morning; and the partners, as they walk toward the pretty little house in which they both live at the end of the garden, discuss matters of business in a friendly way.

"I have been at Prochasson's," says Fromont. "They showed me some new patterns, pretty ones too, I assure you. We must be on our guard. They are dangerous rivals."

But Risler is not at all anxious. He is strong in his talent, his experience; and then—but this is strictly confidential—he is on the track of a wonderful invention, an improved printing-press, something that—but we shall see. Still talking, they enter the garden, which is as carefully kept as a public park, with round-topped acacias almost as old as the buildings, and magnificent ivies that hide the high, black walls.

Beside Fromont jeune, Risler Aine has the appearance of a clerk making his report to his employer. At every step he stops to speak, for his gait is heavy, his mind works slowly, and words have much difficulty in finding their way to his lips. Oh, if he could see the little flushed face up yonder, behind the window on the second floor, watching everything so attentively!

Madame Risler is waiting for her husband to come to breakfast, and waxes impatient over the good man's moderation. She motions to him with her hand:

"Come, come!" but Risler does not notice it. His attention is engrossed by the little Fromont, daughter of Claire and Georges, who is taking a sun-bath, blooming like a flower amid her lace in her nurse's arms. How pretty she is! "She is your very picture, Madame Chorche."

"Do you think so, my dear Risler? Why, everybody says she looks like her father."

"Yes, a little. But—"

And there they all stand, the father and mother, Risler and the nurse, gravely seeking resemblances in that miniature model of a human being, who stares at them out of her little eyes, blinking with the noise and glare. Sidonie, at her open window, leans out to see what they are doing, and why her husband does not come up.

At that moment Risler has taken the tiny creature in his arms, the whole fascinating bundle of white draperies and light ribbons, and is trying to make it laugh and crow with baby-talk and gestures worthy of a grandfather. How old he looks, poor man! His tall body, which he contorts for the child's amusement, his hoarse voice, which becomes a low growl when he tries to soften it, are absurd and ridiculous.

Above, the wife taps the floor with her foot and mutters between her teeth:

"The idiot!"

At last, weary of waiting, she sends a servant to tell Monsieur that breakfast is served; but the game is so far advanced that Monsieur does not see how he can go away, how he can interrupt these explosions of laughter and little bird-like cries. He succeeds at last, however, in giving the child back to its nurse, and enters the hall, laughing heartily. He is laughing still when he enters the dining-room; but a glance from his wife stops him short.

Sidonie is seated at table before the chafing-dish, already filled. Her martyr-like attitude suggests a determination to be cross.

"Oh! there you are. It's very lucky!"

Risler took his seat, a little ashamed.

"What would you have, my love? That child is so—"

"I have asked you before now not to speak to me in that way. It isn't good form."

"What, not when we're alone?"

"Bah! you will never learn to adapt yourself to our new fortune. And what is the result? No one in this place treats me with any respect. Pere Achille hardly touches his hat to me when I pass his lodge. To be sure, I'm not a Fromont, and I haven't a carriage."

"Come, come, little one, you know perfectly well that you can use Madame Chorche's coupe. She always says it is at our disposal."

"How many times must I tell you that I don't choose to be under any obligation to that woman?"

"O Sidonie"

"Oh! yes, I know, it's all understood. Madame Fromont is the good Lord himself. Every one is forbidden to touch her. And I must make up my mind to be a nobody in my own house, to allow myself to be humiliated, trampled under foot."

"Come, come, little one—"

Poor Risler tries to interpose, to say a word in favor of his dear Madame "Chorche." But he has no tact. This is the worst possible method of effecting a reconciliation; and Sidonie at once bursts forth:

"I tell you that that woman, with all her calm airs, is proud and spiteful. In the first place, she detests

me, I know that. So long as I was poor little Sidonie and she could toss me her broken dolls and old clothes, it was all right, but now that I am my own mistress as well as she, it vexes her and humiliates her. Madame gives me advice with a lofty air, and criticises what I do. I did wrong to have a maid. Of course! Wasn't I in the habit of waiting on myself? She never loses a chance to wound me. When I call on her on Wednesdays, you should hear the tone in which she asks me, before everybody, how 'dear Madame Chebe' is. Oh! yes. I'm a Chebe and she's a Fromont. One's as good as the other, in my opinion. My grandfather was a druggist. What was hers? A peasant who got rich by money-lending. I'll tell her so one of these days, if she shows me too much of her pride; and I'll tell her, too, that their little imp, although they don't suspect it, looks just like that old Pere Gardinois, and heaven knows he isn't handsome."

"Oh!" exclaims Risler, unable to find words to reply.

"Oh! yes, of course! I advise you to admire their child. She's always ill. She cries all night like a little cat. It keeps me awake. And afterward, through the day, I have mamma's piano and her scales—tra, la la la! If the music were only worth listening to!"

Risler has taken the wise course. He does not say a word until he sees that she is beginning to calm down a little, when he completes the soothing process with compliments.

"How pretty we are to-day! Are we going out soon to make some calls, eh?"

He resorts to this mode of address to avoid the more familiar form, which is so offensive to her.

"No, I am not going to make calls," Sidonie replies with a certain pride.

"On the contrary, I expect to receive them. This is my day."

In response to her husband's astounded, bewildered expression she continues:

"Why, yes, this is my day. Madame Fromont has one; I can have one also, I fancy."

"Of course, of course," said honest Risler, looking about with some little uneasiness. "So that's why I saw so many flowers everywhere, on the landing and in the drawing-room."

"Yes, my maid went down to the garden this morning. Did I do wrong? Oh! you don't say so, but I'm sure you think I did wrong. 'Dame!' I thought the flowers in the garden belonged to us as much as to the Fromonts."

"Certainly they do—but you—it would have been better perhaps—"

"To ask leave? That's it—to humble myself again for a few paltry chrysanthemums and two or three bits of green. Besides, I didn't make any secret of taking the flowers; and when she comes up a little later—"

"Is she coming? Ah! that's very kind of her."

Sidonie turned upon him indignantly.

"What's that? Kind of her? Upon my word, if she doesn't come, it would be the last straw. When I go every Wednesday to be bored to death in her salon with a crowd of affected, simpering women!"

She did not say that those same Wednesdays of Madame Fromont's were very useful to her, that they were like a weekly journal of fashion, one of those composite little publications in which you are told how to enter and to leave a room, how to bow, how to place flowers in a jardiniere and cigars in a case, to say nothing of the engravings, the procession of graceful, faultlessly attired men and women, and the names of the best modistes. Nor did Sidonie add that she had entreated all those friends of Claire's, of whom she spoke so scornfully, to come to see her on her own day, and that the day was selected by them.

Will they come? Will Madame Fromont Jeune insult Madame Risler Aine by absenting herself on her first Friday? The thought makes her almost feverish with anxiety.

"For heaven's sake, hurry!" she says again and again. "Good heavens! how long you are at your breakfast!"

It is a fact that it is one of honest Risler's ways to eat slowly, and to light his pipe at the table while he sips his coffee. To-day he must renounce these cherished habits, must leave the pipe in its case because of the smoke, and, as soon as he has swallowed the last mouthful, run hastily and dress, for his wife

insists that he must come up during the afternoon and pay his respects to the ladies.

What a sensation in the factory when they see Risler Aine come in, on a week-day, in a black frock-coat and white cravat!

"Are you going to a wedding, pray?" cries Sigismond, the cashier, behind his grating.

And Risler, not without a feeling of pride, replies:

"This is my wife's reception day!"

Soon everybody in the place knows that it is Sidonie's day; and Pere Achille, who takes care of the garden, is not very well pleased to find that the branches of the winter laurels by the gate are broken.

Before taking his seat at the table upon which he draws, in the bright light from the tall windows, Risler has taken off his fine frock-coat, which embarrasses him, and has turned up his clean shirt-sleeves; but the idea that his wife is expecting company preoccupies and disturbs him; and from time to time he puts on his coat and goes up to her.

"Has no one come?" he asks timidly.

"No, Monsieur, no one."

In the beautiful red drawing-room—for they have a drawing-room in red damask, with a console between the windows and a pretty table in the centre of the light-flowered carpet—Sidonie has established herself in the attitude of a woman holding a reception, a circle of chairs of many shapes around her. Here and there are books, reviews, a little work-basket in the shape of a gamebag, with silk tassels, a bunch of violets in a glass vase, and green plants in the jardinières. Everything is arranged exactly as in the Fromonts' apartments on the floor below; but the taste, that invisible line which separates the distinguished from the vulgar, is not yet refined. You would say it was a passable copy of a pretty genre picture. The hostess's attire, even, is too new; she looks more as if she were making a call than as if she were at home. In Risler's eyes everything is superb, beyond reproach; he is preparing to say so as he enters the salon, but, in face of his wife's wrathful glance, he checks himself in terror.

"You see, it's four o'clock," she says, pointing to the clock with an angry gesture. "No one will come. But I take it especially ill of Claire not to come up. She is at home—I am sure of it—I can hear her."

Indeed, ever since noon, Sidonie has listened intently to the slightest sounds on the floor below, the child's crying, the closing of doors. Risler attempts to go down again in order to avoid a renewal of the conversation at breakfast; but his wife will not allow him to do so. The very least he can do is to stay with her when everybody else abandons her, and so he remains there, at a loss what to say, rooted to the spot, like those people who dare not move during a storm for fear of attracting the lightning. Sidonie moves excitedly about, going in and out of the salon, changing the position of a chair, putting it back again, looking at herself as she passes the mirror, and ringing for her maid to send her to ask Pere Achille if no one has inquired for her. That Pere Achille is such a spiteful creature! Perhaps when people have come, he has said that she was out.

But no, the concierge has not seen any one.

Silence and consternation. Sidonie is standing at the window on the left, Risler at the one on the right. From there they can see the little garden, where the darkness is gathering, and the black smoke which the chimney emits beneath the lowering clouds. Sigismond's window is the first to show a light on the ground floor; the cashier trims his lamp himself with painstaking care, and his tall shadow passes in front of the flame and bends double behind the grating. Sidonie's wrath is diverted a moment by these familiar details.

Suddenly a small coupe drives into the garden and stops in front of the door. At last some one is coming. In that pretty whirl of silk and flowers and jet and flounces and furs, as it runs quickly up the step, Sidonie has recognized one of the most fashionable frequenters of the Fromont salon, the wife of a wealthy dealer in bronzes. What an honor to receive a call from such an one! Quick, quick! the family takes its position, Monsieur in front of the hearth, Madame in an easychair, carelessly turning the leaves of a magazine. Wasted pose! The fair caller did not come to see Sidonie; she has stopped at the floor below.

Ah! if Madame Georges could hear what her neighbor says of her and her friends!

At that moment the door opens and "Mademoiselle Planus" is announced. She is the cashier's sister, a poor old maid, humble and modest, who has made it her duty to make this call upon the wife of her

brother's employer, and who is amazed at the warm welcome she receives. She is surrounded and made much of. "How kind of you to come! Draw up to the fire." They overwhelm her with attentions and show great interest in her slightest word. Honest Risler's smiles are as warm as his thanks. Sidonie herself displays all her fascinations, overjoyed to exhibit herself in her glory to one who was her equal in the old days, and to reflect that the other, in the room below, must hear that she has had callers. So she makes as much noise as possible, moving chairs, pushing the table around; and when the lady takes her leave, dazzled, enchanted, bewildered, she escorts her to the landing with a great rustling of flounces, and calls to her in a very loud voice, leaning over the rail, that she is at home every Friday. "You understand, every Friday."

Now it is dark. The two great lamps in the salon are lighted. In the adjoining room they hear the servant laying the table. It is all over. Madame Fromont Jeune will not come.

Sidonie is pale with rage.

"Just fancy, that minx can't come up eighteen steps! No doubt Madame thinks we're not grand enough for her. Ah! but I'll have my revenge."

As she pours forth her wrath in unjust words, her voice becomes coarse, takes on the intonations of the faubourg, an accent of the common people which betrays the ex-apprentice of Mademoiselle Le Mire.

Risler is unlucky enough to make a remark.

"Who knows? Perhaps the child is ill."

She turns upon him in a fury, as if she would like to bite him.

"Will you hold your tongue about that brat? After all, it's your fault that this has happened to me. You don't know how to make people treat me with respect."

And as she closed the door of her bedroom violently, making the globes on the lamps tremble, as well as all the knick-knacks on the etageres, Risler, left alone, stands motionless in the centre of the salon, looking with an air of consternation at his white cuffs, his broad patent-leather shoes, and mutters mechanically:

"My wife's reception day!"

## **ETEXT EDITOR'S BOOKMARKS:**

Affectation of indifference  
Always smiling condescendingly  
Convent of Saint Joseph, four shoes under the bed!  
Deeming every sort of occupation beneath him  
Dreams of wealth and the disasters that immediately followed  
He fixed the time mentally when he would speak  
Little feathers fluttering for an opportunity to fly away  
No one has ever been able to find out what her thoughts were  
Pass half the day in procuring two cakes, worth three sous  
She was of those who disdain no compliment  
Such artificial enjoyment, such idiotic laughter  
Superiority of the man who does nothing over the man who works  
Terrible revenge she would take hereafter for her sufferings  
The groom isn't handsome, but the bride's as pretty as a picture  
The poor must pay for all their enjoyments

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